

FEAR
 OF 
FAILURE

FEAR OF FAILURE

A Biblical Perspective to Rising Above Our Failures

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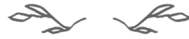
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INTRODUCTION



This book is about looking at and facing our fears in a different way than we are used to. I personally had to face much fear of failure in my life. Whenever there was a challenge in front of me, I feared to fail. That made me get stuck sometimes without even taking a step further, or even if I attempted it, there was a sense in me that made me do it with fear, and in this way not being able to do it with faith, and thus not developing fully what God had in me.

This was until I got a deeper understanding of God and His character (something that I am obviously still learning), who requires things from us but is a loving Father at the same time. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).

This book can give you insight on how to face, in a proper way, the challenges and battles in life which we fight with God’s help for His glory.

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If we believe and walk with Christ, He will entrust us to do things for His glory. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

The problem is that we might often fear that we might fail in accomplishing what He is asking us to do. We do not feel capable enough, or we think that we don't have enough strength given by God in us, or that maybe someone else might do it better than us. We have to know that if He is entrusting us with something, He will also provide everything we need for it and will make us capable by the strength found in Him (2 Peter 1:3).

If He called us for something, it is with a purpose. It means that we can do it with His help. As for when we look at others thinking that they are the ones more suitable and capable for this calling, we need to know that everyone is unique and if God has called us for something, then we need to do it. Other people will have different kinds of callings according to His good will. He has established and placed the parts in the body as it pleased Him (see 1 Corinthians 12:18).

CHAPTER 1



FEAR OF FAILURE

I think that many people might be struggling with the fear of failure. I am writing this to tell you my own experience of what is helping me to overcome it, because I am the one that often feels in such a way. I am also writing to those who have experienced the love of God and still feel such fear.

Many times, I perceive God is telling me to do things for Him, and I feel discouraged because there is a fear of failure in me. And many times, this kind of situation can paralyze all of us. Then I understand that God doesn't look at our success but at our attitude in doing something. Many times we don't do something because we fear that we won't succeed or do it in a perfect way. And I fear that I won't achieve the normative. This is the "normative" or the "standard" we have for what a good believer, according to our standards, would do. I think that those who are really walking with Christ have a higher standard or norm of

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what a believer should do than the rest of the people. That's why this struggle, or the fear of failure, is represented mainly in those who believe, as they really give importance to what God requires from them and thus, setting higher goals to achieve, they also fear that they will not be able to achieve them. When I fear that I won't be able to achieve the level required from me, I freeze up.

But God doesn't look at that. Sometimes we can even fail. He doesn't care if we are going to always win. I mean that even if it sounds unusual, this is not the main thing in which He is interested, and He won't be mad at us if we lose a battle while at the same time having the sincere desire to win it. I also say this because many times we picture the victory in our mind, and we get an idea of what a success and victory might be, but this is not always the right way of looking at it. The real victory might not be what we imagine it to be. It is important, however, to do what we have to and to take a step toward what God wants us to do.

God doesn't look at how good you are in doing something, but at how much you acknowledge your weakness in front of Him.

Many times, we can also lose in our own sight but be winners in His. The people today want always to be first, to succeed in every area, to be perfect. When we see that and we see ourselves weak or incapable, we fear. And I am not speaking about achieving our own desires or purposes but following the will of God when He places in us a desire to do something. His will is obviously also good for us and shall provide all the things we need in life. This will is based on following day-by-day what He wants us to do. It might be to approach someone and share with him the good news or do whatever else has to do with God and His glory.

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We can see how fear is noted in the parable of the ten talents in Matthew 25:14–30:

¹⁴ For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. ¹⁵ And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. ¹⁶ Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them and made another five talents. ¹⁷ And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. ¹⁸ But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. ¹⁹ After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

²⁰ So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, "Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them." ²¹ His lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." ²² He also who had received two talents came and said, "Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them." ²³ His lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

²⁴ Then he who had received the one talent came and said, "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours."

²⁶ But his lord answered and said to him, "You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I

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have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. ²⁷ So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. ²⁸ Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.

²⁹ “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

In verse 24 it speaks about the man who, after having received one talent, hid it in the ground. Often, I see myself in that character, having one talent only.

Now, why does it give an example with the one having received one talent and doesn't, for example, speak about the one with two or five, saying that they hid them? Was there something wrong with the fact that this person had one talent only? Of course not. In the beginning of the parable, we see that the master gave to each one of them according to their abilities.

At that point it wasn't up to them how much were they going to receive. It was up to the master. We can, however, say that the one having received less had the same opportunity as the rest. We can also suppose that he even had less to do and to worry about, but obviously that was his ability. But we can also see a syndrome that we find among those who know that they have received less or maybe think they did. They often reason in this way: “I can't; I won't; I am too weak; I am not like the others; I have little.”

This happens as well because we often compare ourselves with the rest of the Christians, which in some cases might be good, but not always, in a sense that God's work in each person

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is unique, even if we are speaking about the same faith, the same baptism, and the same God.

What about the man in Matthew 25:24–25? I think that he was scared of failure. That’s why he didn’t invest his talent but hid it away. And this is worse than failing. Obviously, the Bible tells us to be prudent before doing whatever, but this was a different case, and we mustn’t hide away what God has given us to do. God is looking at our attitude when we do something, not always at the outcome of it. We can better say that He will worry about the outcome. We must just take a step. Many times, we might be scared of the high expectations we have placed in front of us. We think that we have to succeed; we have to bring good results with us. And when we see with our (limited) mind that we can’t achieve that, we get discouraged, and we give up on doing whatever we had to do.

There are two mistakes here. We mustn’t always expect a success and we mustn’t look at a situation with our own understanding. All this scares us away. The enemy is the one telling us, “You won’t succeed; you won’t be able to do it.” We need to answer, rather, “Yes, I may or may not succeed, but I am doing this in obedience to God. He sends me. The victory belongs to Him, not to me.” It is much more important to obey rather than to succeed in our own way in what we define as victory. When I’m saying, “to succeed in our own way,” I am referring also to things concerning God. We might be thinking to succeed in what He wants from us, in what we understand victory is, and in doing it in our way.

How many people won’t take a step, won’t make a compromise with Christ because they think they will fail? And maybe they will! But that’s the point—that the victory is not ours, but His. We make a mistake when we want to make it ours.

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Going back to the servant in the parable, I think that even with mistakes, taking a step to invest his one talent was going to make his master happy. And I think that God can use our mistakes and turn them into something beautiful. But this is for those who are called by God, who take the steps to obey. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

When we set ourselves to do His will, to do something that He has commanded us, we are obviously trying our best, and many times we fear if we can accomplish it in this way. By saying “this way” I mean doing it in the way that we as Christians retain as right and doing our best. This is the right way and desire we should have, but our hope is in the fact that He brings the victory and the outcome the way He wants to, and we just need to obey. He can turn into victory any outcome, even when we esteemed it as a failure while trying to do His will. This is obviously if we love Him—“those who love God”—and follow what we were called for by Him—“the called according to His purpose.” That means that we tried everything possible to obey His voice and follow Him while we were doing whatever He told us to do. This is His amazing capability. To turn things to work for good. We just need to obey; He knows the purpose with which we do it. Many times, the outcome might not even be visible to us at that moment. We might even come to know it later, even at the very end, in heaven. This is because we are trying to do His will and achieve His victory and glory, not ours.

I heard about men of God who, in their lifetimes, were sent by Him to serve in a certain ministry, and they obeyed His voice. During their lifetimes nothing significant happened, and very few

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people or even none, were converted, but after their death, many people turned to God because of the message they carried. Their ministry brought fruit, but nevertheless, they didn't see it in their lifetimes; they just kept on obeying God's voice and following Him. We see that their ministry brought much fruit, even if they weren't able to see it. What would have happened if they didn't obey Him or just got discouraged as they didn't see any results in time? Yes, we can get discouraged, but we need to get courage and carry on following Him as there is a purpose in it, and God knows the exact way in which things have to be and how to accomplish His will. Even Paul, when writing all these epistles, was having problems and being persecuted, and the churches to which he was writing were having problems, and some of them were probably not obeying nor listening to all the things he had to say. He nevertheless wrote what God had placed in His heart, and today the entire world is reading his epistles.

We just need to take the step, even if we fail sometimes and commit mistakes. But let this mistake not be that we hid the talent God gave us underground. Even the one talent is important for the kingdom. Remember, David killed Goliath with one small stone. "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39). These words were said by Jesus who, in the eyes of many people, lost out by dying on the cross, but in fact, He overcame and sat on the right side of the power of God. The people today want always to win and be successful, but in their own way not in God's way. I would rather say that many times we need to lose our own way.

Then what's important to see is what exactly we retain as a

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victory and what as a loss. Rather, it is more important for us to have obedience than to always win and succeed in our own way and get the glory. The glory belongs to God alone.

We can also see as an example the story of Samson. After the Philistines cut his hair off and blinded him because of his mistake, they made him a prisoner. We can see a total failure here, but nevertheless, after praying to God and receiving back his powers (that were not his, but were from God), he managed to destroy the Philistines' temple with himself being inside. He died with them, but with his death he managed to destroy more enemies than ever he could in his life.

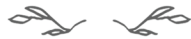
What does it mean? That God managed to turn what was meant for bad into something good? This is a true victory—the one that is such in the eyes of God; the one that bears fruit for Him. He knows how and in which way to bring a victory. Many times, what we define as a victory or success is the one that looks so in our eyes, but God looks at it differently. We only need to love Him and obey Him. He makes all things work together for good for those who love Him. For this to happen, we obviously need to have faith and accept Him in our hearts first. That's why we mustn't fear failure if we belong to Him and if He called us to do something. It's also particularly important that He calls us to do something, and we hear it from Him. If it is our own call or idea, obviously we have to be cautious, but if it is His calling in our life, then we mustn't fear anything because fear comes from the devil, and many times he works with the purpose of preventing us from doing what God wants us to do.

We can see many situations and stories in the Bible in which people had lost hope and failed, but God used that to bring beauty out of the ashes. We can see the story of Job, for example, in

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which the devil brought trials and tribulations to his life, and Job lost almost everything, but at the end he came out with a victory and more knowledge about God, and more blessings than before. It also looked like Jesus lost, dying on the cross, and the enemy rejoiced, but we all know that this became the sacrifice through which we can be forgiven and have His life in us today. Yes, the devil probably rejoiced initially, but afterward he found out that this was the greatest defeat ever afflicted on him. Nevertheless, he couldn't have known this, otherwise he wouldn't have collaborated in any way in the crucifixion. We know that he filled the heart of Judas to betray Jesus. That means that he thought this was going to be some kind of defeat to God, but it turned out to be the greatest victory ever.

CHAPTER 2



VICTORY OR FAILURE?

What is our definition of failure? Or victory? In today's times these definitions, like many others, are being distorted by the society in which we live or the general idea or example we follow.

Let's see again Matthew 10:39: "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

We see that in this verse is mentioned the word "lose." When someone reads for the first time this passage, and more precisely the second part of it, saying, "he who loses his life for My sake will find it," it looks like it is speaking about a defeat. And this is true, but this is not the defeat as we imagine it.

In the world in which we live today, there is an idea with which we are raised, and that is that we mustn't ever give up; we have to be first in everything. This in general might not be wrong, but it depends on how we look at it. Some Christian values, like someone denying himself or giving another first place, are

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considered as a defeat. We also have some role models who set up an example to follow. We are surrounded by famous personalities like sportsmen, actors, singers, or writers who we hear about in the media, and in this way, we are encouraged by the world to follow them in our lives. We choose whom to follow, but in general most of the people set examples that maybe we can never achieve. There are good and also wrong examples, but if they are given by someone with a name, they become role models for us. These examples usually consist of being the strongest, smartest, or best in something according to the point of view set up by the world. Many times, people see that they cannot achieve these ideals, and they get frustrated and disappointed. Not everyone wants to follow what is right or be himself, but rather what the society or modern culture tells him to follow.

In part, all of us can follow certain things of what the society is showing us, but our way of life must be founded on what is right, and we need to follow it no matter what everyone else is doing and following. In general, we've been taught to never give up and always win, but what we may need to do sometimes, is to lose, or better yet, to surrender and accept our failure. I know that this might be shocking and unusual to hear.

To accept our failure means that we accept and acknowledge who we are. The gospel tells us that we need to lose our life so that we can gain it. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:35).

To lose our life means that we have to lose our own way or our own ego so that we can gain what is from God. We need to do this, since most of the time our own way and ego can harm us, as they are not always right.

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There are many motivational speakers in today's times, but maybe we don't always need to be motivated to carry on in the same direction but instead to realize that we can't make it in our own way, and so we change direction. There are also some people who realize this, but without putting their trust in something higher, which is God, they can just lose hope and end up badly. But nevertheless, the fact is that we need to realize that we can't make it on our own, but we go to God for answers. In a way, we have already failed. We just need to accept it. Jesus came for those who were sick (Luke 5:31–32), meaning for those who could acknowledge their need of Him. It is not that the rest of people don't have any need, they just can't see it.

The point is to see that the victory belongs to Him and that He brings it to our lives. “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). We are more than conquerors in Him, not in ourselves. What we need to do is to accept our failure and to surrender to Him. In this way we avoid frustrations. When we are trying to achieve something with our own strength, being under pressure, we can see that we can't make it as we know we don't have enough capabilities or strength. It's okay; we just need to accept it. If we can't, we fail.

But this is the moment to turn to Him and surrender and tell Him: “God, I can't anymore. I am weak; help me, please!”

He came to take our failure; He died to redeem us. This is the difference between when we expect something to happen by our own strength, and when we trust in Him. We need, in a way, to lose so that He can win in our lives and so that He can give us the real victory.

The next time the devil or some voice tells you that you failed, you can tell him: “Yes, it is true. I failed, but the victory is not

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found in me but in Him who died for me and overcame everything, including death. This is Jesus Christ.” “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

From this verse it is shown to us that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Loving God means that we will not willingly look for failure or trouble to come into our life, but if it happens, this could work for something good and for His glory. There are many situations in the Bible where we see things working for good to people after trouble came into their lives. In the previous chapter, we mentioned the story of Job. He was attacked by Satan, and it looked like he lost everything, but by going through these situations, he came to know God better and was blessed more than ever before. Then there is the story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50), who was sold by his brothers as a slave. After going through numerous trials, he ended up being the second in power in Egypt, which later on helped for the survival of his relatives (the ones who sold him) and, in this way, the survival of the entire nation of Israel. All of this happened because of the amazing capability of God to turn into good something that was meant for evil (Genesis 50:20).

This is possible because the victory belongs to Him. It was obtained by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Going back to the verse that says, “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us,” we have to see what the previous verse says: “As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter’” (Romans 8:36). So we see that we are more than conquerors, even in these situations, through Him who loves us.

We can look again at the parable of the talents in Matthew

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25:14–30. This parable represents a story in which a man departed to a far country. Before going he called his servants and gave them talents with which they could deal while awaiting his return. To one he gave five, to another two, and to another one talent. We see that the last one, having received one talent only, dug in the ground and hid the talent given to him (Matthew 25:18). This displeased his master. Why is this parable focused exactly on the servant who received one talent only, and it is given as an example to us? It's an example which we mustn't follow. What we mustn't follow is to hide the talent we have. It is not wrong how many talents somebody has—one or five—because this is not up to the person. He just receives what is given to him, and whatever he has is given to him with a purpose. Nevertheless he, not the others, hid his talent, and that displeased his master. Because with this parable it is shown to us that even if we've got a lot of strength or we think we've got a little, we can still make something out of it, and we are accountable in front of God. Many times we might be thinking that since we don't have a lot then it is not worth it to try to do something with it. We say that this is for the others who have more, for the others that can make a bigger impact. We think that as we have only a little, then we will not make enough. But how are we so sure in that if God is telling us that with little, He can do a lot, and that He can help those with little strength?

We can see a lack of faith here. Just imagine if all the great preachers and men of God that we esteem as great were left alone to do everything because the rest of the believers thought that they could never do enough, as they are not like them. Surely, there wouldn't be a great result for the gospel then. I am speaking about people that we esteem as great because God doesn't look in

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the same way as we do, because He uses everyone in the exact way and moment He wants to, and everyone is important for Him and His kingdom. We have to know that each one is particularly special and unique in the sight of God.

What I am saying with all of this is that the person with only one talent feared failure before even starting. That's why this parable gives us an example with this person, because we can easily think that we have only a little and we will not make it. But this is exactly where the faith comes in. Didn't David kill Goliath the giant with one small stone only? He accomplished something so great having something so little.

We can say that the person having received one talent only didn't accept his failure, but feared that he could fail, and that's why he tried to find a way in which it wouldn't seem so bad (Matthew 25:24–25). He hid his talent in the ground because he thought he wouldn't lose it.

One of the best ways of fighting with the fear of failure when we are in front of something challenging to do is to accept our weakness and condition, to accept that we can fail, but with faith to give everything out at the same time and with all our heart to do what we have to. I know that it might sound controversial, but in this way, we don't have anything to lose, and we go all out for it. The problem with the one having one talent only was that he feared he could lose something, since he saw himself as a weak person, as he didn't have enough, and as there was something wrong in the way he was made. No. God doesn't make mistakes, and He didn't make a mistake when He gave him one talent only. It was with a purpose. He knows His work. There are various parts in the body of Christ, which is the church, and each one is there with a purpose, even the smallest one. He promises to

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give us what is needed to overcome—that is enough and even in abundance. We just need to trust Him.

The change comes in this moment. When we accept that we will fail, we recognize it, and we change our way of doing something, looking for a different approach to the situation and trying to trust in Him for more strength and wisdom. We see instead that this person tried to cover what was given to him and to make the thing look like nothing happened, like he did the right thing by hiding his talent. He was probably also looking too much at the others, thinking that he would never be like them or have their abilities. He had a wrong way of viewing what a victory was. This is what we mustn't do—to look at the others and to have our own idea of what a victory or success might be. We need to have His idea and view of what a victory is instead: His way. The secret is to trust Him and follow Him at every step. Then even our failures will turn into victories for Him because we trusted in Him. It is better sometimes to fail attempting to do God's will than being still and falling into some sin. This is what happened to king David. He didn't go to a war as he was supposed to, and being alone and comfortable, he sinned by committing adultery (2 Samuel 11).

Of course, it can happen to anyone sometimes to hide his talent and not do what God commands him, but it mustn't be a permanent condition. We also need to examine well and have a biblical perspective on what God's will is.

Sometimes people don't attempt to do what God commands them and wants from them because they think they will fail, not because they are prevented by something reasonable like the Word of God itself. There are also other ways, however, in which we can fail, by staying and relaxing in our places or in our comfort zone, same as the situation of King David.

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The only reason we need to stop doing something for God is because we saw through the Word of God itself that this is not what He requires from us now, or we need a better preparation. This should be the only reason, and it needs to be confirmed through certain situations and His Word above all. It also needs to be examined well. For any other reason, we need to see well if it is our fear preventing us from doing it.

Sometimes when we don't feel strong and capable of doing something, and we don't have much to offer, we don't even attempt doing it. Let's get as an example that we are about to meet someone, and we know that it would be good to testify to that person about the gospel. We know that maybe we don't know how to start the conversation, or we don't have the capability on how to exactly approach him. This is at least what I feel sometimes. So, by feeling this, it happens that sometimes we don't even pray for that person. We don't even pray to God before encountering the person to give us wisdom on how to approach him, because we consider not to have much to offer. We give up in advance. This is obviously not the right way to face the situation. We should at least pray for that person or just to try saying something to him, even a few words.

Otherwise, we reduce Christianity to a mere keeping ourselves from some wrongdoings and living without hurting anyone, which is obviously to be done. These were the words of the one having received the one talent: "And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours" (Matthew 25:25).

He presented it untouched to his master. He apparently did nothing wrong. The problem is that he didn't do anything else either. He spent efforts to hide it, to hide what God had given him.

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The Word says that he went and hid it in the ground. It looks like he could've gone and done something else with it, making the same efforts. Sometimes we might spend the same efforts to hide our belief as the ones we could spend to proclaim it. If some person doesn't have much or enough, it doesn't mean that God doesn't want to use him in a particular way for His glory. That's why He created him in such a way, because He wanted to use him in a particular way to achieve a certain purpose and result.

You might be looking at some believer that, according to you has a lot, and you see him when engaging with someone and testifying to him about Jesus, to do that for a whole hour of time or even more (I am not saying this is wrong), using certain arguments and words that will never come up in your mind. And you might admire that and think that you will never be able to do it in just such a way and easily give up before even approaching someone for the gospel. Well, not all people are the same, speaking even about those who have to listen and accept the gospel. What if not all the people will listen to the message transmitted to them in that particular way and may be reached through another? Only God knows the best way for each one, and that's the reason why He is in charge and uses people the way He wants to.

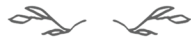
Sometimes even if we say just a phrase or talk to someone for a minute about the Bible, it might be used to bring fruit—everything according to the situation. Sometimes when I expected to talk a lot, it happened that I didn't manage to do it, and when I expected to say just a little about the gospel, God opened a door, and I could testify more. It's important to place our talent there. Today a minute, tomorrow more, but what is important is not to hide it.

As we said before, the person with one talent only was probably looking at the others, at how much they had received, comparing

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and measuring himself to them. All of us can often look at others instead of focusing on ourselves and our relationship with God. We look at them and then maybe we get frustrated that we can't achieve what they achieve, but the fact is that God wants to make a unique work in us, a work of His master hand that only He is capable of. This is what we can be in His hands. God's treatment and work in us is personal. He is personal for us even if we have the same kind of faith as the other brothers and sisters in Christ. The way we look at this and our relationship with Him will also determine if we are going to really succeed by accomplishing His will.

CHAPTER 3



THE TRIUMPH OF CHRIST THROUGH OUR FAILURE

What I am going to say is not going to make sense in the eyes of the world if we compare it with today's stereotype of life, way of thinking, and what in general we've been taught. All of us, as soon as we are born, start growing up and learning how to live life and how to behave, are taught specific ideas or philosophies of how to face problems and how to deal with situations. Many times, we've been inculcated with all this information, ideas, and methods, not only by our parents, but by the world in general, by what we hear and see.

There is a course in which this world goes, and most of the people follow it. The idea transmitted to us is that we must never give up, we always have to stick to what we think, we need to fight always, etc. It doesn't sound bad, but we can't apply it always on everything. We indeed have to fight sometimes, and we mustn't give up, but all this needs to be done in the right attitude and

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direction. We first need to change our direction and acknowledge our own failure—I mean that up until this moment we weren't able to make it, that we weren't able to go in the right direction. This is what the gospel is telling us about losing our lives for His sake, and in the eyes of the world this doesn't make sense. It goes in the opposite direction of the world.

Let's look at 1 Corinthians 1:18: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

We see here how the message of the cross is taken by those who don't believe in it, by those who perish. It is foolishness for them. How is it possible that God is going to save and to manifest His wisdom and strength through a death on a cross? Christ died on the cross and for everyone in that very moment; this was considered as a loss. The disciples and those who followed Him cried as they lost Him, while He told some of them not to cry for Him. No one believed that the expected and awaited Messiah was going to die. They expected, rather, a strong warrior or someone to deliver them from their oppressors, the Romans. God instead decided to show His salvation through the weakness of the cross, even though it wasn't really weak. It just looked so in the eyes of man.

Even the enemy (the devil) surely thought that he overcame the Son of God by seeing Him die on the cross. Just imagine us, if we didn't have the knowledge we have today of the Son of God, and we were to look at that scene, then weren't we also going to think that it was a defeat? Which common and normal person wouldn't? *What happened instead was the greatest victory and triumph ever!* And it wasn't a failure or an accident. It was premeditated before the foundations of the world. This mighty act of God was done for us. Through this sacrifice, we can be

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saved today, and our sins can be forgiven by believing and asking for forgiveness. This is how the gospel works—in the opposite way of how the world does. That’s why it is considered something abnormal, as foolishness, and that’s why it is not accepted.

The problem is not just in the philosophy of this world, as it sounds right; it tells us not to surrender and to keep on going, to keep on fighting, but in the direction in which it is going. The gospel is also telling us to fight and not to surrender, but it goes in the *right* and opposite direction of the world. Both are opposite to each other. There is a line that separates them, and for us to *cross* that line, we need to lose in a way (see Mark 8:35); we need to give up on the direction we’ve been going until then. This is so we go in the opposite direction. This is what “to convert” means. To change our direction with the opposite one. This counts for those who stay on one or on the other side of the line. For a person, it is impossible, though, to change his own ways and to start walking on the right path without the help and the intervention of God.

We can see also another verse speaking about something similar that goes in the same direction. It is found in Matthew 10:39: “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”

Again, we see something not understood and not accepted by the world or our human personality and ego. It is the fact of losing. It is referring to losing our own way and manner of doing things and reasoning. It speaks about losing our ego and our own way. Why? Because many times we think that our way is always the right way, but it is not so.

Jesus is telling us what is the right way, not only because He thought so and it is better for us, but also because it is not good for us to stick on the wrong path. He is telling us this for our

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good. That's why sometimes it's good to lose and to surrender. This is the way that leads us to true victory.

Sometimes it is a question of recognizing that we have already lost. This is a fact. Many people keep on defending and fighting for what they have already lost and don't want to acknowledge the defeat. We lost because of our sin and because our ways were leading us in the wrong direction. I am not saying this to bring down anyone, I am just indicating what the way to really rise up is. We have just to acknowledge it before God and to repent saying: "God I am not ashamed to acknowledge that I have lost. My ways were mistaken and wrong. I surrender my broken life into Your hands; I am giving You my defeat."

Many times, the man doesn't want to acknowledge his defeat and mistakes because of his pride. This is natural. Many times also as believers we can lose a battle, and it is obviously not good. I mean that it doesn't feel right as well. But nevertheless, we need to go to God with the same attitude, giving Him our defeat and surrendering to His ways. This is not for the people who see their defeat but don't care much about it.

The problem is that some people do acknowledge that they have lost, but they don't go to God with their defeat but face it by themselves instead. This may lead them many times to make some wrong and drastic decisions and fall into desperation.

People get desperate looking at their defeat, looking at the wrong choices they have made and blaming themselves, but without looking for the real solution, which is to go before God and place this defeat in His hands. Those who do that also have acknowledged that they were wrong but get a new strength and hope because they feel renewed by God's uplifting power. This is the real victory—the victory achieved through our failure. God is using all

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these things to build something new. He makes all things, including problems and failures, to work out for good to those who love Him. On the other side, there are people trying to rise up by using different methods to deal with their situations and failures.

There are many motivational speakers in today's times, and many people looking for the answers there, where they can apparently receive a solution that in a way convinces them that their problem was just something psychological, and their mistake was just a wrong way of viewing things. The problem that we have instead is something real, and just covering it with patches won't help. It is so real that it caused Christ to come down to this earth and die for us. He died because of our sin and failure, transforming it in this way into a victory, in an amazing triumph. This is the reason why we need to face it—to face our failure and problem—and place it in His hands, to entrust it in Him. If we don't do that, we will render His sacrifice in vain for us. His sacrifice instead had and has excellent value, and we need to acknowledge it. He suffered and poured out His precious blood for this.

If we don't acknowledge His sacrifice and place our failures in His hands, then we will be guilty of His blood shed on the cross—for His death. Then it is like He died and suffered in vain for us. It is like we killed Him and caused Him to suffer, and His blood is going to be on us, not to cleanse us and save us, but to condemn us. One day God will judge the people, not based on what they have done, but firstly on the fact that they have refused His sacrifice. The first question will not be: "Why have you done this or that or why have you lied or even committed murder?" but "Why haven't you accepted the sacrifice of My only begotten Son?" That's the main thing—His sacrifice. He suffered for us. Jesus was crucified because of our sin. You and I are debtors

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to God in a way, and we can't pay Him back. Not by ourselves. That's why this sacrifice was done. He paid for us; we just need to accept it—to accept this gift. You would say: "But I didn't ask Him to do it for me," but God loved you so much that He did it so that you can have an opportunity. Because without this, you were going to be lost forever, separated from Him and His glory.

Why did He have to die? Because that was the only way. Because He had to pay for our sin in this way. Otherwise, we would pay for it. And that's what will happen if we don't accept His way.

As we said before, the real victory comes when we acknowledge our failure—when we acknowledge that we have lost.

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

From this verse in Romans 8:28, we see the amazing ability of God to turn our failures into something good. That's why He is so great and has everything under His control. It says that "all things" work together for good to those who love Him. "All things" also include problems, and this passage points to that. We obviously know that the good things are good for us, but we don't always think in the same way for what we esteem as a problem.

We can also discuss the fact that not everything that seems good in our eyes works really for good at the end (see Proverbs 14:12 or 16:25), but that is something different. Here we speak about the things that we wouldn't like to face most of the time. They work out for good. Obviously, we need to be surrendered to God—we need to belong to Him and to love Him. That's why we mustn't be ashamed to admit that we've failed but present ourselves before God in this way.

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He has this capability, to make beauty out of ashes. But for this purpose, we need to acknowledge our weakness before Him.

Sometimes even as believers we can see ourselves losing and being defeated. It is hard, but we need to admit our defeat in front of God and be confident that He can use it for something good. It happens that the devil has premeditated to harm us, but then the Lord manages to turn it into something good. The real believers, in any case, don't take lightly the failure or the defeat as they love the Lord, and they look not to repeat it. Nevertheless, the Lord uses these things for His purpose, and this is a mystery—*the mystery of grace and godliness*. “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16).

Here we see that it speaks about God being manifested in the flesh. We know that this has to do with Him coming down

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here to us, giving His life for us, and suffering. This is what the mystery of godliness is. This mystery has to do with His death.

He took our defeat and suffered and did what no one expected of Him, by dying on the cross and making it look like a defeat, but it resulted in a victory at the end. This is that mystery in which only God has control. We can see situations in the Bible in which certain characters failed, and yes, there were consequences and pain they went through, but ultimately those situations resulted in their good and God's glory, because they still looked for the Lord afterward. *The question is not in failing so that He can work in us but to seek His kingdom and love Him.* We don't want to fail, because we love Him, but when that happens, it could work for good. This is how He takes control over the situation. The fact that something we esteemed as a failure turned into something good also has to do with this mystery which is founded on the cross. This is something that we cannot know. *Our desire, however, should be to love Him and not to fail.*

We can see again the situation of Samson who lost something as he told all his secrets to Delilah. He lost all of his strength (when his hair was cut) and in this way, his enemies, the Philistines, got a hold of him and blinded him (Judges 16). Samson was enslaved by them, and it seemed that every hope was gone, but after a while, he got his confidence in God back and in a precise moment when his hair grew back, he asked Him for new strength and managed to destroy and kill more enemies than ever before in his lifetime. There were many consequences of his unwise decisions taken before, and he lost almost everything, but the key was that in that moment he looked upon God and cried out to Him. So we see how all of this worked for good. I repeat that we mustn't look to fail or be defeated, as this comes naturally to us, but to love Him.

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In chapter 8 of Romans is where the believers find their hope—in this capability of God to make things work out for good, to turn our failure into victory. They find it there because they see their real condition. When we see our real condition, we get desperate, and we don't know what to do. Here is where the Lord comes and changes the situation. In the same chapter in verse 37 it says: "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

To be real conquerors, or better said, "more than conquerors," because this is what we are with Christ, means that we are such because we have accepted His victory on the cross. It is not that we overcame. He overcame, and we benefit by being more than conquerors because of Him. We need to give up our own way; we need to "lose" our life as Matthew 10:39 tells us. The answer is that in Him and His way we are victorious. *We can be conquerors in this world; we can have victories (apparently), but when we are in Him and His way, we are "more than conquerors"—more than we expected, as this goes for eternity.*

Many people don't want to admit that they have failed, because they don't know how to face it. But the Christians, I mean the real believers, have their eyes set on the cross, on the One who overcame there, despising the shame and the failure, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Do you know why He had to be crucified, and the crucifixion in itself seemed like a failure? Because He took our failures there on the cross. He took our defeat. *He was "defeated" instead of us. He let this happen. And this caused Him to achieve the greatest victory ever over evil. That was the reason why He didn't come apparently as this great deliverer like they expected Him to be.* He indeed will come in this way one day—at His return. He came

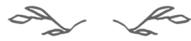
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to die as a Lamb and will return as a Lion. The Lion of Judah. We see that this is His real state and position—as a conqueror, as an overcomer. He had to go through this shame of dying on a cross and suffer for us because of our condition. That’s why He let Himself be defeated.

From our side, we just need to acknowledge it: to acknowledge what we are and what we deserve—the punishment and the shame—and He will give us His victory and will make us more than conquerors. He will not let us feel everything He felt on the cross, and He will not let us be punished for our sins. He just wants us to acknowledge our real condition. Yes, sometimes we can go through tough situations so that we can get to the position to acknowledge our condition, but we will never get the punishment we deserve for our sins. He already took that. If He corrects us and teaches us something, it is for our good, so that we can set our sight on Him.

This is obviously for those who believe and leave themselves in God’s hands. All the rest of the people will have to face the just retribution for their sins. It sadly happens with those who considered themselves as conquerors (winners) here in this life, those who were always successful and winning according to the standards of this world. I am not saying that Christians cannot be successful. Yes, they can, and they will be such in God’s eyes in the first place, which is the most important. This will happen only after we acknowledge our weakness and condition before Him and give up our ways in this way.

CHAPTER 4



DARE TO DREAM FOR GOD

Dare to dream for God. I mean that obviously our vision is limited, and we cannot foresee what could happen, and many times we don't have the right vision of what is exactly the purpose of God, but we need to desire more, to please Him more, and to achieve more. What is really important is to understand our part and role God has given us, to understand the form given to us, limits, and which part of the body we are. Once we know these things, we need to pull in that direction and to desire more according to what He wants and the way we can do it through Him. People say that not everyone is given the gift and the possibility to preach to stadiums full of thousands of people, but maybe they could help the old lady crossing the street and, in this way, talk about the gospel to her. Okay, we are perhaps meant for that, but what about not helping one lady only, but two, three, or five of them? Do you understand my point?

Sometimes we need to have higher expectations than what we

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usually have. Of course, we mustn't exaggerate, but we need to expect something from God. We need to have a desire to glorify God more, not to desire something selfishly for us but for His kingdom. I think that whoever knows God and is born of Him, understands this point. Sometimes we even need to have dreams about it. Dream about Him using you and aim for it. We know obviously that for Him to be using us, first we need to be right with Him. Not everyone agrees with this, and they are right at some point, but we cannot expect anything from the Lord if we sit on the couch saying that we are not meant for this or that. Certainly not as somebody else, but we can do our part. I am speaking this to believers, and I am not saying this about other areas of life, even if it can be applied there too. I am speaking this about what concerns the kingdom of God and His glory. We need to desire more. We need to be careful, though, not letting this become a frustration as we see that we cannot achieve it. *That's why it is fundamental to know who we are in Christ.* Sometimes setting ourselves to desire more and aiming for it helps us to overcome the fear of failure for the rest of the matters we usually attend for the Lord. You need to know though that we don't know completely the will of God and the way He wants to accomplish His will, and many times what we aimed to do *won't be achieved exactly in the way we expected, but it could turn into something else and succeed in a different way, because He best knows how to glorify His name.* The important thing is that we went out for a battle, knowing that the victory belongs to God.

With all this, I am putting an emphasis on the fact that we need to do this soberly, knowing ourselves and having spiritual discernment. How can we obtain that? Through prayer and petition. If we are Christians and real believers, our prayers should

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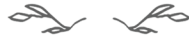
be: “Lord help me to glorify You more; give me more of You.” We will experience failures in this sometimes, because as we said, things will not always turn out the way we expected them.

Ecclesiastes 11:5 explains, “As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything.” By this verse we see that we don’t know how exactly the Lord performs His will, as this is a mystery, but nevertheless we need to do it by seeking Him and drawing strength from Him. That is one of the main reasons for which to seek Him—to look for wisdom on how to walk in Him and glorify Him in the right way. Many people seek Him just because they want to be pure and live a holy life, and they are right in that, but this is not the only reason for which we need to seek Him. Besides living a holy life, our petition to God should be also to spread the news to others. The next verse right after the one we read states: “In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good” (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

This means that even though we don’t know which way will prosper, we still need to do it with the help of His strength.

We know that it is not by our doing or capability, but it is He who only can touch people and let them know His grace; however, we can also do and glorify Him, founding ourselves on the truth that all this is by Him, and He only is capable of touching and changing a person. That’s why we need His wisdom and strength.

AFTERWORD



The message I wanted to share with this book doesn't have much to do with my past life before knowing Christ, but with the life and the experiences I have had in my life as a believer. Before knowing Christ, I didn't have the right point of view of what a victory was, and I also didn't know what to fight for many times. Throughout my life and experience as a believer, I became aware that I am the one having one talent only. (I am referring to the parable of the talents found in Matthew 25:14–30.) Many times, what comes to our minds when we see this is to get stuck by looking at others who have more and by thinking of ourselves as weak and not capable enough. This made me have a fear of failure.

We have to know instead that God gave one talent to that person for a purpose. He had a particular reason and purpose for that person. God gave an example through this parable, exactly with the person having received one talent, because this is a con-

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dition we all can feel in the same way—I mean to fear that we can fail, that we won't make it, and in this way, we hide our talent. We all can feel this way no matter how many talents we have. The only way to fill this void is through God Himself, through understanding the purpose He has for us, and in this way learning to appreciate His work in us.

I am not merely speaking about achieving a “success” in this book (at least not as we imagine it). I am saying this because God can bring a success in our lives in the way we least expect it, as this needs to happen according to His will. The main purpose of this book is also to counsel those who didn't manage to find success but have still tried with all their strength and faith. It is because many times we picture the success in a certain specific way, and then when it doesn't happen, we get discouraged. We need to know instead that God makes all things to work for good to those who love Him, and there eventually can be a success, but in the least way we expected it to be. Speaking about all things God makes to work together for good, we can also include the failures and the times we really tried to achieve a victory or success, but we couldn't. There are such situations in the life of a believer. So the purpose is that a person can immerse himself in the will of God, who provides all the answers, solutions, and victory in His way, as well as benevolence for us to do His will, which is the best way for us.

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