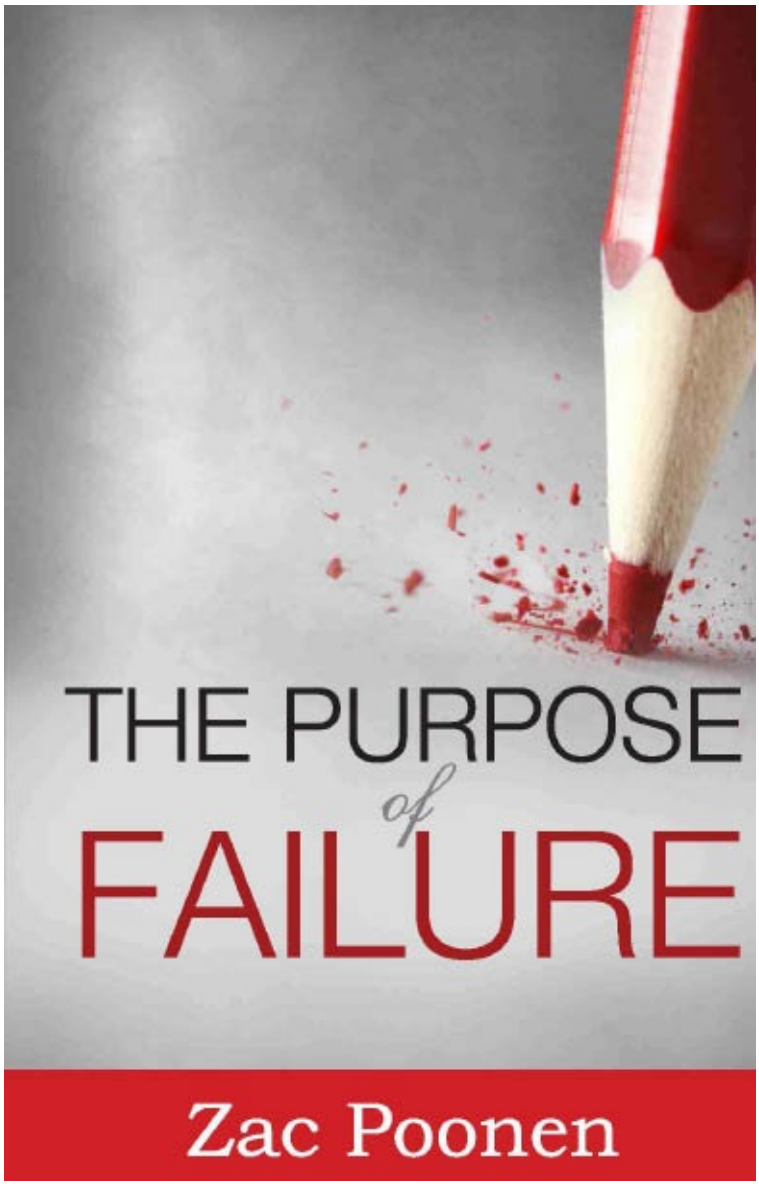


THE PURPOSE of FAILURE

Zac Poonen


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by

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CHAPTER 1

God's Purpose in Man's Failure

(A message given at Christian Fellowship Centre, Bangalore, India, on Sunday, April 9, 2000)

Let's turn to *Luke chapter 22 verse 31*.

Here we read of Jesus warning Peter of a danger that lay ahead of him. He told him

> *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you,* ***that your faith may not fail****; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."*

We all know that Peter denied the Lord three times that very night. In *verse 34*, we read that Jesus told Peter, "*I say to you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.*"

What I want to share with you this morning is ***God's purpose in man's failure***. This will encourage all of us who feel frustrated and discouraged because of our failures to have hope.

The question first of all is: *Does God allow failure?* Does He permit it? Is there a purpose in failure? Or is failure something that has no purpose at all in God's perfect will and something that God cannot use to further his purposes!

When we read this passage, we see that God did not prevent Peter from denying Him. Why didn't Jesus say "Simon I have prayed for you *that you will*

not deny Me even once." Why did the Lord pray only that Peter's *faith* may not fail, *even if Peter himself fell??* Isn't it interesting that the Lord did not pray that Peter might not fall?

Some of us would like the Lord to pray for us that we might never fall. We would like the Lord to say to us "My son, my daughter, I have prayed for you that you will *never* fall and *never* fail." But interestingly enough, our Lord doesn't pray such a prayer for us.

What did Jesus pray for Simon? That when Satan tempted him, ***his faith*** would not fail. He didn't pray that Peter should not fall in temptation, but that when he did fall, his faith in God's perfect love would not fail him – so that even when Peter reached the bottom of the pit of failure, he would confess, "***God still loves me***".

That is faith – and that is the confession we must always have on our lips and in our hearts – no matter how low we may have sunk or fallen – ***that God still loves us, JUST AS WE ARE***.

That was the confession of the prodigal son. When he had reached so low that he could not go any lower, he still believed that his father loved him. I can't imagine anyone reaching any lower than the prodigal son had reached – eating what the pigs eat. That boy was at rock-bottom. But when he reached rock-bottom, he remembered one thing: ***That his father still loved him***. Otherwise he would never have returned home. Supposing he'd heard that his father had died and that his elder brother was now running the house, do you think he would have come back home? No. He knew what his elder brother was like. And knowing that, he would never have come back. He came back only because he knew that his father loved him.

There are sinners who never come to some churches because they sense that the pastor or elders there are like that elder brother in the parable. You can't blame those sinners then for not coming. If however the elders of a church are like that *father*, then the worst of sinners will come to that church seeking salvation, just like they came to Jesus. Our church must have such an image, that

the worst of sinners feel free to come to us. If Jesus is really in our midst, the worst of sinners will definitely come and find salvation in our midst.

There's hope for all who've failed thoroughly, who've made a mess of their lives, and who've reached rock bottom. From there the Lord can pick you up and take you to the heights of glory. His prayer for us is that *our faith in God's love should not fail at any time*.

If you don't need this message today, dear brother and sister, you'll certainly need it one day in the future – when you hit rock bottom. Remember one thing in that day: ***that God still loves you***, no matter where you are, or how low you have fallen. May your faith in God's love not fail in that hour.

Faith is basically believing that God still loves us.

He doesn't love our sin, He doesn't want us to continue in our sin. He's like a father who sees his child's diseases and hates those diseases, but loves his child. Think of a mother who sees her child full of leprosy or tuberculosis. That mother loves her child so much, but hates those diseases with all her heart. God loves sinners but He hates their sin.

We see God's *love for sinners* and His *hatred of sin* on Calvary's cross. His love for sinners is seen in that He allowed Jesus to die on the cross for us. His hatred of sin is seen in His turning His face away from Jesus when Jesus bore the sin of the world on the cross.

People sometimes ask how a God of love can send people to Hell. What is Hell like? Hell is a place that God has forsaken completely – a place where God cannot be found. This earth has not been forsaken by God. That's why there's still so much of goodness and beauty on this earth. Look at the beauty of creation, for example. Look at the decency and goodness there is in many human beings. Demons would like to possess ***ALL*** human beings, but they're unable to, because God has put a restraining wall around people, so that demons can't do what they like. It is God's mercy also that gives man health, prosperity and many other comforts. All these blessings are bestowed by God on both good and evil

people. All this proves that God has not forsaken this world. But Hell is not like that. In Hell there is no mercy at all – because Hell is a truly God-forsaken place.

There is goodness in many unconverted people in this world, because the influences of God are still over them. But once they go to Hell, those very same people will become as evil as the devil himself – because the mercy of God will no longer be over their lives.

In Hell, people will experience for the first time what it is like to be totally forsaken by God. That was what Jesus experienced on the cross. Jesus experienced Hell on the cross for those three hours of darkness, when God actually forsook Him. There we see how much God hates sin.

So what is the answer? Can a God of love send people to Hell? The answer to that lies in the answer to this other question: Could a God of love allow His own Son to face Hell on the cross, when the sin of the world was upon Him? If He could do that, He can send people to Hell too. A God of love will turn His face away from those who ***continue*** in sin, who say to God, "I am ***not*** going to listen to you. I have chosen my own way and I will continue along it forever."

The Bible says in

> Proverbs 29:1 (paraphrased) *"A man who is corrected many times and **refuses to accept correction** will one day suddenly be destroyed and he will not have another chance"*.

If a man keeps on ***refusing*** God's loving invitations, he is in real danger.

Now I don't want any of you over-sensitive brothers and sisters to feel condemned hearing that – because that verse was ***not*** written for those who ***fall*** into sin, but to warn those who ***love to sin*** and who want to ***continue*** in it. It was ***not*** written for those who try to live in purity but keep falling. It was written for ***rebels***, who defy God and ***want to keep on sinning***.

How can you know whether you are a rebel? That's very easy to find out. Just ask yourself whether you have ***a desire*** to repent and to turn back to God? If

there's even the slightest desire within you to turn to God and to love Him, then that proves that the Holy Spirit is still working in your life and that God is seeking to draw you to Himself. You may be a *failure*, but you're not a *rebel*. There's a vast difference between one who is *failing* and one who is *rebelling*.

It was with a purpose that God allowed Peter to fail. That purpose was to *sift* Peter. What Satan really wanted was to destroy Peter altogether, but God would not allow him to do that. God does not allow us to be tested or tried beyond our ability. So Satan was allowed to *sift* Peter. As a result of his failure, Peter was cleansed of a whole lot of chaff in his life.

That is the real purpose with which God allows us to fail too.

Isn't it a good thing for the chaff to be removed from our lives? Certainly. When a farmer harvests the wheat, he has to sift it before he can use it. Only then will the chaff be removed from it.

The Lord uses Satan to remove the chaff from our lives. Amazingly enough, God accomplishes this purpose by allowing us to fail repeatedly!! God used Satan to fulfil that purpose in Peter and He will use Satan to fulfil that purpose in our lives too. There's a lot of chaff in all of us – the chaff of pride, self-confidence and self righteousness. And God uses Satan to make us fail repeatedly, in order to remove that chaff from us completely.

Whether the Lord is succeeding in fulfilling this purpose in your life or not, you alone know. But if the chaff is being removed, you will be *humbler and less self-righteous*. You won't look down on others who fail. You won't consider yourself better than anyone else.

As I said, God permits Satan to remove the *chaff* from us, by allowing us to fail repeatedly. So don't get discouraged if you fail. You are still in God's hand. There is a glorious purpose that's being fulfilled through your repeated failures. But your faith in God's love for you must *not* fail at such times. That was what Jesus prayed for Peter and what He's praying for us today. He's not praying that we may never fail, but He's praying that when we do reach rock-bottom, our

confidence in God's love will still be unshaken.

Only through many experiences of failure do we finally reach a "*zero point*", where we're truly broken. It was when Peter reached that point,that he had a second "*conversion*" (*Luke 22:32* - KJV). He ***turned around***. The proof that Jesus' prayer for Peter was answered is seen in the fact that when Peter hit rock-bottom, he ***turned around***. He didn't just lie down there discouraged. He didn't lose his faith. He got up. God had let him go on a long leash. But when Peter reached the end of that rope, God pulled him back.

It's a wonderful thing to be a child of God. When God lays hold of us, He puts a rope around us to protect us. There's a lot of slack in that rope, and you may slip up and fall many thousands of times and even drift away from the Lord. But one day, you'll reach the end of that rope. And then God will pull you right back to Him.

Of course, you can decide at that point, to cut off the rope and run away. Or you can choose to be broken by God's kindness and mourn and return to Him. That's what Peter did. He wept and turned back to the Lord. But Judas Iscariot didn't do that. He cut away the rope – in rebellion against God's authority over his life – and was eternally lost. But I trust you'll do what Peter did.

Jesus then told Peter, "When you turn back and are strong once again, *strengthen your brothers*".

> ***It is only when we are broken that we can be strong enough to strengthen others.***

It was only when Peter was weak and broken, that he became really strong – so strong that he was able to strengthen his brothers and sisters. We could say that Peter's preparation for Spirit-filled service came through his experience of failure. If he had been filled with the Holy Spirit, ***without*** this experience of failure, he would have stood up on the day of Pentecost as a proud man, as a man who had never failed, who could look down, despisingly, at the poor lost sinners in front of him. And God would have become his enemy, for God resists

the proud!!

That is the tragedy that has overtaken a lot of Christians today who were once filled with the Holy Spirit. They were ***never*** broken. They were genuinely filled with the Spirit perhaps, but they were never broken. And so, through pride, they lost the anointing very soon.

In my own life, God taught me the truths of the way of cross and of brokenness, long before He filled me with the Holy Spirit. That was good for me, because it prevented me from going astray. God shattered my self-confidence and my self righteousness through many years of failure – yes, it was ***years*** of failure, day after day. If I were to draw a graph of the 60 years of my life, it would be something like this: When I was born, I was way up there – innocent and sweet, like all babies are, never having sinned. After I was born again (when I was 19 years old), things went well for a period of time – in fact for a number of years. The graph began going up slowly. But as God began to bless my ministry and I became better known in Christian circles, pride got into me and my graph started going down, without my even realizing it. Outwardly I was still a well-known preacher. But my inner life and walk with God had begun to deteriorate. I had become a backslider – inwardly. Finally, I came to a point where I would say the graph of my life hit rock-bottom. That was 26 years ago. At that point, I seriously thought of giving up the ministry altogether – because I didn't want to continue deceiving people by preaching what I didn't practise. At that point, I deserved only judgment from God for my hypocrisy and my backsliding. But instead of judging me and sending me to Hell, do you know what God did? ***He filled me with the Holy Spirit***.

Why did He do that? Because God's ways are not our ways. Let me use an illustration for you to understand the wonder of that!

Think if you were an employee of a large multinational company, and you had been unfaithful to the company, disobeying their orders, taking advantage of their goodness and disgracing their name. One day, you do something terribly wrong. That's the last straw. The Chairman then comes to you, and instead of

sacking you, tells you, “We have decided to forgive you everything and to triple your salary from today.” Can you imagine such a thing happening? No? Well, that just shows us that God’s ways are not man’s ways. Because that’s a picture of what God did for me 25 years ago.

What was the result of God treating me like that? Did it make me take advantage of God’s kindness and make me sin even more from that day? No. On the contrary, as it says in *Romans 2:4*, “*the kindness of God led me to repentance*.” It led me to mourning – and to brokenness. God’s kindness broke me and gave me a longing to live a pure and holy life for Him thereafter.

But I want to be honest with you here. The graph of my life has not *steadily* gone up since that day. No. I still have my ups and downs, like other struggling Christians. Like Paul, I still have “*conflicts without and fears within*”. I still need the help of my brothers “*to be comforted when I am depressed*” (*2 Corinthians 7:5, 6*). But I am seeking to press on to perfection.

God had to allow me to fall repeatedly into the pit of failure, before He could have His way with me. And it took Him 16 years after I was born again, before He could bring me to that zero-point. By that time I was 35 years old. Half my life was over. It may not take that long for you, because you may not be as stubborn as I was. But I wanted to give you my testimony, to encourage you, so that you will never give up hope. If God could do that for me,He can do that for any of you.

There’s no-one who is beyond hope. Did you hear that? ***No-one is beyond hope***. There’s hope for everyone of you, as long as you’re alive. Hope is lost only when you are dead.

Peter had to come to such a zero-point too, before he could be what God wanted him to be.

Once we have been to the bottom ourselves, we can never despise others who are still there. We can never look down thereafter on sinners, or backslidden believers, or even on Christian leaders who fall. We can never be proud of our victory over sin, because we know what failures we ourselves were at one time.

That's why Peter himself warned other Christians saying, "*Don't ever forget how you yourself were once cleansed from your sins*" (*2 Peter 1:9*). He warns them there that if they do forget that, they will become blind and short-sighted. I don't ever want to be blind or short-sighted. I want to have a long-range vision – of heavenly values and eternal values – at all times.

Who are the short-sighted ones? Those who value earthly things – the pleasures of sin, material wealth and man's honour and approval. All such people are short-sighted. We need to feel sorry for such believers. If you see a man whose physical vision is so poor that he can't see anything more than 10 feet ahead of him, you don't get angry with him. You feel sorry for him. If you see a man who needs to keep a book 2 inches from his eyes in order to read it, you don't get angry with him. You feel sorry for him, don't you? If an eye-doctor asks a man wearing thick lenses whether he can read the "eye-chart" and the man replies that he can just about see the top letter but is not sure whether it is an "E" or an "S", what does the doctor do? Does he get angry with him? No. He feels sorry for him.

And when we see believers who are so short-sighted as to live for money and the pleasure of sin and the approval of man, it's no use rebuking them. We must feel sorry for them, because they are so terribly shortsighted. They are going to have tons of regret when they stand before the Lord one day.

There are lots and lots of believers like that. And do you know how they became blind? They forgot "*their purification from their former sins*" (*2 Peter 1:9*). They forgot the pit from which God pulled them out. They became proud of the fact that God blessed them subsequently.

I never want to forget the pit from which God pulled me out. I know that all my sins have been blotted out and that God does not remember even *a single sin* that I have ever committed. I stand before God today, just as if I had never sinned even once in the 60 years of my life – because I have "*been justified by Christ's blood*" (*Romans 5:9*). That's how God sees me. But I will never forget what I once was. God says to me "*I will not remember your sins any more*"

(*Hebrews 8:12*). But ***I*** will always remember what I once was.

Now, I don't remember my past *in such a way* as to allow Satan to *condemn* me or *depress* me with the thought of my sins. No. Never. "*There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (*Romans 8:1*). When the devil accuses me I tell him straight to his face that "*the blood of Jesus has cleansed me from **ALL** my sins*". I overcome Satan "*by the blood of the Lamb*" (*Revelation 12:11*). But I'll never forget the pit in which I once was, when God met with me and filled me with His Holy Spirit.

Like God once told Judah, I too was like

> *"an unwanted baby thrown out in the open field, and pitied by no-one. When the Lord came by that way and saw me squirming in my blood, He picked me up, bathed me, clothed me and made me perfect with His splendour"* (Ezekiel 16:5, 6, 9, 10, 14).

How is it with you my brother, my sister? I know that many of you have been filled with the Holy Spirit. But I am not sure if God has succeeded in breaking you and shattering your self-confidence and your pride. It's very easy to find out if that has happened. Just answer these *two* questions:

First of all: *Do you look down on others – perhaps those in other denominations?*

We may disagree with many Christians on doctrinal matters, but we must never look down on any of them. I can honestly say that I consider many Christians in other denominations to be better men than I am myself. I am not able to work with many of them, because of our doctrinal differences; but I don't despise any of them.

Do you ever say, like the Pharisee, "*God, I thank you that I am not like other people*" (*Luke 18:11*)? If so, then you are not a broken man,whatever experience of the Holy Spirit you may have had.

And then, a second question: *Are you proud of your spiritual progress or of your accomplishments?*

A broken man recognizes that nothing good dwells in his flesh and so he is quick to give the glory to God for any fruit that he sees in his life or his ministry.

So these are the two marks of a broken man:

1. *He does not look down on anyone – believer or unbeliever.*
2. *He does not glory in his spiritual growth or in his ministry.*

Jacob is a classic example of a man whom God succeeded in breaking. He had two meetings with God – one at *Bethel* (*Genesis 28*) and the other at *Peniel* (*Genesis 32*).

Bethel means "*the house of God*" (a type of the church) and *Peniel* means "*the face of God*". We all need to go beyond entering the *church* of God to seeing the ***face*** of God.

At Bethel, it says that "*the sun set*" (*Genesis 28:11*) – only a geographical fact, but also indicative of what was happening in Jacob's life,because the next 20 years were a period of deep darkness for him. Then at Peniel, it says, "*the sun rose*" (*Genesis 32:31*) – again a geographical fact, but Jacob too had finally come into God's light.

Like Peter's *two* conversions, many believers who have walked with God through the ages, have also had two meetings with God. The *first* was when they entered the house of God (the church) through being born again. The *second* was when they met God face to face and were filled with the Holy Spirit and their lives were transformed.

At Bethel, Jacob dreamt of a ladder set on earth whose top reached up to heaven. In *John 1:51*, Jesus interpreted that ladder as referring to Himself – the Way from earth to Heaven. So what Jacob saw was actually a prophetic vision of Jesus opening up the way to Heaven. The Lord then promised Jacob many things in that dream. But Jacob was so earthly minded that he could only think of earthly security, physical health and financial prosperity. And so he said to God

“Lord if You take care of me on this trip and give me food and clothing and bring me safely home, I’ll give you 10% of my earnings.” Jacob treated God like a watchman who was to take care of him. And if God did that, Jacob would pay Him His wages – 10% of his income!!

That’s exactly how many believers treat God today too. They desire only material comforts from Him. And if the Lord gives them these things, they attend the church-meetings faithfully and give some of their money for the Lord’s work. Such believers are actually doing *business* with God,seeking their own comfort and profit, just like any worldly businessman.

Jacob spent 20 years of his life *grabbing* earthly things. He tried to *grab* a wife from Laban’s family and got *two!* He didn’t want two, but he got two anyway!! Then he cheated Laban and *grabbed* his sheep and thus became a very rich man. He had gone penniless to Laban’s house, but ended up as a very rich man there. No doubt he attributed his prosperity to *God’s blessing* – as many believers do today!!

But what is the real mark of *“God’s blessing”?* Is it prosperity? No. *It is to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.*

What’s the use having a good job, a good house and many comforts, if your life is still useless to God and to man?

But God hadn’t finished dealing with Jacob. He met him a second time at Peniel.

I want to say to you, my brothers and sisters, that many of you need a second encounter with God – an encounter that will take place when you hit rock bottom in your life – and when God, instead of judging you and sending you to Hell, fills you with His Holy Spirit!

We read in *Genesis 32* that Jacob was scared because he had just heard that Esau (whom he had cheated of the birthright 20 years earlier) was coming out to meet him. He was sure that Esau would kill him. It’s good for us when God allows us to face certain situations that *scare* us. Because, when we are afraid of what men might do to us, we will draw near to God.

At Peniel, Jacob was *alone* (*Genesis 32:24*). God has to get us alone first of all before he can meet with us. That's why Satan has ordered life in today's world to be so rushed and busy (especially in the cities) that even many believers have hardly any time to be *alone* with God. Their lives have become so busy, that matters of low priority (*like God*) have been crowded out of their timetable altogether! This is the tragedy in today's Christendom.

God wrestled with Jacob for many long hours that night, but Jacob would not yield. That wrestling was symbolic of what had been going on in Jacob's life for the previous 20 years. And when God saw that Jacob was stubborn, He finally dislocated his hip from its socket. Jacob was only about 40 years old at that time, and he was a very strong man. His grandfather Abraham had lived up to 175. So, we could say that Jacob was in the prime of his youth,with 75% of his life still ahead of him. To get a dislocated hip at such a young age would have been the last thing he wanted – for it would have shattered all the plans he had made for his future. To understand it in today's terms, it would be like a young man of 20 getting his hip dislocated,and having to use a crutch for ever after!! That can be a shattering experience. Jacob would never be able to walk without a crutch for the rest of his life.

God had tried in so many ways to break Jacob but He had not succeeded; and so He finally gave him a permanent physical disability. That succeeded in breaking Jacob finally.

God may do the same for us, if He finds that we need it. He disciplines only those He loves, in order to save them from some greater catastrophe.

If however God has stopped correcting you, then He may allow you, even as a backslider, to live in good health and earn plenty of money and waste your life. But who would want that? I would rather let God deal with me drastically and discipline me and break me down (even physically if necessary) right now, so that I can walk with Him and fulfil His purposes on earth.

Even the great apostle Paul needed a thorn in the flesh to keep him broken (*2 Corinthians 12:7*). Paul's thorn in the flesh may have been some physical

disability that annoyed him continuously. He prayed to God again and again that this "*messenger of Satan*" be taken away. But God said, "No. Even though it is a messenger of Satan, I won't take it away. You need it to keep you humble – so that you can be useful to Me and to your fellow-men".

After God had dislocated Jacob's hip, He told him, "All right, I have done My job. Now let Me go. You never wanted Me. You only wanted women and money." But Jacob wouldn't let go of God now. He had been changed – *at last!* This man who had spent his life grabbing women and property now grabs hold of God and says

"I won't let You go unless You bless me".

What a great work was accomplished in Jacob's heart when his hip was dislocated, so that He now desired only God.

Like the old saying goes, "***When you have nothing left but God, you will find that God is more than enough***"!! That's true.

Now God asks him, "What is your name?" And Jacob replies, "My name is Jacob". "*Jacob*" means deceiver. Jacob admits at last that he is a deceiver.

Are you perhaps a deceiver too? Have you been fooling others around you that you are a spiritual man? If so, will you be honest with God today and tell Him that you're a hypocrite?

Many years earlier, when his blind father Isaac had asked him his name, Jacob had pretended that he was Esau. But now he was honest. And the Lord said to him immediately, "*You won't be a deceiver (Jacob) any more*" (*verse 28*).

Isn't that an encouraging word?

Did you hear it?

"You won't be a deceiver any more"

Hallelujah!

It's not that you won't *fall into sin* anymore. But there won't be any *deception* in

your life any more. There won't be any *guile* in your life anymore.

And then God told Jacob, "*Your name will henceforth be Israel (prince of God), for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed*". What a transformation – from a deceiver to a prince of God. And it was all accomplished only when Jacob was broken.

That's our calling too – to be seated with Christ on His throne, as a prince, exercising spiritual authority over Satan, and releasing men and women from Satan's bondage. As members of the body of Christ, we are to have power with God and with men and prevail. We're called to be a blessing to all men. But that can happen only when we're broken. And we can be broken only when we're honest with God about out hypocrisy and our deception.

Many centuries later, when a descendant of Jacob, Nathaniel, met Jesus, the Lord said of Him, "*Here is a true Israel in whom there is no Jacob (no guile)*" (*John 1:47*)!! He then reminded Nathaniel of the ladder that Jacob had seen at Bethel and told him that he too was an "*Israel*" – not because Nathaniel was perfect but because there was no guile or deception in him.

It says here that Jacob named that place "*Peniel*" for he had finally seen the *face* of God. At Bethel, he had been taken up with the *house* of God. You may have been in the *house* of God for many years and yet you may not have seen the *face* of God. Then you need a second encounter with God – where you see His face.

Jacob says in excitement,

"Now I see Your face O God and my life is preserved."
"I should have been thrown out of the company, but my salary has been tripled!!"
"I should have gone to Hell, but He filled me with the Holy Spirit instead!! Hallelujah!!"

I think I know the reason now, why many believers are not filled with the Holy Spirit. They're trying to earn it. They're trying to be *worthy* of Him. Multitudes

of sincere people in many religions too are seeking for the forgiveness of their sins in the same way. Why don't they get forgiveness? Because they're trying to *earn* it.

How did you receive the forgiveness of your sins? Did you earn it or deserve it? A day came in your life when you realized that you would never deserve God's forgiveness. You came to Jesus then, not as a Christian, but as a sinner. And your sins were forgiven immediately. We must come in the same way to receive the fullness of the Spirit.

There are many believers today who are fasting and praying and tarrying to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing wrong with doing any of these things. They're all good. But if you do any of these things *in order to* make yourself *worthy* to receive the fullness of the Spirit, then you are on the wrong track.

When you don't receive the Spirit's fullness, you may even question God saying, "Lord, I have fasted and prayed and waited. Why haven't you filled me".But you can never *earn* or *deserve* the Holy Spirit, even as you can never earn or deserve the forgiveness of your sins. Both of these are God's gifts. And you can't pay Him for either. You have to take them free – or you'll never get them.

God's gifts are all free. But man makes the mistake of trying to pay God for them and so he does not receive any of them. If you try to make yourself worthy to receive God's gifts, you cannot receive them. This could perhaps be the main reason why you have not yet been filled with the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was on earth, the Pharisees thought they deserved the forgiveness of sins more than anyone else. But they didn't get it – and they went to Hell. On the other hand, notorious sinners like Mary Magdalene received the forgiveness of sins immediately. A thief who had lived a life of crime was forgiven in a moment and went to Paradise the very night he was crucified.

*God gives His best gifts to those who **don't deserve** them*. Those who came to work in the vineyard at the eleventh hour, knew that they *deserved nothing* and

so got paid first. But those who had come earlier, who felt they *deserved* their wages, ended up last.

In the story of the prodigal son, we read that the father had a ring on his hand. One day, he took it off and gave it to his younger son who had wasted all his money. Why didn't he give it to his elder son? Because he was self-righteous. In man's eyes, it was the elder son who deserved that ring. But the father gave it to his younger son.

That's God's way. He does things like that to humble the pride of man, so that no-one can ever boast in His presence. *His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts*.

If you've understood this truth that I am trying to emphasize, then you've understood a fundamental principle of how God deals with man.

It was the kindness of God that first led *me* to repentance. And every subsequent kindness that God ever showed me has only led me to greater repentance.

Let the kindness of God lead you to repentance too. Don't take advantage of His goodness. God has been kind to us in many ways. But we shouldn't imagine that because He is *kind* to us, He is *happy* with us. No. He's kind to all men. His kindness is only meant to lead us to repentance. And when we turn to Him without any guile, He will put His ring on our hands too. He has kept that ring especially for sinners like us.

Jesus once told the Pharisees sarcastically, "*You are all healthy; you don't need a doctor. It's the sick people who need a doctor and I came for them.*" (*Matthew 9:12*). He used sarcasm in love – to wake them up. But they didn't wake up.

Jesus has *not* come to call those who consider themselves righteous, but those who acknowledge that they are sinners. It is quite possible that many of you sitting here this morning may be as sick as those Pharisees were, without even realizing it – sick with hypocrisy, pride and self righteousness. These diseases are more serious than AIDS and cancer – and they can destroy you! Compared to these sins, other sins like murder and adultery are only like having a cold and a

fever. You may think that the murderer and the adulterer are sick. But you could be sicker than both of them!!

God wants to give us His life, His power and His authority. That's why He allows us to fail again and again, until we're finally broken.

In the story of Job, we see how God brought him to rock bottom by allowing him to lose his property, his children, and his health. In a sense he even lost his wife (who nagged him constantly) and his three good friends (who misunderstood him and criticized him). His friends turned out to be self-righteous preachers who took delight in "kicking him when he was down". They kept on "kicking" him, until God in His mercy put an end to it. In the midst of all these pressures, Job justified himself repeatedly. When the Lord finally spoke to him, Job saw the corruption of his self-righteousness – and he repented. He was a righteous man. That was good. But he was proud of his righteousness. That was bad. But after God dealt with him, he was a *broken* man. From then on, he would glory only in God. Thus God's purpose for Job was accomplished.

When Job was broken, notice what he said to God, "Up until now, I had only heard *about* you from all these preachers. But now I see you *face to face*" (*Job 42:5*). That was Job's Peniel! He too saw the face of God and his life was preserved. And what was the result? He repented in dust and ashes (*verse 6*). What those four preachers could not accomplish even after days of preaching, God accomplished in Job, in a moment, by a revelation of His kindness. It was God's kindness that broke Job and led him to repentance.

Most of us hear about God from preachers in the meetings. What we need is a face-to-face encounter with God, where we see His kindness toward us and are broken by it. That's what happened to Peter too. Do you remember what was the very next thing that happened after Peter had denied the Lord and the cock had crowed twice? He saw the Lord's face. Peter had his *Peniel* too! We read that "*the Lord turned and looked at Peter*" (*Luke 22:61*). And what was the result: "*Peter went out and wept bitterly*" (*verse 62*).

That look of kindness and forgiveness from Jesus broke that rugged

fisherman's heart.

Under the old covenant, God had promised health, wealth and many material blessings to Israel. But there was one blessing which was the greatest of them all – the one described in *Numbers 6:22 to 26*. There we read that Aaron was commanded to bless the people thus:

> *"May the Lord make His **face** to shine on you. May the Lord lift up His **countenance** upon you and give you peace".*

Isn't it a pity that many believers today seek for the *inferior* blessings of health and wealth (which unbelievers also get without prayer) and for emotional experiences (many of which are spurious) – instead of seeking for the greatest blessing of all that can transform their lives totally – a face to face encounter with God?

Even if we never become rich, and are never healed, if we see the Lord's face, that will meet all our needs.

Job had boils all over his body when he met with God, but he didn't ask God for healing. He said, "I have seen the Lord's face and *that's enough for me*". The three preachers who pretended to have "discernment" and "a word from God" had told Job that he was being punished for some secret sins in his life. There are self-appointed prophets like that today too with their false "*Thus saith the Lord*" messages, who bring God's people under condemnation. But God didn't threaten Job with judgment like those three preachers did.

God didn't talk to Job about his failures or even remind him of the complaints he had made (against God) when he was under pressure. God just revealed His kindness to Job – His kindness seen in the beautiful universe He had created for man's enjoyment and in the animals He had created to be subject to man. It was that revelation of God's kindness that led Job to repentance. Many take advantage of God's kindness and abuse it. But with Job, it led him to repentance. And then the Lord blessed Job with double of what he had in the beginning.

The final purpose of God in breaking us is to bless us abundantly – as we read

in *James 5:11*. The goal that the Lord had in mind for Job was to shatter his self-righteousness and his pride and make him a broken man – so that the Lord could show him His face and bless him abundantly. Even the material and physical blessings that God gives us can ruin us by driving us away from Him, if we do not see His face behind them all. How many believers there are today, who have drifted away from God through material prosperity.

One vision of the Lord's face can deliver us from longing after all that this world can offer:

"Show me Thy face – one transient gleam of loveliness divine;
And I shall never think or dream of other love save Thine.
All lesser light will darken quite, all lower glories wane.
The beautiful of earth will ne'er seem beautiful again."

Peter saw the Lord's face and he wept bitterly. We may now imagine that Peter was *finally* broken. But no. The Lord had to lead him through one more experience of failure before he was ready for his *Peniel*.

In *John 21:3*, we read of Peter telling His fellow-apostles, "*I am going fishing*". He didn't mean that he was going to fish just that evening. What he meant was that he was quitting being an apostle – because he had been a failure at that – and was going back to fishing *permanently!*

Peter had given up his fishing business some years earlier when the Lord called him. He had forsaken everything and sincerely followed the Lord, the best he knew how. But he had failed. He now felt that this business of being an apostle was not for him. After 3½ years of listening to the most wonderful messages ever preached, by the greatest preacher who ever lived, he had denied the Lord outright – and that too, not just once, but thrice. He had had enough of trying to be an apostle.

But there was one thing he could still do well – fishing. He had done that since he was a boy and he was an expert at it. So he decided to be a fisherman once again. Some of the other apostles felt the same way too. They too had forsaken

the Lord in His hour of need and run away. So they would go back to fishing too, because they had failed at being “apostles”!!

They were sincere men. They had appreciated Jesus’ messages and their hearts had burned within them, when listening to Him. They had wanted to be His wholehearted disciples. But they had failed.

Your experience may be like theirs too. You may have heard powerful messages and been stirred by them. You heart may have burned within you when you heard God’s Word. You may have forsaken all and sincerely sought to follow after the Lord. Perhaps you too have made “*decisions*” time and again, after listening to powerful messages. Perhaps after repeated failures, you may have said to yourself at times, “This time I am really going to make it”. But you have gone out and failed again. As you look back today, perhaps all you can see behind you is failure piled upon failure, a thousand times over. Maybe some of you are so discouraged today that you are thinking, “It is no use. I might as well give up. This gospel may work for others. But it doesn’t seem to work for me. I am too far gone. I can never make it.”

Are you feeling like that today? Have you decided that you are never going to try again, because it’s no use trying. Have you decided to go back to the world to seek a fortune or some empty pleasure there? Do you feel that it would have been better for you to have been a thoroughly worldly person who made no pretence of being a Christian rather than claiming to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus?

Well, that was exactly how those apostles felt when they decided to go back to fishing. And the Lord permitted them to go, saying, as it were, “Go ahead. Try fishing and see if you can succeed there.” So Peter and his friends tried all night to catch fish – and failed *miserably*. They had never had such a bad night in their entire lives.

Once God has called you to be His, He won’t let you go. He will make sure that you fail at fishing and at anything *else* you try! You can try as much as you like, but you will fail. God’s love won’t permit you to waste your life on

trivialities. So, if you try to run away from Him, you will be a failure at everything you try wherever you go – *until you come back to Him*.

But this doesn't apply to those whom the Lord has ***not*** called. There are many crooked businessmen and politicians who've made a lot of '*black*' money, who still live in good health – without God. Why does God permit that? Because they're *not* His children. But I'm not talking about them now. I'm talking *to you whom God has called from before the foundation of the world to be His very own*.

Actually there were lots of fish in the lake of Galilee, and I'm sure the other fishermen caught plenty of them that night. Those fish went near all those other boats. But God kept them away from Peter's, so that not even one fish came near his. Those other fishermen may even have come by Peter's boat and told him what a good catch they had. And that must have made Peter and his friends wonder all the more why they were not catching anything!

Have you ever wondered why you've never been able to make money in the stock-market, like others around you have done? Do you wonder why your business does not seem to rake in "millions" like that of others? People around you seem to be getting wealthier, but prosperity doesn't seem to come *your* way at all. That's because God's call is upon your life, and He wants you to have something better than what those worldly people have.

Peter was turning away from the calling of God upon his life and God had to break him once again by making him fail. Those apostles had started fishing at about 6 o'clock in the evening. But Jesus didn't come to them until about 5 o'clock the next morning. The Lord knew that Peter was not going to get any fish that night. Why then didn't He come earlier – as soon as they went out – so that they wouldn't waste their time? Why didn't He come to them at least by 9 o'clock that night? Why did He wait till 5 o'clock the next morning? Why did He wait until they were exhausted, after having struggled for 11 hours and failed?

In the answer to that question we will discover God's design in allowing us to

fail. There we will see God's purpose in man's failure. There we will understand why He never came to help us in the past, when we were struggling, despite of our repeated cries for help, and why some of our earnest still remain unanswered.

When Peter and his friends went out to fish that evening at 6 p.m., they were *not* failures. They were brimming with hope. By 9 p.m. they hadn't caught any fish, and were perhaps a bit discouraged. But their outing could not still be written off as a "*failure*". By midnight they may have been quite depressed. By 4 am the next morning, they had begun to lose all hope. But they had still to become ***total*** failures. For that to happen, they had to fail some more. The graph of their self-confidence was going down. But it had to go all the way down to zero – to rock bottom. And that occurred only at 5 a.m. Then they were ready to give up. Then they must have said, "It's no use trying any more. Let's go home".

That's when the Lord appeared. That is God's way. And the Lord filled their net to overflowing. They had never caught such a good catch on any single day of their lives. That morning they caught 153 *large* fish. They had probably caught 20 or 30 fish on good days in the past. But this was a real miracle. No-one had ever caught so many fish in one day in that lake. This catch would go down in the record-books of Galilee! They would remember forever that the Lord did a miracle for them, just *when they had given up all hope!*

Are you at your "*wits end*" today, not knowing which way to turn, or what to do next, because everywhere you have turned you have experienced only disappointment and failure. Then you are probably very close to the place where the Lord is going to appear to you. Don't give up. He is only waiting for your self-confidence to reach a zero-point. If He hasn't come to you as yet, it only means that the graph of your self-confidence has not reached a zero-point as yet. He still sees some strength of Self left in you, which also has to go. Lazarus had to die and be buried, before the Lord came!

When Jesus finally came to the lakeside that morning, what did He ask them? He knew that they had no fish. Yet He asked them, "Boys, do you have any

fish?" Perhaps none of them answered at first. Maybe He had to ask them that a second time. Then they answered, "No". They admitted that they were failures. They were honest – like Jacob and Job before them. That was all that the Lord wanted them to admit – that they were failures.

One of the greatest joys in my life has been to discover this glorious truth: *That the main thing God requires from us, at any point in our lives, is* ***honesty***. Then He can do a miracle for us.

"Have you got any fish?" "*No*". "Cast your net on the right side". And lo a miracle occurs!!

"What is your name?" "*Deceiver*". "Your name will no longer be Deceiver, but Prince of God". And lo, another miracle occurs.

That is God's way, my brothers and sisters.

All that God requires from us is honesty.

Can't you be honest with Him today?

Our church is like a hospital. We are all patients here. We are not specialists or experts. Some of us have been in this hospital longer than others. But we are all patients. There is only one Doctor – and that is Jesus Himself. We have no consultants in our midst. Specialists and consultants are found among the self-righteous people in the cults, and not in the church of the living God. All are welcome to our hospital. The more serious your sickness, the more you need to be in our midst, to find healing. Our message is just this that, "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – among whom we are the greatest*".

God meets with those who don't deserve anything. The tax-collector prayed saying "*God be merciful to me THE sinner*." (*Luke 18:13* - NASB). He called himself, "***THE*** sinner". What he meant was that he felt that everyone around him was a saint compared to him! In his eyes, he was ***THE ONLY SINNER*** on the face of the earth! Jesus said that that man went home *justified*. It is only such people whom God *justifies*.

Let me share something with you about what this word "*justify*" really means. It is a beautiful word and a liberating word (*Luke 18:14*).

Look at the pages of a book. Do you see how the right hand margin on every page is straight, just like the left hand margin? In computer-language this is called "*justification*"! Even though the number of letters in each line is different, yet the computer makes the right hand edge to be perfectly straight. Now if you were to write something on your computer without "justifying" it, you will find that the right hand edge is jagged. That was how our pages used to come out in the old days when we used manual typewriters. It was impossible to write even a single page in such a way that each line was of equal length. But now we see the miracle of "*justification*" – and this is not done by just hyphenating the word that comes at the end of each line. No. If you look at the pages in a book, you will find that there are usually no hyphens at all – because that would look ugly too. The computer adjusts the spaces between the words in each line so that every line is neatly "*justified*".

Even if you have already written 30 lines of a page with jagged edges, you can now command the computer to justify all that you have already written – and lo and behold, by the pressing of a single key, all the lines are immediately *justified!!*

God does exactly the same thing with us, when He *justifies* us. Maybe you have made a mess of your life, and each day of your past life has ended with a jagged edge. But if you come to Christ, God ***JUSTIFIES*** you in a moment! Every line in your ***past*** life is made perfect – just as if you had never sinned even once in your entire life – no jagged edges, only a perfectly straight edge.

That's amazing isn't it? What the computer does for our pages, God does for our lives. There we see a 20th-century illustration of the word "*justified*".

Let me tell you something further. Once we have commanded the computer to "*justify*", every line that we write *thereafter* will also be justified automatically and come out in perfect alignment with the other lines. Justification applies just as much to our *future* as it does to our *past*. This is an amazing gospel indeed!

God now sees us in Christ. We have no righteousness of our own to boast about, any longer. Christ Himself is our righteousness

When God justifies us, it will be as though we had never committed a single sin or made a single mistake in our entire lives.

And we are continuously justified by the blood of Christ – because as we walk in the light, the blood of Christ continuously cleanses us from all our sins – both conscious and unconscious.

One of the greatest mistakes we can make when reading the Scriptures is to use the logical way of thinking that we use when working out a mathematical problem. We cannot understand God's mind that way, because God doesn't work according to mathematical logic!! So we cannot use logic when trying to figure out whether we can still fulfil God's perfect plan for our lives, after having made so many mistakes in the past. According to arithmetical logic, that is impossible – because in an arithmetic sum, even if one step is wrong somewhere, the final answer will always be wrong.

If you were to use that logic, you'd have to say that if you missed God's will somewhere in the past (whether that was when you were 2 years old or when you were 52 doesn't really matter), you could never fulfil God's perfect will now, no matter how hard you tried and no matter how much you repented – because it doesn't matter at what stage you make a mistake in an arithmetic problem (whether at step 2 or step 52), your final answer will still be wrong!!

But God says

"My ways are not your ways." (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

Thank God that His plan for our lives doesn't work according to mathematical logic. If it did, then not a single human being (not even the apostle Paul) would have been able to fulfil God's perfect plan. For all of us have failed at some time or the other. We have even failed *after becoming believers* – so many times. We have sinned *deliberately* too, after becoming believers. All who are honest will acknowledge that readily. But the amazing truth is that there is still hope *for*

every one of us.

Mathematics *unsparingly* condemns all who make the slightest error. No allowance is made for even a small mistake. 2 + 2 does not equal 3.99999999. It has to be exactly 4, no more and no less.

But God's plans don't work like mathematics. ***In His plan, failure is necessary***. There is no way by which any of us can be broken, except through failure. And so we could say, that failure is an essential part of the syllabus in our spiritual education.

Jesus was the only One Who lived without ever failing. But the rest of us (even the best among us) have all had to be broken by God through failure. Even Peter and Paul had to be broken through repeated failure.

So rejoice in the message of the gospel and may the kindness of God lead you to repentance. Let it lead you into a life of joy and perfect rest in God – a rest that comes through knowing that God has "*accepted you* (permanently) *in His Beloved Son*" (*Ephesians 1:6* - KJV).

Everyday we make so many mistakes. We slip and fall into sin – even if only accidentally or unconsciously. At times, the pressures on us may be so great, that we get depressed and discouraged – and then we are tempted to sin even more. God understands our pressures and He is compassionate. He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability, but will make a way of escape for us. He can straighten out everything in each of our lives.

The Christian life does not work according to human logic. It works according to the miracle-working power, the perfect wisdom and the perfect love of a heavenly Father.

No-one can ever type out his life with perfect lines and produce a perfectly straight edge. It is God Who justifies each of us – even the best of us. No man can ever boast before God.

Let us be merciful then toward others, who have struggled and failed in life's battles, for we have all failed ourselves too, and we have all received much mercy from God.

Let me say this final word to you, in Jesus' Name:

YOU CAN START FROM WHEREVER YOU ARE AT, RIGHT NOW, AND STILL FULFIL GOD'S PERFECT PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE.

And if you fail tomorrow, go to God immediately in repentance and He will justify you again.

Don't ever say that this gospel won't work for you. If you are tempted to say that, it is because you have listened too long to false teachers, to legalistic preachers and to the devil. Stop listening to them, stop reading their books and listen to God and to His Word from now on. Confess what God's Word says.

May your ***faith*** not fail in the moment of testing.

Let us pray for one another, as our Lord does for us.

Amen and Amen.

CHAPTER 2

God's Perfect Plan for those Who have Failed

There are many brothers and sisters who feel that because they have sinned and failed God at some time in their past lives, therefore they cannot fulfil *God's perfect plan* for their lives now.

Let us look at what the Scriptures have to say on this matter, and not lean on our own understanding or our sense of logic.

Notice first of all how the Bible begins.

"*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" (*Genesis 1:1*). The heavens and the earth must have been perfect when God created them, for nothing imperfect or incomplete can ever come forth from His hand.

But some of the angels whom He had created fell away, and this is described for us in *Isaiah 14:11–15* and *Ezekiel 28:13–18*. It was then that the earth came into the condition described in *Genesis 1:2*, "*formless, empty and dark*".

The rest of *Genesis 1* describes how God worked on that shapeless, empty, dark mass and made something so beautiful out of it that He Himself declared it to be "*very good*" (*Genesis 1:31*). We read in *Genesis 1:2, 3* that the Spirit of God moved over the earth, and God spoke His Word – and this was what made the difference.

What is the message in that for us today?

Just this that no matter how much we may have failed or made a mess of our lives, God can still make something glorious out of our lives through His Spirit and His Word.

God had a perfect plan for the heavens and the earth when he created them. But this plan had to be set aside because of Lucifer's failure. But God remade the heavens and the earth and still produced something "*very good*" out of the chaos.

Now consider what happened next.

God made Adam and Eve and started all over again. God must have had a perfect plan for them too, which obviously did not include their sinning, by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But they did eat of the forbidden tree and frustrated God's original plan for them – whatever that plan might have been.

Logic would now tell us that they could *not* fulfil God's *perfect* plan any longer. Yet we see that when God came to meet them in the garden, He does not tell them that they would now have to live only on His *second best* for the rest of their lives. No. He promises them in *Genesis 3:15* that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. That was a promise of Christ's dying for the sins of the world and overcoming Satan on Calvary.

Now consider this fact and see if you can reason it out.

We know that Christ's death was part of God's *perfect* plan from all eternity. "*The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world*" (*Revelation 13:8*). Yet we also know that Christ died only *because Adam and Eve sinned* and failed God. So logically, we could say that God's *perfect* plan to send Christ to die for the sins of the world was fulfilled, not ***despite*** Adam's failure, but ***because of*** Adam's failure! We would not have known God's love shown on Calvary's cross, were it not for Adam's sin.

That baffles our logic and that is why the Scriptures say that we should "*not lean on our own understanding*" (*Proverbs 3:5*).

If God worked according to mathematical logic, then we would have to say that Christ's coming to the earth was God's *second* best plan. But it would be

blasphemous to say so. It was part of God's *perfect plan* for man. God makes no mistakes. But since God is almighty and eternal, and since He knows the end from the beginning, and since He is always silently planning for us in love, human reasoning fails when we try to explain His dealings with us.

God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts not our thoughts.

The difference between them is as great as the distance between heaven and earth (*Isaiah 55:8, 9*). So it is good for us to set aside our clever reasonings and logic when trying to understand God's ways.

What then is the message that God is trying to get through to us, right from the opening pages of the Bible? Just this that He can take a man *who has failed* and make something glorious out of him and still make him fulfil God's *perfect plan* for his life.

That is God's message to man – and we must never forget it:

God can take a man who has failed repeatedly, and still make him fulfil His perfect plan – not God's second best, but God's best plan.

This is because *even the failure may have been part of God's perfect plan* to teach him a few unforgettable lessons. This is impossible for human logic to grasp, because we know God so very little.

It is only broken men and women whom God can use. And one way He breaks us is through repeated failures.

One of the biggest problems that God has with us is to bless us in such a way that the blessing does not puff us up with pride. To get victory over anger and then to be proud of it, is to fall into a far deeper pit than the one we were in! God has to keep us humble in victory.

Genuine victory over sin is always accompanied by the deepest humility. This is where repeated failures have a part to play in destroying our self-confidence so that we are convinced that victory over sin is not possible apart from God's enabling grace. Then, when we do get victory, we can never boast about it.

Further, when we have failed repeatedly ourselves, we can never despise another who fails. We can sympathise with those who fall, because we have come to know the weakness of our own flesh, through our own innumerable falls. We can "*deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since we ourselves are beset with weakness*" (*Hebrews 5:3*).

Hearing such a message, the logically minded man, can then say, "*Then let us sin all the more so that good may come!*"

Romans 3:7, 8 (TLB) answers such a man with these words:

> *"You say, 'My dishonesty brought God glory by pointing up His honesty'. If you follow through with that idea you come to this: The worse we are,the better God likes it! But the damnation of those who say such things is just".*

No, we do not preach that we should sin so that good may come. Neither do we say that we can take advantage of God's grace and *keep on* disobeying God *deliberately and defiantly*, and still avoid reaping what we have sown. No.

But we do say that human logic cannot grasp the grace of God to fallen men. Nothing is impossible for God – not even to bring us into His perfect will, after we have failed miserably and repeatedly. *Only our unbelief can hinder Him*.

If you say, "But I have messed up things so many times. It is impossible for God now to bring me into His perfect plan", then it *will be* impossible for God, *because YOU cannot believe in what He can do for you*. But Jesus said that nothing is impossible for God to do for us – if only we believe.

"*Let it be done to you according to your faith*", is God's law in all matters (*Matthew 9:29*). We will get what we have *faith* for. If we believe that something is *impossible* for God to do for us, then it will *not* be fulfilled in our lives.

On the other hand you will discover at the judgment seat of Christ that another believer who had made a *greater* mess of his life than you, *nevertheless fulfilled God's perfect plan* for his life – *just because he believed* that God could pick up the broken pieces of his life and make something "*very good*" out of it.

What regret there will be in your life in that day, when you discover that it was

not your *failures* (however many they may have been) that frustrated God's plan in your life, but your *unbelief!*

The story of the prodigal son, who wasted so many years, shows that God gives His best even to failures. The father said,

> "*Quickly bring out the **best** robe*", for one who had let him down so badly. This is the message of the gospel – a new beginning, not just once, but *again and again* – because *God never gives up on anyone*.

The parable of the estate-owner who went out hiring labourers (*Matthew 20:1–16*) also teaches the same thing. People who were hired at the eleventh hour were the ones to be rewarded first. In other words, those who had wasted 90% (11/12th) of their lives, doing nothing of eternal value, could still do something glorious for God with the remaining 10% of their lives. This is a tremendous encouragement to all who have failed.

> *"The reason the Son of God was manifested was to undo (dissolve) the works the devil has done"*
> (1 John 3:8 - AMP).

That verse actually means that Jesus came "*to untie all the knots that the devil has tied*" in our lives. Picture it like this: When we were born, we could say that God gave each of us a perfectly rolled ball of string. As we began living each day, we began to unroll that ball of string and we began tying knots into it (sinning). Today after many years of unrolling the string, we despair, as we see the thousands of knots that we see in it. But Jesus has come to "*untie the knots the devil has tied*". So there is hope even for those with the most knotted strings. The Lord can untie ***every*** knot and give you a perfect ball of string in your hands once again. This is the message of the gospel: ***You can make a new beginning***.

You say, "That is impossible!". Well then, it will be done to you according to *your* faith. It will be impossible *in your case*. But I hear someone else whose life is worse than yours, saying, "*Yes, I believe that God will do that in me*". To him

too it will be *according to his faith*. In his life, God's perfect plan *will* be fulfilled.

In *Jeremiah 18:1–6*, God spoke His word to Jeremiah through a practical illustration. Jeremiah was asked to go to a potter's house, and there he saw the potter trying to make a vessel. But the vessel "*was spoiled in the hand of the potter*". So what did the potter do? "*He remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make*".

Then came the application: "*Can I not, O … deal with you as this potter does?*", was the Lord's question (*verse 6*). (Fill in your name in those dotted lines, and that would be God's question to you).

If there is a godly sorrow in your life for all your failures, then even if your sins are like scarlet or red like crimson, not only will your heart be made as white as snow – as promised under the old covenant (*Isaiah 1:18*) – but God promises even more under the new covenant: "*I will not* ***remember*** *your sins any more*" (*Hebrews 8:12*).

Whatever your blunders or failures, you can make a new beginning with God. And even if you have made a thousand new beginnings in the past and have come to failure, you can still make the 1001st new beginning today. God can still make something glorious out of your life. While there is life, there is hope.

So, never fail to trust God. He cannot do many mighty works for many of His children, *not because* they have failed Him in the past, *but because* they will not trust Him now.

Let us then "*give glory to God by being strong in faith*" (*Romans 4:20*), trusting Him in the days to come for the things which we considered impossible up until now.

All people – young and old – can have hope, no matter how much they may have failed in the past, if only they will acknowledge their failures, be humble and trust God.

Thus we can all learn from our failures and go on to fulfil God's perfect plan for our lives.

And in the ages to come, He can show us forth to others as examples of what He could do with those whose lives were total failures.

In that day He will show what He could do in us, through the "*surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*" (*Ephesians 2:7*). *Hallelujah!*

Amen and Amen.

Bible References

Bible references are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) translation unless or otherwise specified.

Chapter 1

Luke 22:32 - But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

Romans 2:4 - Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

2 Corinthians 7:5,6 - 5. For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. 6. But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

2 Peter 1:9 - For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.

Romans 5:9 - Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Hebrews 8:12 - “For I will be merciful to their iniquities, And I will remember their sins no more.”

Revelation 12:11 - And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

Ezekiel 16:5,6,9,10,14 - 5. No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born. 6. “When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you while you were in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you while you were in your blood, ‘Live!’ 9. “Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. 10. I also clothed you with embroidered cloth and put sandals of

porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk. 14. Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you," declares the Lord God.

Luke 18:11 - The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

Genesis 28 - 1. So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. 2. Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. 3. May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. 4. May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you, that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham." 5. Then Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau. 6. Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take to himself a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he charged him, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," 7. and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Paddan-aram. 8. So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; 9. and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth. 10. Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11. He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. 12. He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold,

the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. 14. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” 16. Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” 17. He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” 18. So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. 19. He called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. 20. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, 21. and I return to my father’s house in safety, then the Lord will be my God. 22. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”

Genesis 32 - 1. Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him. 2. Jacob said when he saw them, “This is God’s camp.” So he named that place Mahanaim. 3. Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. 4. He also commanded them saying, “Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: ‘Thus says your servant Jacob, “I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; 5. I have oxen and donkeys and flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.”’” 6. The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.” 7. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided

the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; 8. for he said, “If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape.” 9. Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,’ 10. I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. 11. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children. 12. For You said, ‘I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.’” 13. So he spent the night there. Then he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau: 14. two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 15. thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. 16. He delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass on before me, and put a space between droves.” 17. He commanded the one in front, saying, “When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these animals in front of you belong?’ 18. then you shall say, ‘These belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.’” 19. Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, “After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; 20. and you shall say, ‘Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.’” For he said, “I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.” 21. So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp. 22. Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23. He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had. 24. Then Jacob was left

alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. 26. Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27. So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28. He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." 29. Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. 30. So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my [p]life has been preserved." 31. Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh. 32 Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.

Genesis 28:11 - He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place.

Genesis 32:31 - Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh.

John 1:51 - And He *said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Genesis 32:24 - Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.

2 Corinthians 12:7 - Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the

flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!

Job 42:5 - “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You;

Job 42:6 - Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.”

Numbers 6:22-26 - 22. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 23. “Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, ‘Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: 24. The Lord bless you, and keep you; 25. The Lord make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; 26. The Lord lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.’

James 5:11 - We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

John 21:3 - Simon Peter *said to them, “I am going fishing.” They *said to him, “We will also come with you.” They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.

Luke 18:13 - But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’

Luke 18:14 - I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Isaiah 55:8-9 - 8. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. 9. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Ephesians 1:6 (KJV) - To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

Chapter 2

Isaiah 14:11-15 - 11. ‘Your pomp and the music of your harps Have been brought down to Sheol; Maggots are spread out as your bed beneath you And worms are your covering.’ 12. “How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! 13. “But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. 14. ‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ 15. “Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, To the recesses of the pit.

Ezekiel 28:13-18 - 13. “You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The ruby, the topaz and the diamond; The beryl, the onyx and the jasper; The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald; And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, Was in you. On the day that you were created They were prepared. 14. “You were the anointed cherub who covers, And I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked in the midst of the stones of fire. 15. “You were blameless in your ways From the day you were created Until unrighteousness was found in you. 16. “By the abundance of your trade You were internally filled with violence, And you sinned; Therefore I have cast you as profane From the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the stones of fire. 17. “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I put you before kings, That they may see you. 18. “By the multitude of your iniquities, In the unrighteousness of your trade You profaned your sanctuaries. Therefore I have brought fire from the midst of you; It has consumed you, And I have turned you to ashes on the earth In the eyes of all who see you.

Genesis 1:2 - The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

Genesis 1 - 1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. 3. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. 4. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. 6. Then God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 7. God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. 8. God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. 9. Then God said, “Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear”; and it was so. 10. God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good. 11. Then God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them”; and it was so. 12. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good. 13. There was evening and there was morning, a third day. 14. Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; 15. and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so. 16. God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. 17. God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, 18. and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was

good. 19. There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. 20. Then God said, “Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.” 21. God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. 22. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” 23. There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. 24. Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind”; and it was so. 25. God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. 26. Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” 27. God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” 29. Then God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; 30. and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food”; and it was so. 31. God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 1:31 - God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 1:2,3 - 2. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. 3. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

Genesis 3:15 - And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.”

Revelation 13:8 - All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

Proverbs 3:5 - Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding.

Isaiah 55:8,9 - 8. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. 9. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Matthew 20:1-16 - 1. “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2. When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; 4. and to those he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ And so they went. 5. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. 6. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he *said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day long?’ 7. They *said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He *said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ 8. “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard *said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.’ 9. When those hired

about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. 10. When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. 11. When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, 12. saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’ 13. But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14. Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 15. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’ 16. So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

Jeremiah 18:1-6 - 1. The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, 2. “Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will announce My words to you.” 3. Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. 4. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. 5. Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 6. “Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?” declares the Lord. “Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.

Isaiah 1:18 - “Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.

Hebrews 8:12 - “For I will be merciful to their iniquities, And I will remember their sins no more.”

Romans 4:20 - yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

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