

SESSION 4

MOVE BEYOND FAILURE

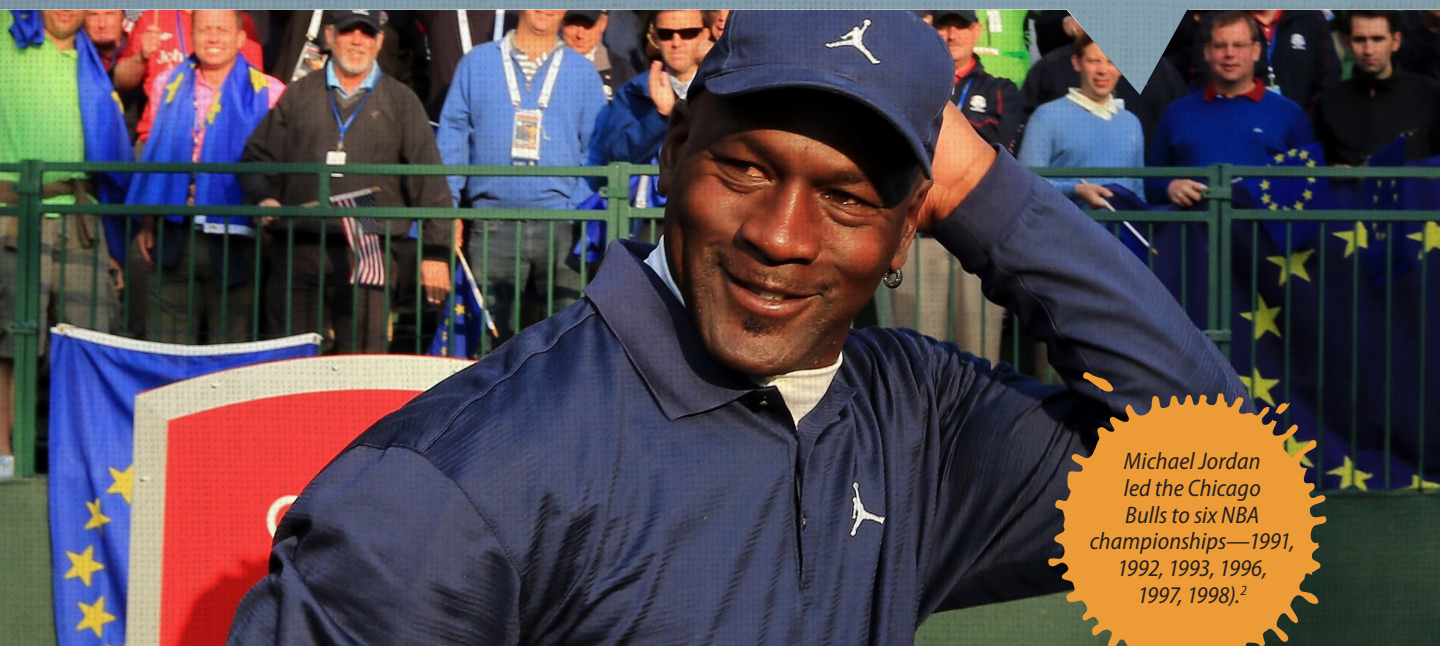


INSTRUCTIONS

When have you
regretted not following
the instructions?

THE POINT

Leaders learn from their failures and move on.



Michael Jordan led the Chicago Bulls to six NBA championships—1991, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1997, 1998).²

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The man often lauded as the best basketball player of all time didn't make the varsity team when he first tried out; yet Michael Jordan didn't let this setback stop him from playing the game. He has said, "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty six times, I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."¹ Michael Jordan didn't let failure stop him. He let failure push him forward.

But what about when failure is more than just a missed basket or an error in judgment? What about when we fail spiritually? The failures we see in the Bible—pictures of sin against God—teach us more than just to be strong or get back on our feet when we fall. We can't simply correct those kinds of failures; only God can remove our sin. In the Book of Joshua, God calls us to confront our sin, deal with it, and move forward.

Sin and failure do not have the final say.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Joshua 7:13-15,19-21,25-26; 8:1

¹³ “Go and consecrate the people. Tell them to consecrate themselves for tomorrow, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There are things that are set apart among you, Israel. You will not be able to stand against your enemies until you remove what is set apart. ¹⁴ In the morning you must present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe the LORD selects is to come forward clan by clan. The clan the LORD selects is to come forward family by family. The family the LORD selects is to come forward man by man. ¹⁵ The one who is caught with the things set apart must be burned, along with everything he has, because he has violated the LORD’s covenant and committed an outrage in Israel.”

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¹⁹ So Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and make a confession to Him. I urge you, tell me what you have done. Don’t hide anything from me.” ²⁰ Achan replied to Joshua, “It is true. I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I did: ²¹ When I saw among the spoils a beautiful cloak from Babylon, 200 silver shekels, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, I coveted them and took them. You can see for yourself. They are concealed in the ground inside my tent, with the money under the cloak.”

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²⁵ Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? Today the LORD will trouble you!” So all Israel stoned them to death. They burned their bodies, threw stones on them, ²⁶ and raised over him a large pile of rocks that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from His burning anger. Therefore that place is called the Valley of Achor to this day.

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¹ The LORD said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid or discouraged. Take the whole military force with you and go attack Ai. Look, I have handed over to you the king of Ai, his people, city, and land.”



The Setting

The people of Israel experienced a remarkable and glorious victory over Jericho in their first battle for the promised land. As exhilarating and reassuring as that first victory was, their next encounter was just as deflating and disconcerting. Sin in the camp of Israel in the form of disobedience at Jericho led to a humiliating defeat at Ai.



What happens when we ignore sin and act as if it never happened?

JOSHUA 7:13-15

Once Jericho was conquered, Joshua set the people's sights on the town of Ai. The men Joshua sent to scout the area reported that Ai would be an easy conquest because of its size (see 7:3). So Joshua confidently sent some soldiers to conquer the city. To everyone's surprise, they were sent running. Joshua and the other leaders were so devastated they questioned God's plan.

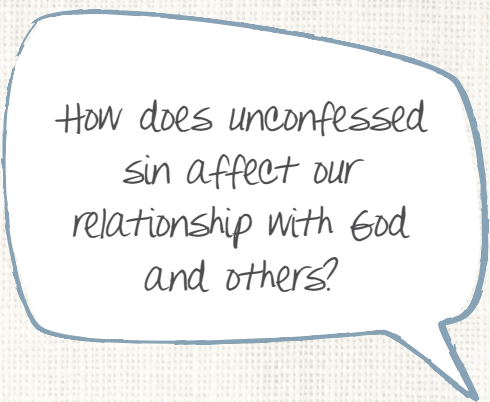
The Lord showed Joshua the source of Israel's military failure was one man's sinful rebellion. One man had taken certain items from Jericho when the city was destroyed. God had made it clear that those things were to be destroyed or dedicated to the Lord and placed in the Lord's treasury. Everything that belonged to the people of Jericho represented the sin of the land—sin that God didn't want for His people. God's desire was to protect His people from the things that would lead their hearts away from devotion and dependence on Him.

To get to the bottom of the rebellion, the people had to face their sin. Their sin was intentional sin. God warned His people that He would not go with them any further in their journey unless they dealt with this sin (7:12).

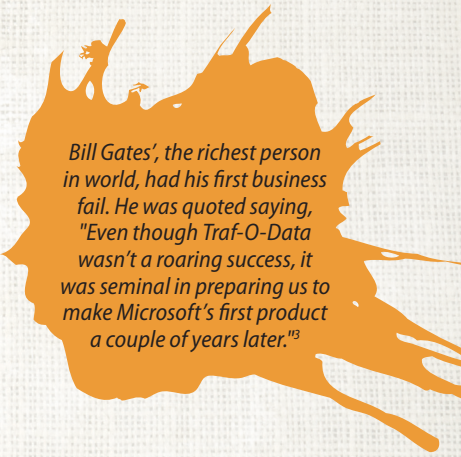
How do we identify sin and failure? For Joshua, God exposed what was hidden. We can follow Joshua's example and ask God to do the same for us. Ask Him to bring to light your sins, to awaken you to those things that have lulled you to sleep, and to turn your heart from anything that has steered you away from God.

Share this





How does unconfessed sin affect our relationship with God and others?



Bill Gates', the richest person in world, had his first business fail. He was quoted saying, "Even though Traf-O-Data wasn't a roaring success, it was seminal in preparing us to make Microsoft's first product a couple of years later."¹³

JOSHUA 7:19-21

God revealed who was responsible for stealing and deceiving others by going tribe by tribe, clan by clan, and family by family. Why didn't God just immediately identify Achan as the one who had sinned? Perhaps because this was more than one man's sin. Only one man took the items, but the sin affected all the Israelites. God wanted each person to examine his or her heart.

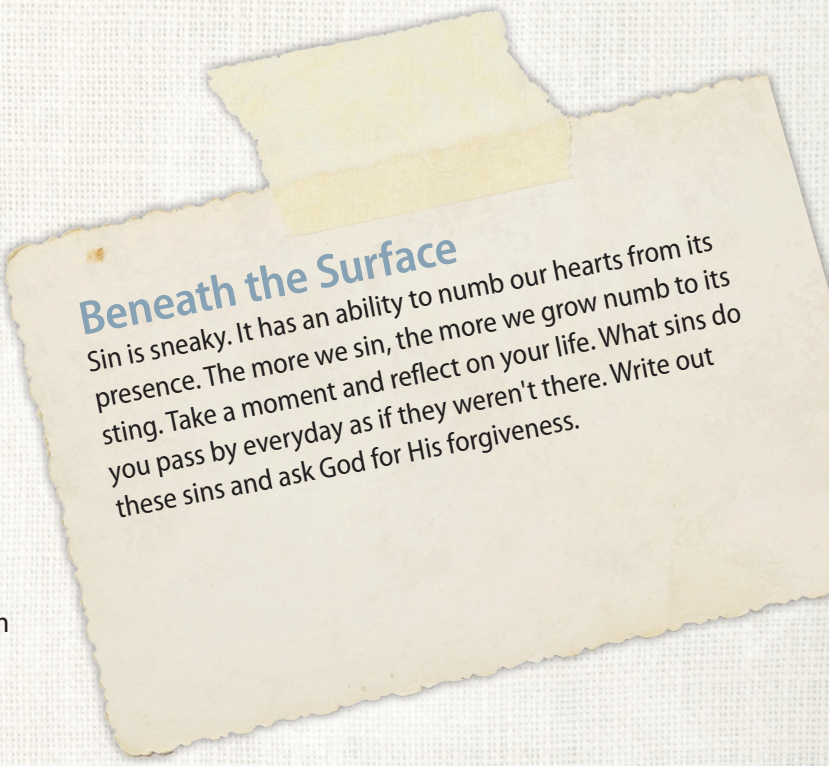
Achan did not step forward voluntarily, but through God's process of elimination, he had no choice but to admit his guilt. Joshua confronted him directly, giving him the opportunity to respond and confess what he had done. Unfortunately, Achan only confessed when he was forced to. There is no evidence of genuine remorse.

An unrepentant person:

- ▶ Is concerned only about the consequences of sin.
- ▶ Is more general and less specific when confessing sin.
- ▶ Is sorry he or she got caught.

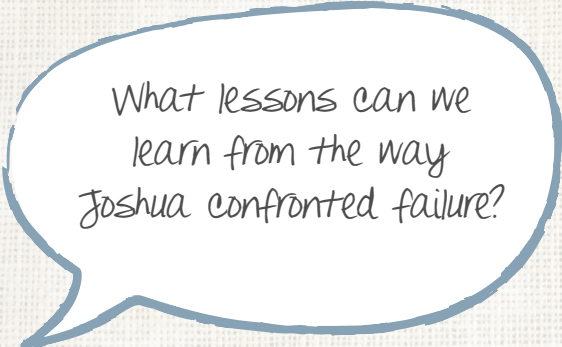
In contrast, a repentant person:

- ▶ Is sad over the root of his or her sin.
- ▶ Acknowledges specifics when admitting sin.
- ▶ Is genuinely sorry for his or her sin and turns away from it.⁴

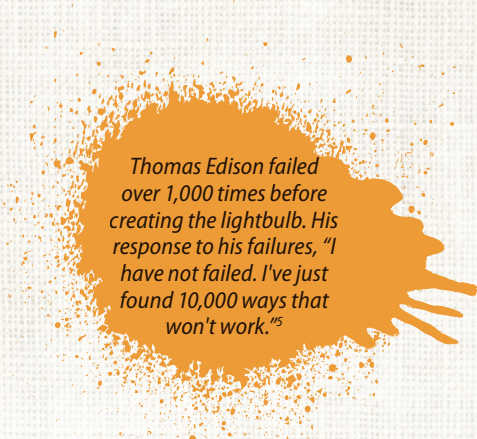


Beneath the Surface

Sin is sneaky. It has an ability to numb our hearts from its presence. The more we sin, the more we grow numb to its sting. Take a moment and reflect on your life. What sins do you pass by everyday as if they weren't there. Write out these sins and ask God for His forgiveness.



What lessons can we learn from the way Joshua confronted failure?



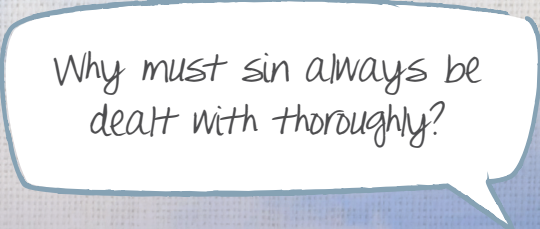
Thomas Edison failed over 1,000 times before creating the lightbulb. His response to his failures, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."¹⁵

JOSHUA 7:25-26; 8:1

The story does not end well for Achan and his family, but sin is a serious thing. We must depend on God to reveal our sin, and we can trust that He will forgive us when we genuinely repent.

You may fail over and over, but in Christ you will always find the grace to begin again. Don't let your past sin and failure define your character. Go to God with your sin, turn from it, accept His forgiveness, and get back to doing what He wants you to do.

Live in the forgiveness and grace of God and lead others to do the same.



Why must sin always be dealt with thoroughly?

"The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling but in rising every time we fall!"⁶

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

APPLY IT

What steps will you take to confront sin and move forward with God? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Practice personal confession.** Examine your heart daily for places you've fallen short in attitude and/or action. As you identify things, confess them to God. And remember, grace—not shame—is found in Christ.
- ▶ **Confess in community.** Find a person who will allow you to share openly about the sin and struggles in your life. Perhaps you could do the same for him or her. Meet regularly with this person for support and encouragement.
- ▶ **Confront in love.** As you see sin and failure in those you lead, lovingly talk to them about it. Godly leadership means we help others come closer to Jesus, not further away.

You will continue to fail both practically and spiritually throughout your life. But you are not a failure in God's eyes. Let His forgiveness have the final say.



Seriousness of Sin

Achan alone took items from Jericho that God had commanded the people to destroy. Yet, the text says that God's anger burned against all the Israelites.



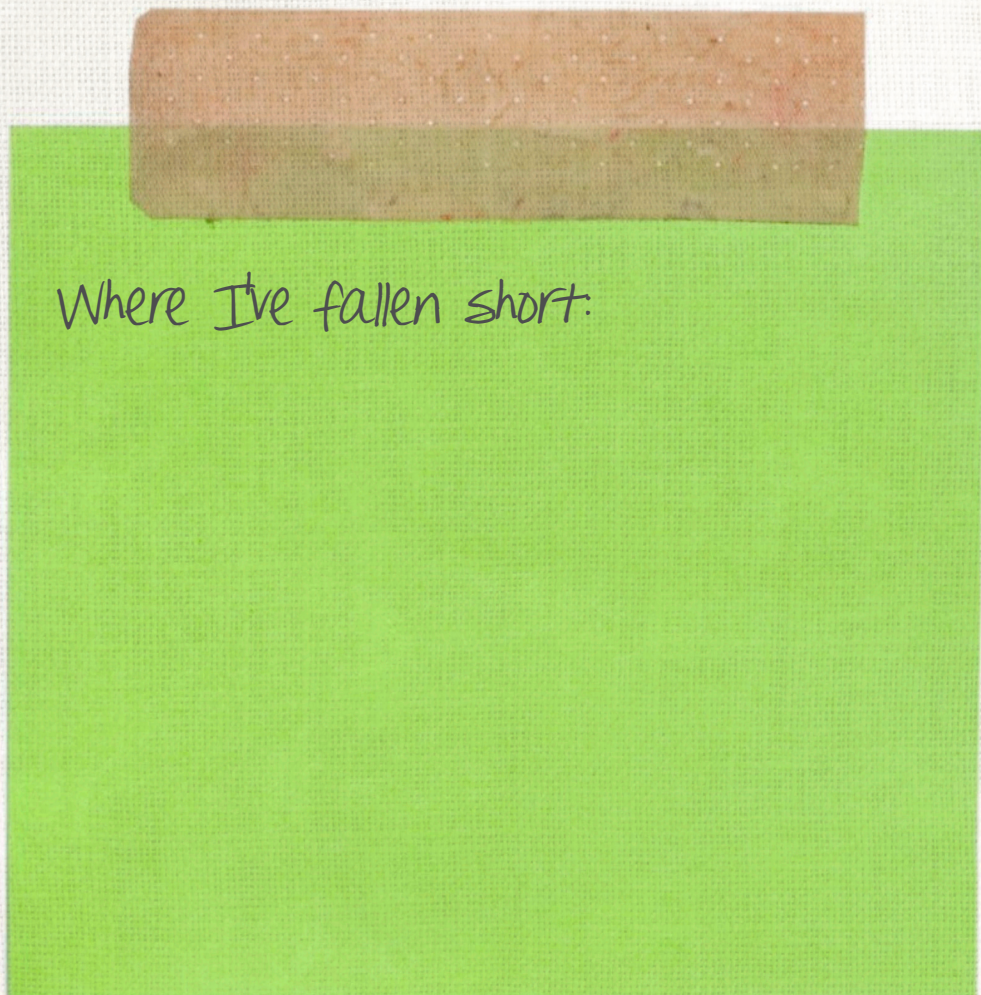
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NO MORE SHAME

2 Corinthians 5:17

Leaders learn from their failures, and they do not let their failures determine their future. However, failure isn't an easy thing to embrace, especially when we've fallen short before God. Take a moment to write down areas where you feel you've failed God. Once you've made your list, spend time asking God for forgiveness and strength to overcome these failures. Then grab a black marker and mark through every failure you listed, because this is what Jesus has done for you.



THE FINISH LINE

Philippians 3:13-14

Overcoming failure requires you to know where you're going. Without goals and an end in mind, you're directionless. And having no direction can be dangerous. Take a moment to examine who you are today. Write down five goals to help you become the person you want to be when you graduate high school. As you write out these goals, make sure you keep this question in mind: What type of Christ-follower do I want to be?

A tip:

► ***Ask a trusted mentor to help you with your goals. He or she can help you evaluate where you are and help you determine realistic goals for the future.***

Goals for becoming the person
I want to be:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

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