

During WWII, the Russians devised a unique weapon system. They trained dogs to associate food with the underside of tanks. After intensive training they strapped explosives to the dog's backs.

The hungry dogs were released in site of Hitler's German Panzer divisions. It was a brilliant plan, except for one thing. The dogs had been trained to associate food with Russian tanks.

The dogs with bombs on their backs forced an entire Soviet division to retreat. I'd say that plan really bombed!

The Russians learned from their mistake. They got rid of the dogs and plowed through the German Panzers with their superior T-34 and the KV-1 tanks.

Thomas Edison was probably the most famous inventor this country has ever produced. One time an assistant was trying to console Edison over a series of failed experiments. He said, "It's too bad to do all that work without results." Edison said, "Oh, we have lots of results. We know 700 things that won't work."

In the *Screwtape Letters* C. S. Lewis vividly describes Satan's strategy. He gets Christians to become preoccupied with their failures. From then on the battle is won.

How many people here have ever failed in life? Some of you just failed to raise your hand!

Failure is tough. Especially when it's our marriage, or our job, or our parenting skills, or school. Failure is tough. I don't like to fail.

But failure doesn't have to be an end. Sometimes failure's just a stepping stone to really great successes.

We're in a series on Exodus and the life of Moses. So far we've seen that in the midst of an apparently hopeless situation, God was at work.

God had made promises to a man named Abraham. Abraham's descendents would be the Jewish people.

He promised him the land of Canaan, numerous offspring, and that his seed would be a blessing to the whole world.

Exodus chapter 2:11, where we pick up today, takes place about 350 years after the promises to Abraham. The Hebrew people were well on their way to becoming a large people group, but they were slaves in Egypt and it didn't look like anybody was going to be blessed through them.

No Hebrew knew for sure how God was going to fulfill His promises and probably most wondered if it would ever really happen.

Then Moses was born. Pharaoh had ordered the drowning of all Hebrew boy babies because he was afraid the Hebrews were getting too numerous. He was afraid he wouldn't be able to control them.

But baby Moses parents put him in a basket in the river instead of letting him be found and thrown in. They didn't know what would happen. They didn't know if he'd die of exposure.

They didn't know that Pharaoh's own daughter would find the basket and defy her father and take Moses into the palace to raise him as her son.

They didn't know, but that's what happened.

We pick up today in Exodus 2:11, Pg 51

I. Even God's People Can Fail

Read vs 11-12

Between verse 10 and 11 is about 40 years of history. During this time Moses is raised in the royal household of Pharaoh.

There's some important things to note about Moses. Acts 7 and Hebrews 11 in the NT give us some insight into the character and background of Moses:

Turn to Acts 7 pg 972

Read vs 22-25

Turn to Heb 11 pg 1069

Read vs 24-27

Here's some things we know about Moses:

1) He was highly educated. Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians..." He was raised as an Egyptian prince. Moses was taught by the ancient world's finest teachers. He was probably educated at the Temple of the Sun, known as "the Oxford of Ancient Egypt."

He would have studied the various sciences, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, medicine, theology, philosophy and law. Evidently he was a great student too. Acts 7:22b says he "was mighty in words and deeds."

2) He had military experience. The fact that Moses was "mighty in... deeds" is seen in extra biblical materials. In his book, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, the Jewish historian Josephus gives the account of how Moses led the Egyptian army in a battle against the invading Ethiopians.

3) He believed he was Israel's deliverer. Acts 7:25, *"For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand."* Heb.11 says, *"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God..."* Somehow Moses understood that God was going to use him.

Moses had a lot of advantages. In some ways he seemed like a natural. But you know what the problem with being a natural is? You tend to trust yourself and not God.

King David was a man who trusted God. Ten times in the Psalms he says "God, in you I put my trust." But interestingly most of those references are in the context of trouble. He trusted God theoretically until the real trouble came. When it was life and death then his trust became experiential.

It's one thing to trust God, but still rely on your natural ability, or money, or position, whatever. When life's totally out of your control, that's when trusting God goes from being abstract to concrete.

David learned that kind of trust on the run from people who wanted to kill him.

Moses had a lot going for him. But that led him to try to take things into his own hands.

Moses certainly had a delivers spirit about him. Three times in this chapter he's going to try to help people. Here's the first.

Moses goes out and looks at his people and their burdens. That doesn't mean he just gave it a quick glance. He moved out from the comfort of his position in a way he hadn't done before. He really investigated what was happening to his people.

This could have been the time that God put it in his heart that he was going to be the deliverer, we don't know. What we do know is that he was compelled to respond to what he saw.

An Egyptian was beating a Hebrew. Moses looks all around to make sure that no one can see him and then he jumps in and kills the Egyptian. Interestingly the Hebrew text uses the same word for "beating" in verse 11 and "killed" in verse 12.

The Egyptian wasn't just giving this Hebrew a love tap. If it kept up he would have killed him. Moses needed to act. But instead he reacts.

I'd take it Moses was no wimp. He was strong and battle trained, and so he takes the guy out. Instead of using his words to dissuade that Egyptian from beating the Israelite, he used his strength to murder the Egyptian and then bury his carcass.

There's plenty of things I didn't see eye-to-eye on with old Dr. Bob Jones Sr. from Bob Jones University, but one quote of his has always stuck with me: "It's never right to do wrong to do right."

The end doesn't justify the means. In this case the Egyptian was wrong and Moses ends up doing the same wrong to try to solve the problem. Instead of trusting God he said, "I'll take care of this my own way. We've been waiting centuries for God. I'll just have to step in and get the ball rolling."

Bad move. How many people here have ever made a bad move?

Not only that but he thinks somehow he can cover up his sin. That's been the pattern from the beginning.

Adam & Eve sinned and they tried to hide from God. Cain kills Abel and he tries to hide what he did by burying the body. Little kids stand there with crumbs all over their mouth and you ask them, "Were you eating those cookies I told you couldn't have before dinner," and they say "Not me."

Somehow in our fallen human nature we think we can cover up our wrong.

We even try to do it with religion, don't we? We all know that compared to God we've missed the mark. The Bible says the Law of God is written on our hearts. We know we're far from God's standard of perfection, but we try to hide it.

We go to church, give money, work in the nursery, get confirmed, baptized, whatever the church says and we end up thinking we're pretty good people. We cover our sinful hearts with a veneer of respectability.

Sa 16:7 "...the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

God knows our imperfections and God judges sin. In fact the Bible says, "The wages of sin is death."

The truth is, we're all sinners who deserve death from a holy God. God knows our hearts. And yet God has chosen to love us by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer the death we deserve.

God forgives all who come to Him in faith believing that He is the savior. We're forgiven through Christ, but we can still fail.

I. Even God's People Fail

II. God Doesn't Abandon Us When We Fail

There's some heavy fall out from, Moses' rash, violent actions: **Read 13-15**

Joel Pankow writes: *All of Moses' strength was used to flee from the very people he wanted to free. You have to wonder, "why did Moses go and do that?" He very likely could have thought to himself, "God, why are you allowing this to happen?"*

God doesn't excuse our wrong actions. Even if we did them with good intentions. But God doesn't abandon us either.

God wants a leader for His people that understands the trials that they are going through. Moses had grown up in the relative luxury of the Egyptian court. He hadn't experienced the alienation that his people had experienced, and so God in His wisdom, allows Moses to know that alienation by being a stranger in a strange land.

Now he's on the run, a fugitive from the man who had acted as his grandfather for 4 decades.

Moses failed but God will work out His plan in spite of that failure. In fact, God being God, will even incorporate Moses' failure in to the training process.

Chuck Swindoll points to Psalm 119 for some basic principles of failure. Let's look there:

Turn to Ps 119 pg 546 Read vs 67

When we fail, we often end up in our own form of the "wilderness." We realize the path we took was a dead end and we end up broken and humbled. There's affliction that we suffer when we fail. But the Psalmist says, experiencing failure leads to obedience.

When we come to the end of the road where we've been bruised, broken, and humiliated, we're often much more aware of doing things God's way. Suddenly God's way makes a whole lot more sense to us.

Now look at vs 71

The results of failure can produce a teachable spirit in us. It's amazing how when everything falls apart for us, suddenly we're much more likely to want to know what God's direction is.

It like counseling. Counseling is just finding out what God says about life, and then doing it. That's something that we all should be helping each other with. We should always encouraging one another with God's life principles.

The trouble is we usually wait until everything is coming down on us before we look for spiritual counsel. We wait until things are in the crisis mode.

Failure has a way of finally breaking through our pride. We finally let our guard down and say, "Help." The greatest hindrance to a teachable spirit is pride. Blowing it big time can dissolve our pride.

So God hasn't deserted Moses. He's not out of God's care because he failed. God will even use Moses failure for His ultimate purpose.

Back to Exodus 2

- I. Even God's People Can Fail*
- II. God Doesn't Abandon Us When We Fail*
- III. If We're Open To God We Will Learn From Our Failures*

Read vs 16-17

What happened at the well apparently happened a lot to these women. They got to the well early to wait in line for the well to be opened.

Here's how it often worked, Gen 29: *So Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the East. And he looked, and saw a well in the field; and behold, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks. A large stone was on the well's mouth. Now all the flocks would be gathered there; and they would roll the stone from the well's mouth, water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the well's mouth.*

I believe these women showed up earlier than the other shepherds who came later. The other shepherds would often push their way ahead of the women who would end up watering their flocks last.

Moses did not like what he saw at all. Again, he must have been a pretty intimidating guy because he said, "ladies first" and the shepherds backed off. Now here were these women, who weren't thought of very highly to begin with, herding a bunch of smelly sheep. People weren't really big on baths back then. So I'm sure the ladies shared the aroma of sheep.

Now the former prince of Egypt helps these women water a flock of smelly sheep. Moses was already beginning to learn the lessons of servanthood.

He had that desire in him to help. Now God was beginning to channel that desire.

Read 18 You usually get bumped to the back of the line so you get home late. How'd you get off early today?

Read 19-20

At this point the way Moses is dressed and his accent makes them think he's Egyptian. Whatever his nationality he deserves some Bedouin hospitality.

So they bring Moses home for dinner. **Read vs 21-22**

Look how Moses is changing. He's developing the attitude of a servant and he's content to be obscure. He's gone from wealth and honor to living in the desert taking care of sheep and he's content.

Serve God where you are and He will place you where He wants you tomorrow. Mt.25:23: *His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.* Be faithful in an obscure position and God will use you.

Now, see how in some ways God is working in his life through his failure.

The learning process isn't over yet, but it's happening. He hadn't got it all straight yet. Moses is still confused.

He names his firstborn son Gershom. Gershom comes from the Hebrew root *garash* which means "to drive away, or divorce." Gershom means a refugee, a stranger. One who doesn't belong.

At that point Moses still saw Egypt as his home.

Think about it. He has fled from Egypt to Midian. He has married a non-Israelite (although technically Zipporah was more closely related than an Egyptian woman would have been). But from Moses' point of view, Egypt, his homeland, is far away.

This isn't a time of great faith or purpose in Moses' life. That becomes even clearer in chapters 3 and 4 when God calls him. Moses' great faith and commitment to the people of God that was evident in verse 11 has somehow eroded into something far less.

Now if you're just reading this account for the first time, without any knowledge of what comes next, you're probably wondering how God's promises will ever be fulfilled. Israel's future seemed pretty dim at this point.

Moses seeks to deliver his fellow Hebrew and he gets himself in a heap of trouble. In fact he's out of there. He skips the country, marries into a Midianite family, and seems to fade out of the picture entirely.

We'd expect Moses' life to end in total obscurity.

But, meanwhile back at the ranch... **Read 23-25**

God heard, God remembered, and God looked. All of those are what we call anthropomorphisms. The Oxford English Dictionary defines an anthropomorphism as an "ascription of human form, attributes, feelings and passions to Deity."

God knew exactly what would happen before it ever happened, but to make it easier for us to understand, the Bible puts God's actions in terms that make sense to us.

The point is, not only is all not lost, but all is going according to plan.

As one author writes: in spite of all appearances to the contrary, God is very much at work. Humanly speaking, it looks as though everything is working against Israel, but this paragraph reminds us that God is very much informed, involved, and intent upon fulfilling His purposes and promises with respect to Israel.

God is faithful and that faithfulness extends even to preparing Moses during his time in Midian. Moses needs experience in servanthood and being content with less. Moses needs to learn how to live in the desert because when he leads Israel they will wander for years.

Experience takes time.

As Calvin told Hobbes in the living room, in front of the television set: "I don't like real experience. It's too hard to figure out! You never know what's going on! You don't have any control over events! I prefer to have life filtered through television. That way you know events have been packaged for your convenience! I like a narrative imposed on life, so everything logically proceeds to a tidy conclusion. And if you don't like what's happening, "Click," you change the channel and there's something different! That's how real life should be."

That's not how real life works at all. We want handle the remote of life. We want to be in control. We want to change the channel if we don't like the program.

God says, "Wait. Listen. Learn. Trust Me."

Moses entered the desert when he was forty and didn't leave until he was eighty. During what most people would have considered as the most productive years of a person's life - Moses tended sheep in what must have seemed like a million miles from nowhere. He was a man who didn't really find his nitch until he was eighty years old.

You can divide the life of Moses into three segments. The first forty years he was educated in the courts of the Pharaoh. The second forty years he spent in the desert taught by God and the final forty years he spend with the Hebrew people in the wilderness.

Dwight L. Moody, the great 19th century American evangelist phrased it this way, "Moses spent his first forty years thinking he was somebody. He spent his second forty years learning he was a nobody. He spent his last forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody."

- I. *Even God's People Can Fail* That's not an excuse, it's just a fact.
- II. *God Doesn't Abandon Us When We Fail*
- III. *If We're Open To God We Will Learn From Our Failures*

Maybe you've taken some courses at "God's School of the Desert."

Some people spend a few weeks in the wilderness. For others it is months. For Moses it was forty years.

Your wilderness experience may involve caring for a sick family member over an extended time. For others your dry and desert time is a physical condition that doesn't improve. It could come in the form of an absent spouse or a rebellious child. It could be a thankless job or an unending routine.

The desert can wear any number of faces. It can be crowded with people, yet lonely. Does God know? Yes! Does God care what you are going through? Yes! he hasn't forgotten you. His schooling includes some time in the wilderness. Sometimes it takes the barren places to open us up to what we need to learn.

When face time in the wilderness we can respond in one of three basic ways.

The first is, "I don't need it!" My husband needs it, my sister needs it, my neighbor needs it, but I don't need it."

The second response is, "I'm tired of it." No matter how long it is it's always too long. Do you say, "Lord I'm weary of this situation, this person, this circumstance. I feel trapped, and I have had it?"

The response God's waiting to hear is the third one, "Here I am God. Help me not to get caught up with trying to figure out what you're teaching me through this. (Some people get all bent out of shape trying to figure out what they're supposed to learn.) Just let me be faithful to you. Just let me trust you to teach me what I need to learn while I stick close to You."

*Psa 37 Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.
Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him;*