

*Overcoming Failure*

INTRO: *Slow Fade* Music Video, Casting Crowns

There are a lot of sobering verses in the Bible. One that has always challenged me is I Corinthians 10:12, *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*

There's no such thing as "I've made it! I've arrived!" in a person's walk with God.

So what do you do when you wake up one day and find yourself far from the God you were once close to? If we've moved away from God through disobedience and sin how does God deal with us? Is backsliding, moving away from God, something that happens suddenly, overnight, or is it a gradual process that ensnares us until one day we are struck with just how far we've moved from God?

The answer to those questions is given to us by God in the form of a living illustration. We see the answers in the man Jacob.

The story of the Bible is really the story of redemption through Jesus Christ. It starts with the separation of human beings from God through sin and the promise of a living redeemer.

The whole Old Testament is a record of the nation and the forefathers through whom this redeemer was to come.

Today we know the redeemer has come. His name is Jesus Christ and He came just the way God said that He would in the Old Testament scriptures. That story of the coming redeemer and His people is an amazing story of the love and the grace of God. God would have been perfectly just in destroying Adam and Eve at the time of their sin. He could have destroyed the world which He had created.

But God had already condemned Lucifer and the angels that followed him to eternal destruction. There was no chance of salvation or redemption for them.

Satan, the prince of this world, has been judged. Satan's place will be the lake of fire for all eternity and yet for some reason that sentence hasn't been carried out. The divine judgment has been handed down but the sentence hasn't been carried out.

The reason, I believe, is that God has chosen to show for all eternity His true

character. There is no way that He was going to send Satan into the pit with all the hosts of heaven watching and allow him to cry out with a sneer on his lips, "I told you God lied about His nature. He claims to be love and mercy but He's only judgment and condemnation - just look."

And so God postponed carrying out His sentence against Satan and created human beings. And in our redemption from sin God demonstrates to all the angelic hosts, throughout all the ages, that He's just who and what He claims to be.

Even though the human race sinned against God, God provided the way of salvation. He came to earth as Jesus Christ, took to Himself a human body, and paid the price for our sin.

God, in the most striking demonstration of the fullness His character, showed once for all His true nature. He showed His holiness in His wrath and anger against sin. He showed his love and mercy in His sacrifice for sin. He showed His justice in the way He upheld His own standards and yet provided the way for our salvation.

The book of Genesis takes us from the creation of man up through 2000 years of human history. And each step of the way God's story centers on what is most important. And what is most important is the lives of people leading up to Christ.

As we've seen in our study of Genesis, God chose a man out of the region of Chaldea, named Abram. He called him to leave his homeland and move into the land of Canaan. Through Abraham came the nation of Israel, and through Israel came Jesus Christ.

The last 38 chapters in Genesis are concerned with Abraham, his son Isaac, Isaac's son Jacob, and Jacob's son Joseph.

Jacob is a tremendously important character in God's revelation of the salvation story. Through Jacob's 12 sons come the 12 tribes of the nation of Israel.

But, the story of Jacob is important for more reasons than just being a chronological or genealogical link in the line of the Messiah.

Jacob's life is jammed packed with lessons for our own spiritual lives. Some of the lessons are positive, some of the lessons are negative, but they're all profitable for our instruction.

One of the things we've tried to do here as we've studied the life of Jacob is to really try to understand him.

Jacob has probably been one of the most misunderstood men in the scriptures. He has shown some tremendous spiritual qualities along the way and we've been able to use his life as an example of a lot of right things. He's usually only looked upon as a man who was trying to scheme or plot without much consideration of God, but actually that has been minimal in Jacob's life.

Jacob has shown some real spiritual insight. But even a man whose walking with the Lord can be overtaken in a fault.

And that brings us to the place where we last left Jacob, in Shechem.

**Open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 35, page 34**

Is backsliding something that happens overnight, suddenly? Not usually. Backsliding usually slips up on us just like it did on Jacob.

Jacob had left the promised land 30 years before this. During the 20 years that he was away he not only married and had children, but God instilled character and spirituality into his life through his circumstances. God used the people around Jacob, particularly his father-in-law Laban, to knock off some rough edges and polish up Jacob's life.

When Jacob returned home after 20 years, he displayed some real character and godly insight. But there was something that Jacob seemed to avoid and that was returning to a place called Bethel.

It was in Bethel that God had appeared to Jacob on the first night after he had left the house of his father Isaac. God promised, *I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. 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 spoken to you.* Genesis 28:13-15

Then God appeared to him 20 years later and said in chapter 31 "I am the God of Bethel - go back home."

In our chapter for this morning God is going to say, *Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there.*

Obviously God wanted this man at this place for a reason but Jacob didn't want to go back. It seems like he deliberately avoided going there.

If I was going to have to guess at a reason why I'd say it was probably because he knew he hadn't fully followed God's will in everything. He hadn't completely kept the promise, or vow, that he made there to fully honor God in all things so he stayed away.

First, he moved to Succoth and then from there to the city of Shechem.

Now at that point Jacob wasn't planning on disobeying God with his life. He even built an altar in Shechem.

God wasn't just forgotten or completely put aside because that's not the way backsliding works. It's a gradual process. But it starts by failing to do what we know we should or doing what we know we shouldn't and it grows from there. It's a process that builds and builds until one day we are in the middle of a big mess and it comes home to us how far away from God we've really gotten.

Disobeying God is something we so easily rationalize in our minds.

Jacob said to himself. "I'm back in Canaan. I've made the trip back home. I may not be doing every little thing exactly the way God spelled it out but at least I'm here."

Have you ever thought anything like that about your own life?

"Sure I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior. I go to church pretty regularly, I even pray and read my Bible now and then. I might not obey every last thing. I haven't exactly made my body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, unto the Lord. But, hey nobody's perfect!

That is called setting yourself up for a fall.

Beyond that Jacob had some other excuses. Shechem was civilization. People lived in

houses there, not tents like Jacob had lived in all his life. Here was good pasture land for his flocks and herds.

Jacob would say “I've been knocking myself out all my life to make a living and provide for my family. We need a little stability. I need a rest.”

There's nothing wrong with those things, if you don't have to compromise biblical principles to get them.

But Shechem was an evil place. The bright lights and glitter of the city might have looked good to a man who had been in the countryside all his life. But in the end Jacob sacrificed his family to the “culture” around him.

We dealt with the story of chapter 34 last time. Dinah, Jacob's daughter was raped by the prince. Her brothers deceived the people and killed all the males to get revenge and then plundered the city.

When we last left Jacob he was sitting with his head in his hands whining and complaining in fear about the position his sons had put him in.

He said, *You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I.* Genesis 34:30

Now it was absolutely wicked what his sons had done but God had promised to protect Jacob. And God had promised make his descendants great in number but Jacob's backsliding has allowed things to get to the point where Jacob doesn't even have enough faith to believe that God will carry out His word.

Chapter 34 covers a period of 10 years in the life of Jacob. Not once in chapter 34 is God even mentioned. Not once is there any communication between God and Jacob or Jacob and God.

Jacob had backslidden. It didn't happen overnight. But one day Jacob woke up to the realization of what happened and of how far away from God he really was.

There's 4 consequences that are given to us as a result of Jacob's backsliding. Four consequences that speak to us as a challenge for our own lives, as well as an encouragement. We'll look at those 4 consequences then we'll see the steps back.

a.) *Backsliding Hinders Our Fellowship With God*

There was no communication between God and Jacob and Jacob and God because sin hinders our fellowship with God. Sin dampens that communication between God and man.

God said to His people Israel, *But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.* ( Isaiah 59:2) *You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness.* (Habakkuk 1:13)

Sin violates the very root of the nature and character of God. And if we sin willfully without seeking God's forgiveness our fellowship with the Lord will be hindered.

Now, the exciting thing in all of this is that we have an unbreakable relationship with God. The fellowship may be hindered but the relationship is permanent.

It was true in Jacob's life. God didn't dismiss Jacob at this point and say "Enough is enough, "I've had it up to here with you."

Even though Jacob had backslidden and moved far away from God and even led his whole family into a compromising situation Jacob was still God's child by faith. Jacob belonged to God and that relationship continued. That's why we have chapter 35 where Jacob is restored.

Now some people really wrestle with this idea of an unalterable relationship between God and his people. They say, "If sin doesn't break that relationship then God would be giving people a license to sin. If our salvation isn't at stake then what is going to keep us from sinning and not caring?"

That is a horrible misunderstanding of the grace of God and the security of the believer. If sin broke our relationship with God (not our fellowship now, but our relationship) there wouldn't be a saved person on this earth.

Inevitably whenever I've read the writings of people who say that you could lose your salvation through sin I've discovered that they had a very shallow view of sin.

Sin is abhorrent to God. He can't tolerate it in the least and yet every one of us are sinners.

In fact, the Bible says, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* I John 1:8

Even believers have a principle of sin, a sin nature, and sometimes it gets control. We've seen it in the lives of each of these patriarchs; Abraham Isaac and Jacob.

Now there's no excuse for sinning. There's no justification for doing wrong. But sin is a reality of life. That's why God has made a way to bring backsliders to restoration.

Salvation is totally by God's grace. Abraham believed God and God counted him righteous. We believe on Christ and God gives us His righteousness.

We can't do anything to earn our salvation. It's totally the work of Christ which Jacob looked forward to and we look back on. The Bible says, *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

We don't deserve forgiveness when God gives it to us. We don't deserve salvation while we have it in this life and we won't deserve it in eternity.

It is obvious that there is nothing that we could do to make ourselves unworthy. We're already unworthy to start with.

Salvation is of the Lord, but fellowship with God can be affected.

Sin works to destroy our day by day fellowship and that is exactly what happened in Jacob's life. No communication. The contact with God was broken.

*a.) Backsliding Hinders Our Fellowship With God*

*b.) Backsliding Endangers Those Around Us*

The second consequence was that the moral and spiritual life of Jacob's entire family was endangered by his backsliding.

The real root of Jacob's problem with Shechem was material pleasure. Jacob compromised for money and ended up paying a price that all the money and comfort in the world couldn't make up for. His daughter was defiled, two of his sons were murderers and God's name was dishonored.

That ought to stand as a solemn warning to every parent to value their family above whatever they might get from this world.

- a.) Backsliding Hinders Our Fellowship With God*
- b.) Backsliding Endangers Those Around Us*
- c.) Backsliding Destroys Our Opportunity To Tell Others About God*

The 3rd consequence of Jacob's sin was to lose any hope of being a blessing to the Shechemites. God said, "You'll be a blessing to all nations". Instead Jacob became a curse. You can be sure all the Shechemites weren't flocking around Jacob to find out more about his God.

- a.) Backsliding Hinders Our Fellowship With God*
- b.) Backsliding Endangers Those Around Us*
- c.) Backsliding Limits Our Our Opportunity To Tell Others About God*
- d.) Backsliding Doesn't Stop God From Working In Our Lives*

God was active in the circumstances to chasten and discipline Jacob and bring him back to fellowship.

This has got to be one of the most exciting truths in all of the Bible. God is interested in our good and even our neglect and sin can't dampen God's love and care for us.

His amazing purpose is to bring us back to fellowship with Himself and God will use all the means at His disposal to accomplish that goal.

There are really 4 steps in this restoration process.

#### *I. To Overcome Failure We Must Identify The Area Of Disobedience*

In this case it's God who puts his finger on it.

#### **Read verse 1**

God doesn't speak to us in audible voices and we are not told that's how He spoke to Jacob here, but He does speak. And He has a way of putting His finger right on the problem area of our life until we can't deny that it is true.



David prayed, *Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.* Psalm 139:23-24

David was asking God to put him to the test. That's a fantastic pattern for prayer for us too.

*I. To Overcome Failure We Must Identify The Area Of Disobedience*

*II. To Overcome Failure We Must Have A Change Of Mind About The Sin In Our Lives*

It's 30 years overdue but finally Jacob cleans house.

### **Read verses 2-4**

Where did all those idols come from? Remember Rachel, the love of Jacob's life? She brought along her father's household gods and apparently her attitude rubbed off on others in the family. To top it off, 10 years in idolatrous Shechem didn't help either.

Jacob was soft on these things, but now he saw where it had gotten him. The changing of the garments and the purifying had to do with making a new beginning; a new start.

In verse 4 the earrings were amulets, tokens of magic, and so Jacob collects them and buries them in Shechem.

What Jacob did was exactly what we need to do with sin in our lives.

We have to repent. That means we have to change our mind about it. We have to see it as God sees it. God sees it something that cripples and devastates us and needs to be put away from our lives.

When God puts his finger on our life we need to deal with sin. And we need to set our mind to do what is right.

Jacob said to his family, "Let's go. We're headed for Bethel so I can build an altar and worship God who has been with me just like He promised He would."

Why is it that we can come back to God at any time? Because we have the same promise that Jacob had.

Thirty years before this when Jacob left for Padan Aram God appeared to him in Bethel and made a promise. He said, *Behold I am with you wherever you go...I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.* (Genesis 28:15)

That's the promise that Jacob confesses in verse 3. God didn't lie. Jacob said, "He's been with me all the time. Even when I went the wrong way God didn't leave me. I'm the one who turned away from Him."

Jesus Christ promises His children, *Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age.* (Matthew 28:20) *I will never leave you nor forsake you.* (Hebrews 13:5)

God is always with us in the way which we should go. And if that way turns out to be the wrong way, God doesn't forsake us. It's us that breaks fellowship with Him. He's always there waiting and working to bring us back to Himself.

*I. To Overcome Failure We Must Identify The Area Of Disobedience*

*II. To Overcome Failure We Must Have A Change Of Mind About The Sin In Our Lives*

*III. To Overcome Failure We Must Obey God*

The third step is to pay the broken vow, or whatever it takes to deal with our particular area of disobedience. In other words, obey God.

### **Read verses 5 - 7**

After Jacob's sons had killed the men of Shechem all of Jacob's old fears returned. He was afraid of the people of the land even though God had promised his protection.

But when we get our life right with God and confess our sin and begin to obey those by products of disobedience, like fear, worry, anxiousness, and guilt fade out of our lives.

Jacob took off for Bethel and God protected Him. And when he got there he built an altar and named it "the God of the House of God".

In Genesis 28 after Jacob had a vision of the ladder, he called the name of the place Bethel, "The House of God." That name emphasized the place. The new name emphasized God himself. God had become more real to Jacob.

*I. To Overcome Failure We Must Identify The Area Of Disobedience*

*II. To Overcome Failure We Must Have A Change Of Mind About The Sin In Our Lives*

*III. To Overcome Failure We Must Obey God*

*IV. To Overcome Failure We Must Dedicate Ourselves To God*

### **Read verses 8-13**

To me this is the high point of the chapter. The heavens open and God reaffirms His love and acceptance of Jacob. He reaffirms the change of names from Jacob to Israel - the old man to the new. He reaffirms the covenant that He made with Abraham and Isaac.

Here's what's so amazing. God didn't receive Jacob back as some second-class citizen in His kingdom. Every promise and privilege and blessing was reconfirmed to Jacob. God didn't say "Get in the back of the line." That's grace.

Just remember though, while God is gracious to forgive and restore us that doesn't erase the damage that comes through sin, this doesn't come lightly, but it restored that bond of fellowship and so...

### **Read verses 14 & 15**

Pouring out the drink offering or the cup of wine, was a symbolic act signifying pouring out His life in the worship and service of Jehovah God.

The oil was the oil of consecration. This was Jacob rededicating his life to serve God.

See nothing about Jacob was wasted as far as being used to accomplish God's purpose in his life. Even Jacob's failures were used by God to accomplish His desired end.

One of the supremely important lessons we can learn from the life of Jacob is that no failure needs to be final. There is a way back to the fellowship and joy of walking with God.

Where are you in your relationship with God this morning?

Are you unsaved? You need Jesus Christ. The Bible says, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.* (Acts 16:31)

Are you living in disobedience to God?

Identify the sin.

Repent. Have a radical change of mind.  
Then obey God and dedicate your life to Him.