

Unstuck

3. The Truth about Sin

January 20-21, 2018

Welcome to Crossroads. If you are new today, I'm so glad that you're joining us. My name is Andrew, and I lead our student ministry here at Crossroads called Elevate. We like to have fun at Elevate and play some games on Sunday nights. Today, I'd like to play one of those short games. I think you're going to like it.

It's called "Make it or Break it." We are going to watch video clips of some extreme stunts. The clip will pause then we have to decide if the person is going to make it or break it. Let's see a demonstration [demo clips]. Great job! Thanks for playing!

I believe that many of us want to "Make It" in life. If you're a follower of Jesus, like me, we want to live lives that honor God. Even if you don't believe in God, I don't think anyone wakes up in the morning and says, "I can't wait to mess up, today!"

But, sometimes we fail. We face temptations. We have weaknesses and the devil works hard to make us fail. When we fail, we can feel stuck. Stuck in guilt. Stuck in fear. Today, I want to encourage you that there is hope in failure.

We are in a message series called "Unstuck." Today we are going to look at overcoming failures that hold us back from God's promises. We'll be looking in the Bible at a story in Joshua 7. This book follows the Nation of Israel as Joshua leads them out of the desert into their homeland - the Promised Land. The homeland, however, is occupied by foreign enemies who are not going to give up the land without a fight.

Earlier, in chapter 6, Israel defeated one enemy at the city of Jericho. After the victory, God gave strict orders that the Israelites were not to take any plunder from the city; and any gold or silver they found was to be devoted to the Lord's treasury. But, Israel failed to obey. **Joshua 7:1** *But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel.* Later, we find out that Achan took a beautiful, exotic robe, 5 pounds of silver, and about 1 pound of gold. Achan probably thought, "Nobody will notice! Who's going to miss a couple of pounds of gold and silver?" Maybe he thought the robe would be nice a gift for his wife or girlfriend.

The Bible calls failure like this Sin. As we look for hope, we first must understand the **Truth about Sin**. First, **Sin is failing to obey God**. Notice, in verse one, that all of Israel is guilty because of one man's disobedience. This is very important. We should realize that God views and treats the nation of Israel as one entity - one unit - like we might consider a company, or a university, or an institution. Throughout the Bible, God

refers to Israel with singular language like, “my son, my child, God’s offspring”. So, in God’s view, when one person sins, the whole unit is guilty. We ought to compare our individual lives to the nation of Israel. God had a promise and a vision for Israel, just like he has a plan for you and me. If we are faithful to obey God, we can receive his promises.

Joshua doesn’t know about Achan’s sin, and Joshua leads the army to meet their next enemy - the city of Ai. Confident for another win, Joshua has no clue what’s about to happen. **Joshua 7:4-5**, *4So about three thousand went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, 5who killed about thirty-six of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of the people melted in fear and became like water.* 36 people died in the failed battle and Joshua panics! Joshua and the leaders tore their clothes, and covered themselves in dust as a sign of mourning in that culture.

The second truth about sin that we see in the text is that **Sin separates us from God**. Joshua cried, “Why has God abandoned us?” God removed his protection because the Israelites had failed to obey him. Unresolved sin in our lives will separate us from God. Just like Joshua, we can feel like a wedge is between us and God; we feel alone.

While Joshua is panicking, God speaks to him, “Get up, Joshua! There is sin that needs to be dealt with.” God has Joshua gather the entire nation together and the manhunt begins. Can you imagine Achan standing in the crowd watching Joshua go through the 12 tribes thinking, “Don’t pick my tribe, don’t pick my tribe?”

I don’t know how Achan stayed calm. I know when I get nervous, I start to sweat, and when I sweat, I get more nervous about having sweat stains on my shirt! God chooses the tribe of Judah (Achan’s tribe). Then, they go clan by clan, and Achan’s clan is chosen. God leads Joshua through every family down to Achan’s. Finally, Joshua selects Achan (maybe sweat stains gave him away). **Joshua 7:19-21** *Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and honor him. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.” 20 Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: 21 When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”*

Achan’s failure may seem small; it was just a personal, secret sin. But the third truth about sin is that our text shows us that **Sin may be personal, but it’s never private**. No matter how secret a sin is, it will always affect our relationships with the people close to us and our relationship with God. We may think our sin isn’t hurting anyone, but no matter how great or small, sin will affect others.

Remember, Achan’s secret disobedience cost 36 soldiers their lives in the failed battle and now, Achan has to answer for his failure. **Joshua 7:24-26** *Then Joshua,*

together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold bar, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. ²⁵Joshua said, "Why have you brought this trouble on us? The Lord will bring trouble on you today." Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them.²⁶Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

Some of us might think, "That's a harsh ending. Achan admitted his sin and got executed. Isn't God supposed to be a God of love and forgiveness?" Yes he is a God of love and he is a just God. He does forgive, but he does not ignore sin. In order to forgive Israel, justice was required for the sin and for the 36 men who died in battle. Achan was punished so the nation would be forgiven. God will forgive our sin because Jesus suffered our punishment. He is our substitute that absorbed the wrath and justice for our sin.

There is hope in failure. I'm not sure about you, but when sin is in my life, I "know" that God will forgive me. Still, I "feel" guilty and ashamed. I feel stuck. I believe that sin will keep us stuck so that we never receive God's best. We get stuck because **Failure lies to us**. Failure says that **you should give up**. Living a life for God can be difficult and challenging. Failure tells us, "You can't live a life for God. Just give up. Following Jesus is too hard, just quit." That's how Joshua felt.

Joshua 7:7 *And Joshua said, "Alas, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan!"* Joshua panics thinking, "We should have stayed out of this land!" One failure, one loss, and he was ready to retreat and give up. You may be here today fighting against a secret sin. Do not give up! The lies say, "quit. Throw in the towel." You may say, "You don't know how long I've been fighting this. You don't know the depth of my failure. You can't begin to understand how hard the struggle is each day." Do not despair. There is hope in failure.

When you hear this lie, remember that **Hope tells the truth. God does not give up on you**. There is hope in failure. **Romans 5:8** *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Jesus died for us! There is hope for everyone who feels like giving up. Jesus fought for you and won because he died on the cross and he rose from the dead.

A second lie that failure tells us is that **You are rejected by God**. God was angry at Israel for sin, but he didn't reject them. **Joshua 7:10** *The Lord said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?"* God doesn't reject them. He tells Joshua, "there is sin, but I'm going to help you." God helps Joshua get Israel unstuck from their failure. He didn't abandon them, he helped them.

Personally, I have believed this lie myself. There was a time that I carried my own secret, private sin failure like Achan. There was a season in my life that I was

addicted to pornography. Just like Achan, it was my private secret. At first, it was fun, but my curiosity turned into addiction. I felt far from God. I felt like a failure. I was stuck in sin. And I believed this lie that God had rejected me! I told myself, "You know better! God won't accept you because of this. Andrew, you gotta clean up your mess before God will ever take you back." So, I convinced myself that I had to fix my failure. I tried to set myself free. I worked and struggled to get unstuck, but the harder I fought the more stuck I got. Until, I turned to God and said, "Take control. I surrender. Take control."

Not only did God forgive me, but he freed me. It was a struggle, it was a fight, but God fought for me. One day at a time, one step at a time, God gave me victory over addiction. Since then, I have been unstuck and unhindered by the failure of the past! There is hope in failure. You may be fighting your own struggle. You may be trapped in an addiction like pornography. You may carry the shame of failure. Even if we feel separated from God, he has not rejected us.

Hope promises that God forgives you. There is hope for forgiveness because of Jesus. **2 Corinthians 5:17-18** *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ* Addiction is broken in Jesus. Failure is overcome in Jesus. Pain is healed in Jesus. Anyone who is in Christ is made new. There is hope in failure.

Failure will try to use a third, sneaky lie to keep us stuck: **You are just like (so and so).** You're just like your mom. You're just like your dad. You're just like your brother, your sister, your friends. Their failures are your failures. You're destined to turn out just like them. Those are lies from the devil that will keep us stuck in failure.

Let's look back at **Joshua 7:1** *But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them.* Notice that Achan was from the tribe of Judah. Achan's failure was a family embarrassment to the tribe. I wonder if the other 11 tribes criticized the people from Judah? Maybe the other tribes whispered things like, "Don't trust that person, he's from Judah. Don't go into business with him, he's related to Achan. Don't believe what she says, she's from the tribe of Judah." Achan's sin did not ruin the tribe of Judah. Judah is the same tribe that Jesus comes from. Jesus and Achan shared the same ancestors. The same line produced Achan and Jesus. God redeemed the family sin.

There is hope in failure. Do not believe someone else's failure is your failure! Hope tells us: **God adopts you as his child.** If your faith is in Jesus, you belong in the family of God. You are not destined to repeat the failures of others. **1 John 3:1** *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!*

If your father was an alcoholic, you don't have to be an alcoholic. If your mother was a liar, you are not destined to become a liar. If you are ashamed because of your family's past, you have a new future in the family of God. There is hope in failure.

Lauren and I both come from families with three generations of divorce. We talked about this when we got married. Together, with God's help, we will not repeat the failures of our ancestors. We refuse to be stuck in a cycle destruction. We want to set our family on a new course pursuing the promises of God.

Today is a new day. God has promises for you. He wants his best for you. Don't let failure keep you stuck in sin. By his grace, we can overcome failure and pursue hope today.

To **Overcome Failure**, you must first **Confess**. If you have a hidden, secret sin, the first step to being unstuck is to confess. **James 5:16** *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."* Confess your sin to another believer; a small group member, a group leader, someone you trust to pray for you and support you. Together, we can help each other get unstuck.

Second, if we want to get unstuck, we have to **Turn away from sin**. After confessing it, we have to cut it out. Joshua had to cut out the sin of Achan from the nation of Israel. He had to make a hard decision to remove the sin.

Many times, this step is not easy. It may mean removing ourselves from situations, it may be avoiding certain influences and environments. Like I was, you may be struggling with a sin habit or addiction and can't turn away by your own power. Get Help! Personally, I had 2 or 3 men in my life who knew my struggle and helped me overcome. I needed to get help.

At Crossroads, there are several places that can help. AA meets at the North Fayette campus every Monday at 7pm. Life Recovery and Family Rescue meets Thursdays at 7pm. Private and Family Counselors are available to help. There is information at the welcome center.

There is hope in failure. With God's help, we can overcome failure and win the victory.

After God set me free from pornography, I felt forgiven. Still, I continued to struggle with shame and embarrassment. I didn't want anyone to find out and I still felt unworthy of God's love. But God's grace gave me hope. His grace erased those feelings and he gave me a fresh start - a new day. Today, I stand in that grace because it is a new day.

If you read the next chapter, Joshua 8, you'll discover that Joshua led 30,000 warriors into battle and they won a victory over their enemies. Joshua could have stayed in defeat. The people could have given up on moving forward, but it was a new day! They moved forward to claim God's promises. Their failure did not hold them back, it was a new day in the Promised Land.

Today is a new day. You may have come here carrying scars from defeats. Guilt and shame may cling to you, and you are afraid to fight again. By God's grace you

can walk out of here leaving behind the guilt of failure and the shame of defeat. Receive his grace! It is a new day! God will make you strong to overcome failure and move forward to receive his promises. **There is hope.**