

I am a Spiritual Failure

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- [0 : 0 0] Now, for the month of August, in the mornings, we're looking at a series called Being an Ordinary Christian. The first sermon we looked at, the theme of being, I am ordinary.
- Then last week, my life is a disappointment. And today we're looking at the theme, I am a spiritual failure.
- And looking at that theme, hopefully, through channeling our thoughts from 2 Timothy chapter 1. So the main focus of what I'm going to say today, or the main areas, because that's a broad theme, you know, it's a theme that's found in many different parts of Scripture, it's a broad theme.
- I'm going to focus on two things. The first thing is the question, what does God think of me in terms of being a failure? Do I think that God, do you think that God thinks you're a failure?
- And that therefore colours your idea or your understanding or your perspective of who God is and what God is for you. What does God think of me?
- [1 : 0 8] And then the second question really is related to that, which I think is something we often feel in a Christian, like I'm really terrible.
- It's a statement, not a question. I'm really terrible at sharing my faith. I'm a failure as a Christian, sharing my faith. I can't do it, I see other people, I've got a rub, you know, things aren't great, and I can't share my faith.
- So that's really the two questions, or two areas that I'm going to focus on particularly. You know, what does God think of me? Is He judging me?
- I try my best, but I fail so often. Therefore God must think of my failure. If that's what you think, can I say, right at the very beginning, that's not the gospel.
- That's not what it is to believe in Jesus Christ. Whatever else you think, that is not the gospel. You try your best, you fail, therefore God thinks you're a failure.
- [2 : 0 6] Or with regard to sharing your faith, I'm silent. Nobody knows that I'm a Christian. I've got a rubbish testimony anyway, it's not really worth sharing with anyone.
- I really live two lives, two separate lives. I'm one person on a Sunday and I'm another person for the rest of the week, and I'm afraid of sharing my faith. I can't do it. I'm a failure.
- Well, I think this chapter that we're looking at, I'm not going to do a detailed study of it, but this chapter does cover many of the themes that come up in these two areas, and may dip into one or two other parts of Scripture.
- But Paul is clearly speaking to Timothy about some of the issues that we've been raised even in the introduction there. Now, immediately you'll say, well, Timothy is very different from me.
- Timothy is a church leader. He's an elder. He's a church planter. He's not like me. That's true, maybe, if that's the case with you in your life.

[3 : 07] But it makes it even more interesting, because it reminds us that church leaders, ministers, elders, deacons, others who are leaders in the church, do face these same issues.

Do you have these same issues? And the principles and the answers and the direction that we take applies to all of us, whoever we are in our lives.

So what is this chapter? What are some of the themes in this chapter? Fear, timidity, being ashamed, the gospel, deserting the faith, mums and grannies, encouragement, senior pastor helping a young church planter.

And these are some of the issues, some of the themes that he deals with in this chapter. It might not be what you would expect a second letter to a leading church planter in the early church.

Might not expect some of the issues that are being dealt with to be dealt with in such a letter. So what are we reminded of? We're reminded, as I said, that you and I, you share what is common to many, even church leaders.

[4 : 23] And so you may look at church leaders and elders and maybe older, more mature Christians, or those that you deem to be very strong in the faith, and you say, they don't know.

They don't know how much of a failure I am. I wish I was more like them. God gave us 2 Timothy chapter 1 to remind us that we are all in the same boat.

And we all share the same struggles, and we all need God to deal with the failures and the struggles and the battles that we have in our lives.

So I would ask you to stop comparing yourself with leaders or with other Christians or with what you perceive other people to be able to do, and the strength of their faith and the seeming success of their Christian lives.

We all share the same battles. But it's important as we think about that question of failure, particularly in the light of these two areas of God thinking I'm a failure or that my witness is a failure, we need to know the gospel.

[5 : 35] It's really important, a foundational level that we know the gospel. Because if you think today, if you think this morning that God's attitude towards you is dependent on your brilliance, on your amazing testimony, or on the powerful words or works that are evident in your life, then you will be enslaved.

You'll be enslaved in your life, and you will be living out a religion of works. It's not grace, it's works.

And that will enslave you and make you feel like a failure. That's exactly the reality for us, isn't it? When we try, even our very best, it seems like before God and even before others, or before others and even before God, it seems like failure.

So what I want to stress as my response to really the first question about failure is in Christ as believers, and I'm speaking to you as a believer, and if you're not a believer, I would encourage you to think about what I'm saying with regard to Jesus Christ.

Verse 13, follow the pattern of the sound words you have heard from me in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

[7 : 07] You have to let that verse sink in if you're a Christian. You have to recognize that today, and I need to recognize that nothing that you can do today can make God love you more as a Christian, and nothing you can do today can make God love you less as a Christian.

Hugely significant fact that we think that the love of God for us is dependent on our success or failure, or on our obedience even or disobedience. I'm not saying these things don't matter, at least disobedience and obedience, but it doesn't change the relationship, the fundamental forensic relationship that we have with God in Christ.

It doesn't change by what we do. He loves us, and this chapter is gushing with that message to Timothy. This young, fragile, struggling church planter needed to hear this message because he felt like a failure, and he felt ashamed.

God has saved us, and it's His gift. Verse 9 and 10 speak about what Christ has done for us. He's brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

That's what we've received. That's what we enjoy. We enjoy life and immortality. He's already done it for us on the cross. And the moment we have accepted Christ as Savior, we receive that gift, and we receive from Him the reality that our guilt has been paid for.

[8 : 47] Our debt has been paid. Our failure is understood. If we need to stop in our lives being driven by guilt in our Christian lives, how many of you came out to church today because you were driven by guilt?

I really should go today. I should go to church. I better go to church, and it's a sense of guilt that drives us into the church, or even a sense or a desire to earn favor.

Well, if I go today, I'll get some biblical brownie points, and that will do me for the rest of the week. A sense of earning favor or denying guilt can be what drives us in our Christian lives.

It's a battle we face from beginning to end. But Jesus has already earned all the favor that we need. He has already taken, He has assuaged all the guilt that is ours on the cross of Calvary.

He's taken our sin, massive sin pinned on top of our lives being paid in full. God has taken these things.

[9 : 59] And the resurrection power that Paul speaks of here is the power that we need to know and recognize and receive. We're not left alone.

The Holy Spirit is with us, as it says in verse 14. And we need to turn again and again and again to the pattern of sound words in faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

That's where our foundation lies, that God Himself has put right the wrongs. Be led by these truths.

May they make and be the foundation of your life. What is it? What is it that we have in Jesus Christ? We have, and I may be repeating myself here, I think I said this last week, but we have come home.

That's what the gospel is. That's what we need to remember, we have come home. It's a domestic picture, the gospel. We have come home to a living relationship with God, our Father, the author of life and everything good.

[11 : 10] We have come home because our guilty abandonment of God, our Father, has been justly dealt with and punished and paid for by Jesus Christ.

God's Son. So there's this, it's a domestic answer, a divinely domestic answer to this problem that we have that is domestic at every level.

We have a heavenly Father sending His Son to deal with our failure and our guilt. I'm going to ask you a question, just to keep you awake this morning.

What is your picture of God? Because that will very much depend on whether you feel a failure or how you live your life. What's your picture of God? I'm not going to guess, I'm not going to pretend to come up with lots of answers that I might know as a minister.

Just, you think about what is your picture of God? But at the same, when you think about that, what your picture of God is as a Christian, I also want you as a Christian to stop trying to earn your favor with Him and look at Him with the eyes of a poor, smelly, hungry and desperate prodigal Son.

[12 : 32] That's how I want you to look at your Father. What do you think the prodigal Son's image of the Father was as He was heading towards home in His great parable of the prodigal Son?

What do you think He had in His mind? What was He going home to? Was He going to be in the outhouse? Was He going to be in this servant's quarters? Was He going to be living a 14-hour day in the fields trying to earn His Father's favor back and His good books?

Was it going to be for Him a life of servitude? Maybe that was in His mind, but nah. What do we see when we have the picture of the prodigal Son and the picture of the Father that God Himself gives us?

The prodigal Son sees His loving Daddy tucking His tunic into His belt, making a fool of Himself running with open arms and tears in His eyes with the biggest smile you ever saw.

The root of true joy. Say, you're home. You were dead and you're alive. Open arms. Now, last week, as a family, we watched a film together.

[13 : 42] It was called The Impossible. And if you've watched that film or seen it, it's a film based on a true story of a tourist family in Thailand, Christmas 2004, when their beach resort, they were right at the beach in beautiful, expensive kind of luxury accommodation, was devastated by the tsunami that hit Thailand at that time.

They were separated, mother and eldest son, father and two youngest sons separated. Each of them, presuming the other was dead.

The film is a story of them coming together eventually, because it's a true story. So you know, it's not just a kind of Hollywood makeup thing, but the great moving point in the story, the great fulcrum of the story is the father and the three boys meeting up and then the father and the three boys finding the mother in a hospital bed.

Hugely moving scene when the father with open arms welcomes the sons that he thought were dead. And any parent will get that.

And any child with loving parents will get that. And even if you are a child without loving parents or a parent who doesn't love their children, you still recognize and see that deepest longing that's in all of us for home and that great longing of love and protection and warmth and acceptance.

[15 : 13] And that is fulfilled when you come home to Christ. That's the message of the gospel. That's the gospel story. That's the gospel image.

That's the gospel truth. You can't keep on thinking you're a failure in the light of that, but the great paradox is, yes, you are a glorious failure and so am I.

Gloriously failed just like the prodigal. But Christ loves us enough to take our failure and set us free and never let us go.

That's the foundation that keeps us from thinking and being driven by guilt and being driven by a desire for acceptance when we are already accepted in Christ because Christ has taken our failure and we are covered in His righteousness.

This isn't just bare theology. Please remember that. This is fundamental to living our lives, not lurching from failure to failure and lurching from success to success or lurching from seeking to be accepted by God again and again.

[16 : 26] In Christ, it's already happened. It's already been done. We can relax in Him and do consider always when you think of God, if you can, especially if you're maybe more artistic and more imaginative in your mind.

When you go to pray, just think of the Father tucking His tunic into His belt, girding up His loins and running to His smelly, poor Son and saying, You are dead and now You're alive.

That's the great message. Remember that. Remember that picture, that laughing, smiling, happy, joyous picture of the living God.

That's the first point. The point is I'm terrible at sharing my faith, I'm a failure. There are many more areas, I'm sure, that we could look at with regard to feeling like a failure.

Certainly I could. These are two that I think may be significant and two that I've heard many times, partially, and I've experienced. I'm terrible then. I'm a failure at sharing my faith in the workplace.

[17 : 35] Wherever I go, I bomb when it comes to that. Why is it? Why is it that you feel a failure in that area? I feel a failure in that area. Is it because you think sharing your faith is like sharing a formula that you need to remember and you can never quite remember what it is?

Is it because you're fearful of not saying the right thing and getting it wrong or sounding weird? You know, the greatest thing we want is to be accepted, isn't it? We've dealt with that at one level, but even in this world we want to be accepted.

So when you share your faith, you know it's going to sound weird to people who are not Christians. Is it because you're afraid of not having the answers when people ask difficult questions? Or is it because it's not that real?

I'm not that good with words. I don't ever believe anyone who I share my faith will accept what I'm saying and will come to faith themselves. What can we say about that from this chapter as well?

There's a couple of things that we need to be challenged by and consider ourselves. The first is conviction. In verse 12, you know, Paul says, and as he's speaking to Timothy, he's a mature, older leader who's in prison himself, which is why I suffer as I do, but I'm not ashamed for I know whom I believe and I'm convinced that he's able to guard until that day, that which has been entrusted to me.

[19 : 01] So there's conviction. So conviction, you know, in terms of our lives, living our lives, conviction's really important. In other words, it has to be something in us that's real, that we're convinced by.

If we are convinced by something, we are more confident then to share it with others. We know from this chapter that's not always the case, don't we? Some, he says, sadly in verse 14, he says, some have abandoned the faith.

They've turned away, Phygeolus in Hermonogy, he mentions them by name, turned away. And we know that that can be the case, and there's a warning there within that chapter.

But you will turn away, you will turn away if your God is harsh, and if your God is unbelievable, you know?

If you don't have a prodigal father for your God, then you will be tempted to turn away and you will be tempted to abandon him. You will never share your faith if your faith is in a harsh, oppressive God.

[20 : 10] That may be part of the problem, is it? But if it is real, and if you're a prodigal, and if you've been accepted in the arms of the Father, whatever it is that we have done, then that conviction will drive your desire for others to share that God of grace, and that God of forgiveness, and that God of love.

So conviction. But also this chapter speaks about sincerity. In verse 4, as I remember your tears, I long to see you that I may be filled with joys and reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now I'm sure dwells in you also.

Which along with conviction, there's sincerity. This is a great little verse when we're talking about sharing our faith. Who was it that brought the influential church planting young leader of the early church to faith?

Who was it? It was his mum, and it was his granny. His mum, Eunice, and his granny Lois.

Yep. It was mums and grannies who brought this man to faith. Not professionals, not experts, not seminary educated, not elders or preachers, not Paul, the great apostle.

[21 : 42] It was his mum and his granny. They were the ones who shared their faith with Timothy so that he came himself to faith. And that was because they sincerely believed with conviction what they shared with their grandson, and grandson.

A pass down real faith and sincerity. Sincerity today and now in our 21st century society, but in the 21st century, sincerity counts for a lot as does conviction, and we can all have that.

Sincerity of what we believe sincerely and seek to act out is tremendously powerful. And as it was the case in Timothy's family, so as in our families here today, it is those who are closest to us who are our first responsibility.

We're sharing our faith in our lives, in our homes. That's a great place to be. And people in life, in your workplace, in your seminar room, wherever you are in your neighborhood, when they see conviction and when they see sincerity, they will ask about your faith.

They don't really want to be argued into a corner. They don't really want to be said, I told you so. They don't want to be threatened and they don't want to be shown any kind of self-righteousness, but when they see conviction and sincerity, that matter.

[23 : 16] And you say, I can't do it. I can't share my faith. I think what God's saying here is saying, mums and grannies do it best.

And mums and grannies are just great people. And if surely we can learn from mums and grannies about how to share our faith. And Paul said, we don't need to be educated in a special way.

We don't need to know ten steps. We just need conviction and sincerity and remembering that faith for us is a homecoming.

But if your faith in Jesus Christ isn't a homecoming, if it's not a great place to be, if being in Christ for you isn't a great place to be, if you actually love not being with Christ more, it's going to be very difficult for you to attract other people to this Christ you serve.

But we know there's a great temptation in all of us. And Timothy, obviously there was a sense in which he was tempted because Paul twice says, not to be ashamed.

[24 : 25] Don't be ashamed in verse 8. And then verse 12 he says, I'm not ashamed because I have conviction. Shame and being ashamed is something that's very real to all of us as we battle with professing to whom we belong, whose we are to whom we belong.

So as I close then in this section and close altogether, I'm terrible at sharing my faith. What's our responsibility along with conviction and sincerity? Well I think we have to do what Paul encourages Timothy to do here, is fan into flame.

Fan into flame the gift of God. Now Paul was speaking specifically about Timothy's gift of preaching and leadership as he was ordained and his hands laid on him in that special way.

But there's a broader application there of fanning into flame, the gift of God that we all have, our salvation, that is what we have. So we need to fan into flame our knowledge of the gospel as we live day to day.

Remember that picture of the prodigal. Remember daily remind yourself, and I need to remind myself, it's not moralism, it's not perfectionism, it's not earning favor with God, it's not doing our best, it's not quid pro quo.

[25 : 42] It is that he has gifted us in his grace and his love, belonging and acceptance and adoption into his family. It's a homecoming, it's a feast, it's a family reunion of the best kind.

Remember that as the heart of the gospel. And as you do so remember, and I must also remember to guard your heart. You know, in verse 12 he says, you follow the pattern of sound doctrine, and he's talking about God, he says, God is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

And then verse 14 he says, by the Holy Spirit guard the good deposit entrusted to you. So there's a double guarding going on, is that God's guarding us, we guard the gospel in our hearts and in our lives.

Do what he's doing, he'll not let go, let us not let go. There needs to be, I'm going to speak about this tonight, about persevering, keeping going, pressing on. And as we share our faith, learn to use, is it kind of more maybe practical, maybe?

And you have the opportunity to do so, learn to do so in terminology and language that people will associate. That means when we get, it means knowing how people tick, it means knowing what their fears are.

[26 : 55] The basic human needs, prodigal needs, the needs for being home, their longings, they ditch the formulas, ditch the four or five steps to becoming a Christian, the jargons that sometimes we use.

There's Bible concepts that we need to explain to people that they maybe don't have any understanding. Go a step back. Remember that the many people we will share our faith to, we're talking about a God, Son Jesus, it's not easy for them if they don't believe there's a God.

God, Son may sound brilliant, but if they don't believe in God, then that's a problem for them to believe in God's Son. So somehow we need to step, sometimes start further back and recognize where people are.

And it's not just a case of plowing out things in a formulaic way. Own our own mistakes. Ask for forgiveness.

Tell people you don't know. We don't have all the answers. Be willing to learn and understand. Love people well. Love them well. That is the greatest pre-evangelistic message there is.

[28 : 00] If you want a formula, that's it. Love people well with open arms and a wide smile, with obvious love. Pray for your friends.

Pray for the friends that you're around. There will be opportunities. Every day, every single day that you're in contact with another person, you're telling them a little bit more about who you are.

By the way, you answer them, your responses, your attitudes, your behavior. Every day we're unpacking a little bit more to people about who we are.

And is Jesus ever there? Do we ever unpack that? Or is it so deep within us that it will take 37 years, 18 days and 19 hours before anyone will ever know that we belong to Jesus?

Who is the main character in the book of our life whose chapters are being unfolded as people read them in our workplace and in our neighborhood and in our families and in our homes?

[29 : 03] And in our failure, take it to the living God. Don't always feel that we need to be in the defensive with people about our faith. Ask questions back.

Find out about the thinking behind their questions, the fears and the assumptions, the shaky philosophy that sometimes they are pinning their hopes on and do so with love and with tears.

We can't change their hearts, and we're not asked to change their hearts. We're simply asked to do what Timothy's granny and mum did.

And remember that family, as I think is exposed here and throughout the New Testament, is the best environment to share your faith. Your natural family and also your spiritual family.

So we are adopted into God's family, and that's not insignificant. This is a church which is part of God's family, and that is a powerful place for Christ.

[30 : 10] This should be a lovely community. It is. And it can be more of a lovely community of God's people. Okay, I'm just about to finish here.

But it's powerful, and it's to be a reflection of God's vision for society, okay? A place of prodigality.

A place where we accept people. And we don't ask the questions as to whether they meet our mark or whether they reach our standard, a place of worship, purpose, forgiveness, debt, support, and diversity.

And we battle to make it like that. And we struggle and we fight to make it like that with the grace of God in our lives. And we share Christ together in the intentionality of our friendships, and we pray for one another, and we love one another.

You see that love just oozing out of this chapter as he is concerned for Timothy and prays for him with tears longing to see him, with joy sad about those who have abandoned him and praying and praying and praying.

[31 : 19] May it be that we build each other up, and in so do, so do we experience real joy in our community as Christians. And that sense of not only has God accepted us and loved us in the prodigality of His grace, but therefore we do the same with one another by the impossibility of that grace.

And if you're not a Christian, then I would ask you to consider with all your heart that picture of the Father, because if you're not a Christian, you're separate like the prodigal son was separate, distanced away from rejecting the Father's verdict on your heart and His solution of grace and goodness.

So do consider Him and His love solemnly and seriously and openly. Let's bow our heads and pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would bless your word to us and our thoughts and considerations around this theme.

We thank you that the Bible doesn't present to us paragons of virtue unattainable believers who were high and lofty and free from failure, but even the apostles, the church planters, those who you chose to use, even when you think back to the disciples and their doubts and their arguing and their separation from one another and from Jesus, all the things they did remind us that if we regard ourselves as failures in a way that will paralyze us, we have not understood the gospel.

May we meditate and may we luxuriate in your grace today, and may we take our failures to you and move on and grant us the grace of conviction and sincerity and help us, Lord, we pray, to fan into flame the great gift of salvation that has been given to us on a day-to-day basis as we move forward.

[33 : 36] Help us to renew our praise and worship as we sing together, our closing song in Jesus' name. Amen.