



WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Your Chapter In God's Never-ending Story

Week 7

Today's Theme: Great stories involve failure.

Scripture Verses:

- Judges 14:10-20
- Judges 15:1-8
- Judges 16:1-22
- 2 Corinthians 12:9

Supplies:

- Paper, pens and colored pencils or markers

Opening Everyone Answers Question: (10min)

You want to get everyone talking here. This will set the tone for the meeting and introduce the theme.

“Failure is not an option!” demanded Gene Krantz, played by Ed Harris, in the popular movie Apollo 13. Faced with increasingly diminishing chances at survival, NASA’s space program’s flight director willed everyone on the team to accept nothing less than a safe return trip home for the astronauts. While “Failure is not an Option!” electrified everyone in Mission Control, sparking an unbelievable success story, Gene Krantz actually never spoke those words. He admits that the phrase was inspiring, and he wished he had originated it; however, he simply didn’t have enough confidence in the moment to sound so certain.

We’re much more likely to espouse to the phrase “Failure is a Given”, especially as our years accumulate experiences supporting its claim. How does failure break us down or build us back up? Does God want us to fail? Does He love us in spite of our failures, because of our failures, or not at all when we fail? This week we explore these questions through stories in the Bible involving failure, and we practice searching deeper into our own story to see if failure can allow us to be closer in our relationship with God.

- What, if anything, is a benefit of failure? Tell us about a time when you experienced that benefit in your own life.

Scripture Exploration: (25 minutes)

This is the part of the study that you'll dig into Scripture so as to draw out the day's theme.

1. Skim Judges 14:10-20, Judges 15:1-8, Judges 16:1-22. What are some of Samson's greatest failures?
2. Describe the mistakes Samson makes that causes these failures.
 - a. How, if at all, could Samson have prevented these failures?
3. How, if at all, do you think Samson benefited from his failure?
4. Do you think God intended Samson to behave differently, or do you think He intended to use Samson as is – failures and all? Why?
 - a. Do you think God could have accomplished more through Sampson if he had shown a better character?
5. Where do you find yourself in these stories?
 - a. What, if anything, do these stories mean for your life?
6. *(Everyone Answers)* If you could take away your greatest failure, how, if at all, would you be different today?
7. Do you think God wants us to fail? Why or why not?
 - a. Do you think God is disappointed in us when we fail? Why or why not?
8. Read Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:9. Think about a moment in your life when you failed. How, if at all, did you encounter God not in spite of your failure, but because of it?

Storytelling Practices (20 minutes):

Each week, we'll provide you with different storytelling practices designed to help those in your small group practice sharing their stories.

Storytelling Practice #1: Time Travel

The Bible is full of heroes who failed as well as failures who unknowingly furthered God's plans. Here are some examples:

- Abraham – the father of many nations lacked trust in God's plan when he pretended his wife Sarah was his sister to protect himself on two occasions.
- Jacob (Israel) – furthered God's plan by fathering the 12 tribes of Israel but stole his brother Esau's birthright and blessing, and showed obvious favoritism to his son, Joseph.
- Joseph – rose to prominence from very humble beginnings but was prone to bragging to his brothers and showing off his beautiful coat.
- Moses – performed miracles to rescue his people from the Egyptians, but killed an Egyptian when he thought no one was looking.
- David – known as the "Beloved One" and a great and well-respected king, but took matters into his own hands by having Uriah killed just so he could be with his wife, Bathsheba.
- Jonah – preached to the people at Ninevah to hear about God, but didn't really want God to help them and complained to God about it.
- Peter – the Rock who helped start the church but denied even knowing Jesus and abandoned him at the cross.
- Paul – the greatest missionary the world has ever known began his career by hunting down and executing Christians, thinking this was God's will.

Now it's your turn. Pretend you have access to a time machine. Go back and view those incidents in your life when you failed. Create a catalog of your failures.

Once you've catalogued your failures, reflect on these questions:

1. How aware of your failure were you at the time?
2. Could you have prevented your failure from occurring? Why or why not?
3. Was God working through you and your failure in any positive ways?
4. What, if anything, has God revealed anything to you through your failures that you otherwise would not have known?
5. How, if at all, have your failure stories enabled you to trust God more?
6. Where, if at all, do you see yourself in any of the aforementioned stories of Bible heroes? What, if any, hope do their stories give you?

Storytelling Practice #2: Confessing our Failures

Often, we think of confession as a time to admit our sins. Confession can also be a valuable way to admit our failures and release them to God's care – even though failures are not necessarily the same as sin.

Today, confess your failures in a new way.

On a blank sheet of paper, write your name for God on a piece of paper. Draw a shape around it or just start to doodle. Let your drawing become a prayer space, a small prayer closet if you will.

Add marks or shapes to your doodle in as many colors as you'd like. Ask God to be part of your prayer time – with or without words. If words come, pray them. If not, enjoy the silence.

Ask God to bring to mind one of your failures. Write a word or phrase on your paper that somehow encapsulates your failure. Again, draw around it – adding shapes, lines, doodles, and color. Keep drawing as you release your failure into God's care. As you do, write down what you feel – adding shapes, lines, doodles, and even words to represent your feelings.

Add other failures or words associated with your failures to your drawing. Think of each stroke of your pen as a prayer. Take a breath or say "Amen" between each thing you list or draw.

Add a picture or word that shows God's reaction to your failure and confession.

Storytelling (20 Minutes):

Your small group leader will direct you in sharing the stories you reflected on during the practices. Consider sharing all or part of your faith story at our **What's Your Story?** storytelling event on November 17.

After giving your small group a few minutes to reflect on their failure stories, invite people to share one of their failure stories – either by choosing ONE story from their failure catalogue and sharing it or by sharing their Confessing Your Failure drawing. As always, invite people to share as much or as little of what they came up with as they'd like.

As people share, encourage them to think about sharing all or part of their faith story at our Storytelling Event on November 17.

Processing / Wrap-Up (10 minutes):

1. How easy or difficult was it for you to participate in tonight's storytelling practices?
2. What was scary or intimidating to you about tonight's storytelling practices?
3. What did you learn about yourself from tonight's storytelling practices? About others in our small group?
4. As you thought about your own story, where did you see God at work?
5. Where did you encounter God during tonight's small group?

Closing Prayer: