

Take Heart

by K.P. Yohannan

K.P. Yohannan's sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining faith in God amidst failures and the transformative power of humility and grace.

Scripture: Luke 22:31, 1 Corinthians 10:12

Topics: "Faith in Trials", "God's Grace"

Description

K.P. Yohannan reflects on the tragic journey of Charles Templeton, a once-prominent evangelist who ultimately renounced his faith, emphasizing the importance of maintaining faith in God amidst life's challenges. He highlights that even strong believers can falter, as seen in Peter's denial of Christ, and stresses that Jesus prayed for Peter's faith to remain intact rather than for him to avoid failure. Yohannan encourages listeners to recognize their need for God's grace and humility, asserting that failure can serve a divine purpose in shaping us to be more like Christ. He reminds us that God's love and faithfulness remain constant, even when we struggle, and that our failures can lead to deeper compassion and understanding for others. Ultimately, the sermon calls for reliance on God's grace and the importance of nurturing our faith to withstand life's trials.

Transcript

In the 1950s, Charles Templeton was a household name among evangelical Christians. He was a close friend of Dr. Billy Graham and the pastor of a large and growing church in Toronto, Canada. He was also a mighty evangelist and in some ways was more eloquent and able than Dr. Graham. Many predicted that Charles would become one of the most famous preachers in history. Together, Graham and Templeton had founded Youth for Christ in Canada. Not that many years later, news came out that Charles Templeton had walked away from the truth of the Scriptures and the God he had proclaimed to millions.

Templeton declared himself to now be an agnostic, and his announcement sent shockwaves through the church world. In spite of his disbelief in a loving God, Templeton continued to give much thought to God and his struggles with Christianity over the rest of his life. He wrote several books about these concepts with which he grappled. In 1999, Templeton published his last book, titled Farewell to God. The book's subtitle was My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith. Author Lee Strobel was fascinated with the volume and sought an interview with the Canadian to gain more understanding into this man's journey.

Strobel ended up writing his book The Case for Faith in response to that meeting. In it, Strobel recounts that eventful conversation. Strobel had gone to Templeton's high-rise apartment in Toronto to sit with this

83-year-old man. At the time, Templeton's health was failing with Alzheimer's. For some minutes, Strobel pressed Templeton about his beliefs in God. Growing more strong and adamant, Templeton made it clear that he could not reconcile believing in a God who seemed to permit random cruelty and evil.

He stood his intellectual ground, giving no hint that anything could change his hardened position. Strobel then turned the interview toward Jesus. An article from Christian Courier comments on their conversation as follows: How would he now assess Jesus at this stage of his life? Strobel says that, amazingly, Templeton's "body language softened." His voice took on a "melancholy and reflective tone." And then, incredibly, he said: "He was the greatest human being who has ever lived.

He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically wisest person that I've ever encountered in my life or in my reading. His commitment was total and led to his own death, much to the detriment of the world." . . . Strobel quietly commented: "You sound like you really care about him." "Well, yes," Templeton acknowledged, "he's the most important thing in my life." He stammered: "I . . . I . . . I adore him. . . . Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus."

Strobel was stunned. He listened in shock. He says that Templeton's voice began to crack. He then said, "I . . . miss . . . him!" With that the old man burst into tears; with shaking frame, he wept bitterly.¹ Somehow, this minister who early in life was a strong Christian leader lost his faith. He let go of the Jesus he loved so dearly. How could something like that happen? C.S. Lewis writes in his book *Mere Christianity*, "We must never imagine that our own unaided efforts can be relied on to carry us through the next twenty-four hours as 'decent' people.

If He does not support us, not one of us is safe from some gross sin."² No one is immune to failure. No matter how much knowledge or experience or revelation one might have, no one is exempt from tripping spiritually. None of us should ever presume to have "arrived" or to be stable enough not to fall, even significantly. Not even a spiritual stalwart who has been faithful for the past 50 years is immune to crashing. The Bible warns us in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"

I pray that in the areas in which you believe yourself to be strong that you choose to humble yourself. Be careful to continue in His grace, for He gives grace to the humble, but by His own Word, He must oppose the proud (see James 4:6). May Your Faith Not Fail Jesus sat eating the Last Supper with His disciples, sharing His final words with them hours before He was to be seized, brought to trial and crucified. In this setting, He turned to Peter and said, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.

But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32). Jesus knew Peter was going to deny Him. I find it interesting that His prayer was not that Peter wouldn't fail. Jesus did not seem as concerned about Peter failing as He was that his faith would not fail. Why was our Lord more concerned about Peter's faith than his failure? Our faith in God and in His goodness is the safety rope that pulls us out of whatever pit in which we find ourselves.

If we believe God and believe He is good, no matter where we are, that safety rope will get us out. Even when contrary to the feelings of the moment, simply affirming with conviction, "I believe You, God. I believe that You are good," will get us on the road again. But if we stop believing in God and His goodness, we are without a safety rope and have no way to climb out of our pit. Charles Templeton had

lost that critical safety rope--his belief in God and His goodness. Without it, he could not get back on the road to recovery.

I believe that just as with Peter, Jesus is not necessarily praying to the Father that you will not fail, but that in the midst of it your faith will not fail. God doesn't want you to forget His faithfulness. Although God will not prevent you from failure, He will ensure that Satan won't test you to the point of ruin, just as He did with Peter. You see, today Jesus is interceding for you (see Romans 8:34). All of us must remember this truth that even when we are unfaithful, He remains faithful (see 2 Timothy 2:13).

God's goodness and love toward us will never change. "Put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption" (Psalm 130:7). So even when all seems dark and hopeless, I too pray that your faith will not falter. Even when all emotions and feelings dry up, hang on by faith, knowing that His love toward you is constant, as sure as the rising sun. Is There a Purpose? If no one is immune to failure and if God will not prevent failure, could it be that God has a purpose in it?

I believe so. God's purpose in our failure is that we become more like His Son, Jesus. Jesus described Himself only once in Scripture. He said, "I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). It is the pride within our hearts that is most contrary to Christ and the most like Satan. Yet pride is the sin that so easily runs rampant in the human heart. Failure is one of God's best tools to transform our prideful hearts into a heart like His. God allowed Peter to fail and be sifted.

As a result, he was cleansed of so much chaff in his life. He was made more like Christ than he had ever been before. God will allow Satan to sift us too. There is chaff in all of us--the chaff of pride, selfconfidence and self-righteousness. If we let Him, He can fashion in us a soft heart of gentleness and humility. Jesus prompts us, "Come . . . and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

His invitation is before us. His way is clear. Restoration is near. God wants to bring about His purpose through our failure, but before He can do that, we must come to Jesus and be willing to learn from Him. What Does He Want to Teach Us? He wants to teach us to lean upon God's grace. Perhaps in the way you failed, you will finally be able to realize that you cannot make it on your own. Temptation and failures are like the law in the Old Testament. They show us our incredible need for grace.

C.S. Lewis writes, Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. . . . If there was any idea that God had set us a sort of exam, and we might get good marks by deserving them, that has been wiped out. . . . God has been waiting for the moment at which you discover that there is no question of earning a pass mark in this exam or putting Him in your debt.³ "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

It is through our failures that God often helps us see our need for salvation--both eternal salvation and the daily walking away from the desires of the flesh to pursue those of the Spirit. Paul asks the question in Romans 7:24, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" And he answers himself in verse 25: "Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!" So finally we realize we cannot walk down this road and not fail, except through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Through this revelation of God's grace in our lives and our critical need for the Lord, humility naturally unfolds in our hearts, affecting the way we view ourselves, the way we view God and the way we view

others. It chips away at our strong exteriors and prideful hearts, helping us realize that if it weren't for the Lord's mercy and grace, we would all be consumed. It is with this new understanding that God can bring about true victory in our lives. Bible teacher and friend Zac Poonen says, "Genuine victory over sin is always accompanied by the deepest humility."⁴ God wants us to have that victory.

He has promised us that He will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (see 1 Corinthians 10:13). Yet so often it seems that victory eludes us. It is when our self-confidence is finally destroyed and is replaced with dependence upon God that we have victory. Jesus encouraged His disciples just before His arrest to "pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (Luke 22:46). He knew that only with dependence on the Lord would they be able to stand. "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

God transforms not only our relationship with Him, but also our relationships with others. God begins to do a work of compassion in our hearts. Our failure helps us see that we are no different from any other human being. We are as prone to failure as anyone else. A heart of hard judgment turns into a heart of compassion when we identify in a real and practical way with the rest of flawed humanity. Several years ago, a pastor and friend of mine was in a terrible car accident.

He fell asleep at the wheel, hit a post at high speed and crashed the car. His wife died instantly, and he was in the hospital with complications of all kinds. Not long after the accident, I visited him in the hospital. It was difficult to see a man of God not just suffering physically, but also bearing the emotional strain of having lost his wife in such a tragic way. As I spoke with him beside his hospital bed, he said, "I buried so many people and comforted so many in their loss and pain.

But for the first time in my life, I understand the meaning of sorrow and death. I feel now the way death separates and removes the people who are most dear, leaving a gaping emptiness within. The one I love is gone. She will never come back on this earth." As he started to cry, he said, "Now when I go to comfort others, the words I speak will be different than before. I have been in their shoes. I have experienced their pain." Jesus told Peter, "And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

It is only when we are broken that we have the right kind of strength to strengthen others. It was only when Peter was weak and broken that he became truly strong--so much so that he was able to strengthen his brothers and sisters. We could say that Peter's preparation for that Spirit-filled service on Pentecost came through his experience of failure. Without his encounter with his own shortcomings, he would have stood up to preach on that day as an arrogant man--one who had not failed and who would look down with ridicule at the poor, lost sinners in front of him.

God would have become his enemy, for God resists the proud. Peter had to come to such an incredible low before he could be what God intended. Peter himself realized this truth and warned other Christians, in essence saying, "Don't forget how you yourself were once cleansed from your sins" (see 2 Peter 1:9). He goes on to caution them that if they forget, they will become blind and shortsighted.⁵ This principle is also true for us. God uses temptations and failures to remove the chaff from our lives.

He is breaking us so that like a branded animal, we too can bend our necks from our pride and put on Christ's yoke. He is molding us into the image of His own Son: He is making us holy. Therefore, when we fail, let us trust God's sanctifying work in us and look to Him to fulfill His purposes, for He who has called us is faithful (see 1 Corinthians 1:9). Whether the Lord is succeeding in fulfilling this end in your life or not, you alone know. But if the chaff is being removed, you will be humbler and less self-righteous. You won't

look down on others who fail. You won't consider yourself better than anyone else. You will become more like Jesus. Let us learn from Him.

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