

No Going Back

Focusing on Faith Over Fish

September 19, 2021

Today we're talking about *resisting returning* to our *old* ways, and trying to figure out when exactly *enough* is *enough*. But first, I'll ask this: **Have you ever been blessed with failure?**



If someone is going down the *wrong* path, with great success driving them *further* and *faster*, is that *success* a blessing or curse? A *curse* – as far as their *created purpose* is concerned.



Those who've gratefully survived an attempt at suicide know all about the *blessing of failure*. Likewise anyone happily married, who reflects on past courtships that thankfully *didn't* work out.



So **how many times have you perceived failure as a curse, when in fact it was a blessing?** To *get* you, to *keep* you, or to *return* you, to the *right* path, your *true* calling, and your *created purpose*? And **how many times have you perceived success as a blessing, when in fact it was a curse?**



We've talked about leaving our nets, like Peter, Andrew, James, and John – to become full-time followers, ready and waiting to take the witness stand, as fishers of man. And letting go of what's holding us back, and dropping what we shouldn't be dragging along. And like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, we all start out strong when we first heed the call to leave our nets and follow along. But then it gets rough, and the going gets tough, and **it's so tempting to return to a self-centered safety net.**



Well, after weeks of deprivation and hunger, (Mt 12:1; Mk 2:23) and now under threat of *murder*, (Mt 12:14; Mk 3:6) *Jesus* returns to the shores where He'd called them to become fishers of *men*, and *they* return to being fishers of *fish*, and leave *Jesus* to fend for himself.

Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. ... For He had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch Him. – Mark 3:7, 10 NIV

He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the [disciples who were] fishermen, [Peter, Andrew, James and John] who were [occupied] washing their nets. – Luke 5:2 NIV

Money's tight. Food's scarce. So when *Jesus* returns to the shore, *they* can't resist returning to the security of their old ways. This was their *livelihood*. They were good at it. Had a *very* successful business partnership. **They just made the mistake of momentarily neglecting Jesus.** So, at a critical moment when they're most needed as fishers of *men*, they're tied up in their nets, and too tired from tending to their own *needs* in their own *way* as fishers of *fish*.



Because of the crowd [pushing in] He told His disciples to have a small boat ready for Him, to keep the people from crowding Him. – Mark 3:9 NIV



And I gotta wonder how far out in the lake, Jesus was pushed back, before He asked them to give Him a hand. **He's not big into part-time fishing partners.** They want fish? He'll give 'em fish!



He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from **shore**. Then He sat down and taught the people from the boat. – Luke 5:3 NIV



And knowing in hindsight that the miraculous catch will serve as His conclusion, I can't help but think He's tied in Moses' charge against God, when *he* had trouble trusting the Lord to meet his needs to feed a crowd of the size he – and now Jesus – were dealing with. Saying:

"Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?" The Lord answered Moses, "Is the *Lord's arm* too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for *you*." – Numbers 11:22-23 NIV

Which begs the question: **Just how many fish is enough?** Because we're *about* to find out!

When [Jesus] had finished speaking, [He got ready to teach the lesson! And] He said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." [Jesus asks Peter to use the net he just put away, to catch the fish that don't bite in the day] Simon answered, "*Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. [And why is that? Because God was blessing them with failure]* But because You say so, I will let down the nets." ["But Your *timing is terrible*. You couldn't have said something an hour ago, before we *washed 'em?*" And] When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. [And then the panic that comes with great success sets in] So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, [Bring in the fish! Bring in the fish!] and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. [Throw out the fish! Throw out the fish! We don't tend to know when enough is enough. And that's how **we can allow our success to destroy us and deprive us of the very thing it gave us!** And my favorite part of this whole story, is knowing that Jesus is sitting there, being covered in fish, patiently watching the boat sink. *But*] When Simon Peter saw *this*, [his panic-driven anxiety and greedy grabbing that nearly sank his boat – not to mention his *absence* when needed, and his *hesitance* when instructed] he fell at Jesus' *knees* [since His *two feet* were buried in *two feet of fish*] and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" – Luke 5:4-8 NIV

So, generally speaking, **does success enhance us or ensnare us?** Depends, I suppose. We all like to think we're the exception. But *statistically*, as wealth *increases*, compassion *decreases*. In fact, on average, **the lower the household income, the higher the percentage of charitable giving.**



A psychologist at Berkeley, conducted social experiments that he describes in a TED talk called, “Does money make you mean?” His team conducted a fascinating series of scientific tests, and found, for example, that they could turn *most* Monopoly players into much *poorer* sports simply by restarting the game and giving ‘em twice as much money as everyone else. And when they put a pedestrian at a wide variety of intersections, they discovered that the *more* expensive the *car*, the *less* likely it would stop. What we kind of already knew is *now* a scientifically documented fact: **money, success, and status makes us jerks**. If we’re not on *guard* and *deliberately* allowing *Jesus* to make us *His* business partners.

[After this] He said to them, “Watch out! Be on your *guard* against *all* kinds of *greed*; a man’s *life* does not consist in the *abundance* of his possessions.” – Luke 12:15 NIV

Yeah? Try telling *that* to my *greed* and *selfishness*; ‘cause they make a pretty compelling argument to the contrary! Which is why our closets, garages, and sheds are filled with stuff we don't really *need*, bought with money we don't really *have*, to impress people we don't really *like*.

And He told them this parable: [that asks: How *many* storage *sheds* are enough] “The ground of a certain rich man produced a *good* crop. [Abundance is good] He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to *store* my crops.’ [Contemplating what to *do* with our *goods* is good. But] Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my *grain* and my *goods*. And I’ll ... take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’ But [hogging our goods is bad. So] God [who knew this guy’s ticker was about to expire] said to him, [behind the scenes; like we do when we watch a football game] ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared [only] for yourself?’ This is how it will be with *anyone* who stores up *things* for *himself* but is not *rich* toward *God*.” – Luke 12:16-21 NIV

This isn’t about *prosperity*, but *priority*. Jesus isn’t against wealth, ambition, banks, retirement, or enjoying life. Just greed and selfishness. Which hurts *everyone* while helping *no* one. To review: **piggy banks are good; piggy hearts are bad**. Because there’s a big difference between *saving* and *pigging*. So, **what are you saving and what are you pigging?**



It’s like having a home, a car, savings, and a retirement plan, and *then* winning a 10-minute shopping spree. It’s *fun* to run around grabbing more of what you don’t really need ... *for 10 minutes*. But what a horrible way to live this brief life. One cart’s filled with blenders, another with hams, and now you have to deal with ‘em. But on the way home, you pass a low-income neighborhood, and it hits you: “I’ll use my *savings* to build a big shed, with freezers for my hams and shelves for my blenders! It’s *prudent* because it’ll increase my property value! And just as you put the *last* blender on the top shelf – a KitchenAid Pro-Line, 500 watt, 2-speed, with a heavy-duty, die-cast base, and a 48 ounce, stainless steel container, polished to a sleek and sexy mirror-like finish – it falls on your head and you die.

And instead of the Lord saying, “Good job with your goods.” He just shakes His head and says, “You fool. You traded eternal treasures for *blenders?*” **God’s not against the goods, just the greeds.** So, what’s it mean to be “rich toward God”? It’s about finding our deepest security *in the Lord*, so there’s *no need* to hoard. And then **using our blessings to bless Him by blessing others.**



You see, collections can quickly become obsessions. And **stuff not only accumulates, it complicates.** And we grow *attached* to it; and *then it calls* us to return to our old ways of putting our trust in our stuff that we gather to *possess* rather than *bless*. So, “be on your guard against all kinds of greed” because, **it robs us even as it rewards us.** And so:

When Simon Peter saw *this*, [that his piggy-heart was turning this blessing into a curse] he fell at Jesus’ *knees* and said, “Go away from me, Lord; [do yourself a favor and leave me to fish for fish, for] I am a sinful man!” ... Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; [you’re catching on] from *now on* [after *this* experience and *that* confession] you will catch men.” [I mean, if you can walk away from this kind of success – the ultimate, fantasy catch, and potentially biggest payday ever!] So they pulled their boats up on shore, *left everything* [once again] and followed Him. – Luke 5:8-11 NIV

This doesn’t mean you quit your day job to follow Jesus. It means **you identify your calling, and you guard it as your first priority**, and you then keep the secondary things secondary. And, **you trust when things get lean**, whether by death, disease, divorce, or depression, and you *lean* not on yourself and the old ways you left behind, just to get a quick false fix of self-centered security. And **you never momentarily neglect Jesus for a little success.** Because it’s bound to be a *curse*. Because *He’s* our *One* and only *eternal* source. But so many just don’t see it till their sunk.



He doesn’t promise to meet our immediate needs as we perceive ‘em, but our eternal needs as only He can know ‘em! If we’ll just leave *everything* ... to *Him*. And follow in His footsteps ... again ... and again ... and as many times as it takes. Peter is the poster child of failing, repenting, and returning with an ever-more determined devotion. He’s a very devoted sinful man.



So did we ever answer when exactly enough is enough? Well, as far as the *enemy* is concerned, it’s when it’s just enough to sink us. But as far as *Jesus* is concerned, it’s when it’s just enough to bless those He’s put in our path.

Because, **we’re basically on a 10-minute shopping spree down here.**

And, we can either build trust and love ... or bigger shelves for ourselves.

But bigger *shelves* will probably only make us bigger *jerks*.

Scientifically speaking.