

Sunday March 22, 2009  
Speaker: Pastor Paul Penelton  
**LOSE YOUR LUGGAGE FOR GOOD!**  
How to Free Yourself from Failure

Isn't it fun to laugh at other people's mistakes? Doesn't it make you feel better to see other's fail? Isn't it great when the focus of failure is aimed at someone else? We like that don't we? Let me spin the microscope around for a moment and ask you this: What's the most expensive mistake you've ever made? Think about that for a moment while I tell you a costly story that was recently the feature of an episode of Mythbusters.

*A real outdoorsmen decided one day that he'd had enough of watching his friends accumulate better equipment than him so he decided to stretch his bank account and buy a Lincoln Navigator SUV for himself for Christmas. Shortly after his big ticket purchase, he decided to take his buddy out duck hunting. So there they were in the SUV driving out onto the frozen lake with the gun, the dog, the beverages, and...the dynamite.*

*They knew that in order to attract ducks they'd need to create a big enough hole in the ice for the ducks to land. Since there were no visible signs of open water, they knew they'd have to do something more than just cut a little hole in the ice. So this guy pulls stick of dynamite out of the back of the Lincoln Navigator that will burn for 40 seconds.*

*Now these guys are smart enough to know that they don't want to be standing near the dynamite when it goes off. They don't want to carry it out somewhere, light it and then try to run away in case they slip and hurt themselves on the ice. So what they decide to do is take the stick of dynamite, light that 40 second fuse and throw it as far as they can.*

*Now to review: Two guys in an SUV, a stick of dynamite and a dog. The dog happened to be a Labrador Retriever. And we all know what retrievers do, they retrieve. So they throw the stick of dynamite and start walking backwards when one of the men notices the dog taking off as fast as it can in order to fetch the stick. Within a few seconds it retrieves the dynamite and dutifully starts back towards its master.*

*The master starts shouting and waving frantically but the dog thinks he's cheering him on and starts picking up speed. The master is terrified! Noting that the dynamite will blow in about 20 seconds, the master grabs his shotgun and fires it into the air hoping to scare the dog. It works! The dog is so scared he looks for cover. Unfortunately, the only place of cover on this frozen lake is underneath the Lincoln Navigator.*

*So the dog crawls under the truck but burns his behind on the tailpipe, drops the stick of dynamite and runs toward his master who is running as fast as he can from him and the SUV. The next sound you hear is this enormous explosion that blows the SUV to bits and creates a massive hole in the ice.*

*Parts of the SUV scatter across the ice while the heaviest pieces sink to the bottom of the lake as the two men and their dog stand there with an I-can't-believe-that-just-happened look on their face. The insurance agent said that sinking a vehicle in a lake by the illegal use of explosives is*

*not covered. And that was when the man realized that he'd yet to make his first payment on that new SUV.*

So let's get back to the main question? What is the most expensive mistake you've ever made? Perhaps it cost you lots of money, or your job, it may have cost you your reputation, or maybe it cost you your family. The fact of the matter is, that if every person here would search their hearts they would admit that the most profound, the most painful failures in life are typically not those done accidentally but those that are done intentionally.

We don't wake up one day and say we're going to start blowing up parts of our life. But we do wake up, make decisions and start moving in directions that we know intuitively could rapidly go south and if we're not careful we might have to pay a price. What we do is push the consequence thought far enough away and we just keep proceeding in a dangerous direction until...bam...everything explodes.

*It sounds like a story I recently read about. There was this guy named Dave who's carrying his own big suitcase full of stuff. I wish you could meet him because you would really like him. He's a great guy with a winsome personality, articulate, good looking, and a lot of charisma. Dave grew up on a farm as part of a large family and when his country called he went off to war as a kind of a nobody but when he came back he was a national hero.*

*His popularity dragged him into politics and his rise to the top was quick and fast. He became very wealthy, well respected and known to be an avid follower of God. But not all was well in Dave's world. For a period of 12 months he'd been carrying around a secret that was eating him alive. He'd been spending a lot of time trying to make sure that nobody knew. And he carried that weight with him pretty much all the time.*

*You see, Dave's secret is that he had a one-night stand. To make matters worse he was soon informed by this woman that she was pregnant. Dave panics. Everything's on the line. He senses that if this gets out his whole world will explode, his life will be in shambles, and his career gone. So Dave goes into damage control and ultimately arranges for the murder of this woman's husband. Little did Dave know that the lid was about to blow on his whole secret.*

I'm sure that on a day like this there are a lot of us who walked into The Olive Branch today with our own heavy baggage. We've been carrying our own secrets for awhile now and the load is getting heavier and heavier. It may not be some big secret like the one in Dave's suitcase but it might be some kind of addiction, out of control anger, a relational problem. It could be a wide variety of things that we walked in here with inside our suitcase.

But the one thread that ties them all together is that nobody knows. Right now, for some of us, as I even begin to talk about this topic there's sort of that pit in the stomach, that nervousness. Even right now that very thing is coming to the surface in your emotions. The very thing that you try to keep stuffed down is right now coming to the surface.

The result for some of us who are here is that it has taken us captive and we are living in slavery to this secret failure. The truth is nobody here wants their failures to be broadcast. Don't we want to minimise the number of people who know our failures and shortcomings? But by doing so, don't we also allow the failure trap to become our prison?

We go to bed thinking about our failures and wake up with them staring at us in the bathroom mirror. We think we hear voices from parents, co-workers, family members and friends whispering “You’re a failure. You disappoint me. You let me down.” We feel scared, defeated and hopeless.

But I have some incredible news for you. Your failure doesn’t have to be final. The incredible news is that there is hope. Based on the authority of God and the authority of the Bible, you don’t have to live in slavery to these things any more. God wants you to be free. He has a plan to set you free. It may not be easy and it may not happen all at once. But the good news is...you can be free.

What I want to do for the rest of the time we have this morning is to finish Dave’s story and learn how he not only unpacked his suitcase but learned to live in freedom without it. Let me explain by going back to our little story about Dave. Dave, by the way, is not some mythical character or imaginary figure. He’s an Old Testament character known to many of us as King David, one of the great men of the Bible, who even after his moral failure the Bible would say of him that he was a man after God’s own heart. In other words, his actions following his failure demonstrated a full recovery.

But if you were to read the account of that story, of his moral failure, and the confrontation he had with a prophet named Nathan in 2 Samuel 12, you’d really get the sequence of events but not the emotion. In fact, we really don’t know what’s going on in the heart and mind of David. But if you would go to Psalm 51 that’s where you’d discover what’s was going on inside of him and how he chose to deal with his guilt.

### **THREE WAYS DAVID FOUND FREEDOM FROM HIS PAST**

#### **1. *He Opened Up the Suitcase (Cry to God)***

The first step that David took, when confronted, with his failure was to open the suitcase back up. For an entire year he had packed away not only his failures, his emotions but also his connectedness to God. He takes that long hard look into what he has been hiding from for about a year – his failure. As the guilt and pain began to overwhelm him, he fell on his face and cried out to the only one who could save him from these chains of misery.

***“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” (Psalm 51: 1-2 NIV)***

What do you do when you’ve suffered a setback in your faith, in your job or in a relationship? How do you begin to rebuild your life? If we follow David’s example, we cry out to God and release it.

Failure or loss always creates strong emotion in us. We grieve. We worry. We have fear. We have anger. We may fall into depression. What does God want us to do with all of these emotions when we’ve experienced disappointment or loss.

First of all, don’t resist them or repress them. A lot of people are “stuffers.” They push their feelings down. They says things like “I’m just not going to let myself feel anything. I don’t want to let it get close to me.” That is a major mistake. It reminds me of someone taking a bottle of pop and shaking it up. One day it’s going to explode.

As a pastor, I've dealt with a lot of hurting people and believe me when I tell you that one day you are going to deal with your feelings. If you don't deal with them now, you're just putting off the inevitable. I've learned that when I swallow my hurt my stomach keeps score. When you internalize your feelings, when you stuff them down, they come out first in some kind of illness or ailment.

God says, "No, I want you to release them to me." The Bible calls it crying out to God. Later on in Psalm 62:8, David encourages us to,

**"Pour out your heart to Him, for God is our refuge." (Psalm 62:8 (NIV))**

He's waiting to embrace you. He's our safe place. In a storm you need shelter or a refuge. And God says, I want to cover you. I want to comfort you.

I know that sometimes that's the furthest thing from your mind. It was the furthest thing from David's. He wanted to flee from the one he least wanted to disappoint. He felt unworthy of God's love. But the one thing we can always count on is God's unconditional love. It's not based on performance or measuring up. In Isaiah 43:4, God lays it out for us very clearly when he says,

**"You are precious to me." (Isaiah 43:4 NIV)**

You're not only acceptable, you're valuable because of His grace. Open up that suitcase and throw yourself at the mercy of God, humble yourself and you'll experience what James describes in his book:

**"God gives grace to the humble. So give yourselves completely to God...Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you." (James 4:6-8 – NCV/NLT)**

## 2. Clean It Out (Confess Your Sins)

The second thing that David does is he starts the process of cleaning out the contents of his luggage.

He starts to face the truth about his life. After he's confronted with the adultery and murder in his life by Nathan, the very next words out of David's mouth are, "I have sinned against the

Lord." That's amazing to me! There were no excuses, no blame, no rationalizing, no justifying, he just confesses. It's my guess that he'd been waiting a long time to say it. We hear his emotional plea for forgiveness in Psalm 51 where he says:

**"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge." (Psalm 51:3-4 NIV)**

Now for those of you who are dealing with issues right now, you need to know Nathan the prophet's immediate response: "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die." Proverbs 28:13 (NCV) says,

**"If you hide your sins you will not succeed. If you confess and reject them you'll have mercy." (Proverbs 28:13 NCV)**

It's a verse that contains both a promise and a warning. The warning is that if you hide your sins, you won't succeed. The promise is that if you show up with the truth God will give you mercy.

Here's why this is so important. Confession reduces the power of a secret. It sets us free not only from trying to hide the secret but from having to manage it as well. One of the lame but true sayings that some pastor stuck in my head is that "the beginning of the healing is in the revealing." There is something cleansing and liberating about coming clean through confession.

But I want to us to be really clear about this. The purpose of confession is not disgrace. It's grace. The purpose of confession before God is not humiliation, it's restoration. It's really for any and all of us who have something in our lives that keeps us in bondage or chained up that we can't get free of on our own. Confession is what frees me from the heaviness of my luggage or burdens and allows me to start over.

### 3. **Throw away the suitcase and grab your carry on (Carry On)**

Now here's the million dollar question: How do I sustain this freedom every single day. You hear some people say, "Jesus changed my life." How does that happen? Does he do some type of spiritual surgery? Does he brain wash us? Does he zap us with something and all of a sudden we're changed?

King David certainly knew that he'd struggle again after he'd been freed from guilt. Let's hear what he prayed in Psalm 51:10-12:

**"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." (Psalm 51:10-12 NIV)**

I think there's a lot of confusing advice that's coming out these days on how God changes us. Some people say, "Wait on the Lord" or use the passive approach.

Others say, "If it's to be, it's up to me or a more activist type of approach. The question becomes is it all me or is it all God or is it a combination?"

I think Paul deals with this issue best when it comes to sustaining your spiritual growth. He tells us that God has a part and we have a part. In Philippians 2:12, he tells us to

**"Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us to will and act according to His good purpose." (Philippians 2:12 NIV)**

What do you do in a physical workout? You work on developing the body that you already have. Paul is telling us to accept personal responsibility for our growth. God wants you to work out the implications of your life individually.

But the good news is that He is, at the same time, working in you to see that His goals are accomplished. He says, "I will give you the power to do what is right. I will empower you and give you the desire and the capability to change. There are three tools God uses to work in your life and you should pack these tools into your carry on.

#### a. **God's Word**

Fill up your suitcase with the Bible. David said in Psalm 119:25 and 52

**"I am completely discouraged...Revive me by Your word. Your Word has been my comfort." (Psalm 119:25, 52 NIV)**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says,

**“The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us to do what is right. It is God’s way of making us well prepared at every point...”**

**(2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV)**

The Bible changes our minds and our thoughts change our actions. If you want to get serious about change, you need to pack this book in your suitcase and your heart. Read it, study it, memorize it, meditate on it, and you’ll begin to live it out. The first way to reverse the curse is by filling your mind with the truth, the Word of God.

### **b) God’s People**

We need each other. We were not made to be isolated from each other. There is no such thing as a Lone Ranger Christian. We need each other to make it. If you don’t have any family maybe we can be your family. That’s what God meant the church to be. We promote that sense of family here through our small groups or Roots groups.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4) tells us that

**“The God of all comfort comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV)**

If you’re hurting today, you are not alone in your hurt. You may think your problem is unique but that’s generally not true.

There’s a pretty good chance that in a crowd like this there are a few people who’ve gone through the very same problem you have right now. You just need the courage to open up and share where you’re hurting so they can pray with you and help you. That’s the value of a Roots Group.

If you’re not in pain, what does this verse say to you? Can you remember that pain you went through months ago, or years ago? If you can, you have an obligation to help other people through the same hurt you’ve been through. God allows us to go through problems, comforts us, and then asks that we turn around and comfort other people with the comfort you’ve received. Just remember God never wastes a hurt.

### **c) God’s Spirit**

This is the greatest comfort of all. God himself wants to be your friend. Two thousand years ago, Jesus walked around in a body here on earth and said to His disciples, “I’m going to go to heaven but when I go, I’m going to come back to earth in another form, in the form of a Spirit, so I can be with you and in you.”

The Holy Spirit is just God in another form. He called the Holy Spirit a counsellor. The Holy Spirit comes into your life not to scare you or make you a religious fanatic but to help you become all that God wants you to be. He wants to have a relationship with you so that when the going gets tough, when temptations come, you have some inner strength. 1 Corinthians 3:18 (LB) says

**“As the Spirit of the Lord works with us, we become more and more like Him.”**  
**(1 Corinthians 3:18 LB)**

God's number one purpose in your life is not to make you happy, but to make you like Jesus. How do you know when you're depending on God's spirit? What does it mean to depend on God? It means to pray continually.

Pray about your decisions, your relationships, your actions, everything. It also means to listen continually. Be aware that God is constantly with you. You practice his presence by having a running conversation with Him. You whisper up a prayer to God no matter what you're doing. You talk to God about anything and everything. That's what it means to depend on God's Spirit.

**Conclusion:**

The most beautiful part of the story of David, to me, is that the failure wasn't final. Because David was willing to humble himself and turn to God, God made him clean. If you keep reading the story of David and Bathsheba, you find out that they do end up together and she does get pregnant again and this time she gives birth to a son whose name is Solomon.

And Solomon became a great king of the nation of Israel. Then Solomon had a son whose name was Rehoboam. And Rehoboam had a son named Abijah. And Abijah had a son whose name was Asa. And if you follow the lineage of David from son to grandson to great-grandson to great-great grandson 25 times down the line you find that eventually someone gave birth to a son named Joseph who married Mary from whom Christ was born.

You see it was from two failures – David and Bathsheba – that God brought Jesus. From sin to saviour. That's what God wants to do in your life and mine. All through your life, God's been working in you and on you and shaping you into who you were meant to be. And he'll keep on working on you and me until the day we die if we let him. Aren't you glad God's not finished with you yet?