

From Failure to Favor

By Jerry Lawson

Introduction:

A. No one likes to be labeled a failure.

1. Failure often brings with it grave consequences.
2. Failure can be difficult to deal with.

A football coach gave this advice on how to deal with failures. "When you're about to be run out of town, get out in front and make it look like you're leading a parade."¹

B. Truth is, we've all tasted of failure & it's no fun.

1. No one here will get the prize for the worst failure.

The prize for the most useless weapon of all times goes to the Russians. They invented the "dog mine." The plan was to train the dogs to associate food with the undersides of tanks, in the hope that they would run hungrily beneath advancing Panzer divisions. Bombs were then strapped to the dogs' backs, which endangered the dogs to the point where no insurance company would look at them. Unfortunately, the dogs associated food solely with Russian tanks. The plan was begun the first day of the Russian involvement in World War II...and abandoned on day two. The dogs with bombs on their backs forced an entire Soviet division to retreat.²

2. Today, I want to talk about a person who went from FAILURE TO FAVOR.

Text: Luke15:11-32

C. The Prodigal Son was the ultimate failure, yet he experienced the favor of God:

1. Jewish law allowed him to have 1/3 of his father's inheritance (elder brother 2/3).
2. He quickly squandered that and "joined himself" with a pagan & ended up eating slop with hogs (idolatry).
3. From a lofty place, the Prodigal Son could not have fallen any further.

D. This story comes down to three elements:

1. *The Failure.*
2. *The Faithful.*
3. *The Favor.*

I. The Failure.

A. The Prodigal Son thought he was missing out of the "high life."

1. He took his money and ran.
2. His sin soon found him out.

Rev 3:17 NIV

You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

B. His vision of self quickly changed from thinking he had all he needed to realizing he was wretched...

1. From a palace of a home to a pig sty.

John 8:34 NIV

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

2. He literally became a slave to sin:

3. He was feeding hogs raised for idol worship.
4. At this point he had NOTHING...almost.

C. Though he lost it all he was:

1. **Aggressive** – for what he wanted.
 - There comes a time when it can't get any worse.
 - Like Peter walking on the water.
 - “The violent take it by force...”
2. **Decisive** – left the pigpen for what he wanted.
 - Decide you want to get to the Father no matter what.
 - Decide you want the promises of God for your life and family.
3. **Willing** – to do what it took.
 - He knew he'd look like a fool.
 - Maybe he'd get laughed at, work like a slave ... anything for the Father's blessing!
 - If you're too proud to come to the Lord, you can stay outside with the pigs.
 - NOT ME – I'm going to the Father's House!!!

II. The “Faithful.”

A. On the surface the elder brother seems to be faithful.

1. (v. 25) He was “in the field” working – doing the stuff.
2. Religious people always get all caught up doing the stuff: *songs, classes, sermons, rituals, ceremonies...*
3. He wasn't there b/c he loved the father; he was there b/c he was trying to earn the father's favor.

B. Most important fact: He was in the field (of religion) instead of in the house (with the father).

1. The younger brother didn't go to the field when he came home – he said, "I will arise and go to my father's HOUSE..."

2. The elder was working on "salvation by achievement."

C. He came in and was amazed at what was going on (celebration).

1. He was so mad that someone was getting the father's favor.

2. "I've been working all this time...now this son of yours"

3. He couldn't even call him his brother!

D. That's just like religious people in 2004:

1. We've been sleeping in the church (bored) for years.

2. Who do you think you are to come in here and start having fun...vibrant worship...joy of the Lord...jumping around, having fun...

E. The elder brother wanted to come in & go over the rules of sonship.

1. The father and son just wanted to celebrate the grace and mercy of God.

2. You can fuss and argue over who deserves salvation is you want to, but I'm here to CELEBRATE JESUS!!!

Religious people criticize and undermine what they cannot control and understand!

2 Tim 3:5 NIV

5 having a form of godliness but denying its power

F. The biggest tragedy is found in verse 28:

Luke 15:28 NKJV

28 But he was angry and would not go in

1. He was busy earning his religious credits & judging those who didn't do it like him.
2. When it came time to put down the tools and enter into the presence of the Father, he was confused & angry.

G. Since coming to Cullman, I've seen dozens come to the door of the presence of the Lord only to turn away b/c they don't understand (they're not used to what they see).

1. If they'd only enter in, they'd experience the "joys of the Lord."
2. They'd see God move in their lives like never before!

III. The Favor.

A. The favor of the Father is summed up in one phrase:

"Everything I have is yours."

Luke 12:32 NKJV

32 Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

1. The Prodigal Son had his speech all ready:

Luke 15:18-19 NKJV

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." '

2. He doesn't even get ½ of it out of his mouth:

Luke 15:21-24 NKJV

21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

3. He was ready to grovel all the way back to the field – they started singing, dancing, rejoicing, eating...

B. Look at what the Father does next:

1. **Robe**: visible sign of full restoration & rights of sonship.

2 Cor 5:17 NKJV

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

2. **Ring**: restored him to a position of authority.
 - i. Other family members, neighbors, servants may have judged what he had become...
 - ii. The RING settled the issue – FULL HEIR!!!

Rom 8:15 NIV

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave ... but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ... (Gal 4:7 NKJV) Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

3. **Shoes:** immediately elevated him above servant.
 - i. He instantaneously became a FREE MAN!!!
 - ii. He wasn't sent to the field to work off his debts.
 - iii. He wasn't given a lecture.
 - iv. He wasn't compared to the elder son...
- C. The Father threw open his arms:
 1. Ran out to meet him.
 2. Killed the fatted calf; called for a celebration.
 3. Robe on back, ring on finger, shoes on feet...
 4. MY SON HAS COME HOME!!!

Conclusion:

- A. You can come home today!
 1. If you've been the prodigal son you can come home to the Father today.
 2. No lectures, no penalties – Just MERCY!
- B. If you've been the elder brother, you can come home today.
 1. Stop living life on the outside looking in.
 2. The Father wants you to enter into His presence.
 3. He wants you to experience the fullness of His JOY & FAVOR!
- C. William Brown: *"Failure is an event, never a person."*³

Thomas Edison's manufacturing facilities in West Orange, N.J., were heavily damaged by fire one night in December, 1914. Edison lost almost \$1 million worth of equipment and the record of much of his

life's work. The next morning, walking about the charred embers of his hopes and dreams, the 67-year-old inventor said: "There is value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Now we can start anew."

- **You may have *failed*, but you're not a *failure*.**
- **It's not time to give up; It's time to start over!**

¹ *Bits & Pieces*, April 30, 1992.

² www.sermonillustrations.com

³ William Brown, [Welcome Stress!](#)