

## **Have You Failed? Or did You Fall?**

A study by Alex Hipkins

How often in our lives do we feel that we just have not done well enough? We cannot leave good enough alone and dwell on the fact that things did not turn out successfully. For some, this is an everyday feeling, while others may just have it occur occasionally, and even more may claim that they never have a shortcoming to save face with their friends, family, and congregation.

Over time, or if it happens consistently, our minds can start to play tricks on us. It can begin to tell us that we will never succeed, that the problem is too big or the task too difficult for us to accomplish the right goal; we will just never get it right. I know that I have struggled with the affliction of self-doubt, doubt in general, and attempted to be too careful to the point of inaction. I did not want to come up short in the task at hand or the calling of that moment; I did not want to lose face in the eyes of God.

So, my mind told me that it could not be done. It told me that I was not good enough for the job, that God made a mistake in choosing me for it, and that the talents He had given me were not what this needed. Of course, as a Christian, I should have seen the lies in the trickery, but I did not. And so, I did not act. Instead, I let it overcome me, keep me from doing what I knew I needed to do, and stayed down for the proverbial count.

In those times, I felt I failed. For so long I let that spirit of failure linger over me, let it tear at my heart and ravage my mind to the point it made a great stronghold that I am still fighting against. But, as it comes down brick by brick, I started asking myself if I had failed. Did I keep away from the task permanently? Did I shrink away from it to never return?

Or did I just fall and need to pick myself back up again?

Many might believe that failure and falling are the same when it comes to acting in God. In both situations, it relates to not accomplishing something, or not being successful in something. Maybe it is a sin that keeps coming to pass in everyday life that you have yet to overcome. It could be an action that was not taken even when you felt led to take that step. Again, there are numerous possibilities on what the example could be.

I want to tell you that they are entirely different. There is a finality to failure; there is no coming back from it. When you fall, you have only stumbled. You have only temporarily separated from the path, from the walk that you have with God, and from the life, you are supposed to lead. You can get back up, by the God-given grace and opportunity, and dust yourself off when you fall.

Let's go a little deeper.

### **Section One: What it is to Fall**

## **Subsection One: The First to Fall**

The Fall. This is probably the most well-known biblical event aside from Noah's ark and Jesus' crucifixion. Many may know it as the fall from grace, or the fall from Eden, but the important part of this is that it is called The Fall. This event takes place in Genesis 3 when Eve is tricked by the serpent and eats from the one tree that she and Adam are told not to. In turn, she gets Adam to eat from it as well. God finds out, and they are removed from the Garden and will now know death, shame, and sinful nature.

You could look at this and blame it for the Fall on Eve. She was the one to first eat the fruit, and she was the one that convinced Adam to eat the fruit as well. I am sure that this would be valid and put under much consideration to many. We could also place the blame on the serpent that talked Eve into the action. The serpent was a cunning creature utilized by the enemy to show God that man was far from perfect. However, the blame must fall on Adam.

But why did he do it? Why did he decide it best to not listen to the will of God, and to follow Eve in eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? He was worried he would lose his companion, his loved one. Adam was worried he would lose his soulmate on this earth. How do I know Eve was Adam's soulmate? Genesis 2 tells us so. Eve was made to be a helper for Adam and was made from Adam. They were also the only two people on the planet, so there were not any options.

Either way, Adam loved Eve and did not want to lose her. I believe most can understand that feeling, whether for a spouse or a child, some member of family and friends that holds the most special place in your heart. Adam held Eve there, and his belief had to have been that the Lord would remove her from the Garden, and he would never see Eve again. So, Adam's choice was made from fear, the idea of loneliness, and love.

In essence, Adam fell because he was deceived just like Eve was by the serpent. That is a large portion of why people tend to fall; deception comes into our lives and feels so overpowering and so much like the truth that it is hard to ignore.

That is also one of the greatest tools Satan has in getting us to fall. 1 Peter 5:8 tells us to remain sober-minded, alert because the devil is lurking and searching to devour us like a lion on the savannah. He is coming to steal, kill, and destroy. (John 10:10) Satan's goal is to bring every believer down so low that they cannot accomplish what God has planned for them. 2 Corinthians 11:3 even has Paul being afraid or concerned about our adversary deceiving our minds enough that we are led astray from the pure devotion to Christ.

Deception is often the key ingredient in his plan, because if he can get us to believe the lies enough, then we will do all the work for him; we will continue to toil and trouble over the lies that are stuck in our heads and Satan will not have to come up with anything new.

How do we battle against his deception?

We must focus on the truths. By looking at what God says about us, about who He is, and about who we are in Him, you can combat the lies that Satan puts into your mind.

Are the lies telling you that you are alone? That your past will keep you from ever being loved? That it will keep you from ever truly seeing the glory of God? Zephaniah 3:17, "The Lord your God is in your midst, A warrior who saves, He will rejoice over you with joy; He will be quiet in His love [making no mention of your past sins], He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy." He is always there. He does not see your past, especially the sins that may have you believing you are worthless or unworthy. And He is joyful that you are His.

Are the thoughts in your head filling you with fear that you cannot do what God has called you to do? That you cannot be what you need to be for any relationship you have? With your kids or spouse? We need to remember the truth given in 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." He did not give us the spiritual makeup to be fearful. He gave us power, love, and self-control. We must be strong and courageous with every action we take in this life; with every task, we are given to do. God commands it in Joshua 1:9, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

There are so many ways that we can be deceived, so many lies that can be told to us. That means the biggest key to overcoming them would be learning to trust wholly in the Lord, with all of your heart, and lean onto His understanding. Acknowledge, lean on, believe, in Him for all things, and He will make your path straight. A paraphrase of Proverbs 3:5-6 makes it clear that we need to rely on God's help to make it through, for our path to be directed, even through the jungle that is our minds.

### **Subsection Two: Personal Bias**

Most of us know the story of Jonah and the whale, or big fish, or sea monster. Beginning in Jonah 1, Jonah is told to go to Nineveh to speak the word of God to the Ninevites so that they may come to redemption before they came to destruction. As you can expect, and this is the first moment of falling found in Jonah, he was not excited about it. The Ninevites were wicked, full of lust and the fulfillment of the flesh. They were not to be saved, in Jonah's opinion. So, Jonah ran away from the task he was given based on his personal beliefs.

Then comes in the travel by ship, the storm, the throwing overboard, and being swallowed by the fish. After three days, Jonah is brought out of the fish after agreeing to go to Nineveh and stop running from his task. And Jonah does the task. He gives his message in Jonah 3:4, "On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: 'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.'"

Jonah was so displeased with the task at hand, that he did not even put effort into accomplishing it. Eight words were given. You can see that his heart was not in it, and the bias he had against

the Ninevites kept him from truly trying. Thankfully, God does not need our best to accomplish what he wants to accomplish, and the Ninevites turned toward God and away from the wickedness they had pursued.

Jonah was so angered by the salvation of Nineveh that in Jonah 4 he wished to die rather than live because of the Ninevite's salvation. If that is not the epitome of bias, racism, discrimination, and a slue of other mental deficiencies, then I am not sure what is. Jonah could not stand that someone else got saved, that a people he deemed unfit would seek the glory of the Lord and find the mercy and compassion that He has.

Do we ever act in that fashion? Have you ever not done something that you were told to do just because you did not like who it was for? Who it was supposed to reach?

Now, was it their clothes? Their appearance? Their beliefs?

If you have, and most of us have, then you fell. It is that simple. You fell because you put your own belief, or what others may have spoken before you in their ill-advised way, before the will of God. I would venture to say that putting someone or something before God is the reason most of us fall during our time in this world. It is what our sinful nature calls for us to do; the flesh wants something corporeal rather than spiritual or eternal.

In Acts 10, we find Cornelius, who is a Centurion of the Italian Cohort, a firm believer, and a man of faith. As most are when an angel comes before them, he is terrified at the moment he is told to collect Peter from Joppa. In Joppa is where I want to look.

The men of the Centurion have headed to collect Peter, and Peter is praying on a rooftop while waiting for food to be cooked. Peter has a vision.

"The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.'" Acts 10:9-14

With what this vision of God was telling him to do, Peter's fall here resides in his refusal to partake in the animals shown. Everything that Peter had learned before this point told him that many of these animals were unclean. They were not allowed to be touched, let alone eaten in the Jewish belief. Thus, because of rules and laws that were learned through childhood, Peter was disobeying. But what did God say to Peter about this?

Acts 10:15 "And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common."

Peter was scolded. His previous learning caused him to be biased against the things that God was providing in the vision, against what God was stating were now clean and acceptable for consumption. This happened three more times in Acts 10. Three more times before Peter grasped what he was supposed to do; before he understood what the meaning of this vision was, he repeated his actions again and again.

It was at this point that God was opening the way for the Gentiles to be taught The Way and to hear the Gospel message. So, at this time, God was saying that you cannot discriminate any longer as to who is receiving the message of Christ. He has called all available. He has opened the doorway for everyone to hear and not just the Jewish people.

Because of this, we have no right to try and decide who should hear our testimonies or see Christ working through us. It does not matter if the person seems homeless and covered in filth, or if they seem to be part of the upper class, dressed well, and clean-shaven. We do not get to decide who is supposed to be spoken to. Everyone is to be reached. That is our charge by Christ when He said to go forth into the world.

If you have ever fallen in this manner, as I know that I have on more than one occasion, it is time to pick yourself up and do the duty that Christ wants from you.

### **Subsection Three: Denial**

Let's revisit the life of Peter. He became such a great man of Christ, overcame so much, and preached until his last breath. Before that point in his life, Peter fell. More than once he fell, but I want to focus on one specifically. If we look at Luke 22:33-66, we find the point in the story leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. It begins with Peter telling Christ that he would die alongside Jesus rather than ever betraying Him, and Jesus telling Peter that he would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed.

Of course, when we are often in the presence of the Lord, feeling Him right there with us, we will become indignant at the thought of denying Him. We would never do that. Christ is our life, our breath, our nourishment, and our eternity. We would never even think of denying Him at all.

But we do.

Think of it this way. Romans 6:23 states, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord." The two main aspects of this verse are sin brings death, and eternal life comes through Christ. John 14:6, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" The main aspects of this verse are Christ is the only way to heaven, the truth that will get us there, and the life that will let us live in His presence for eternity.

Sin is death. If we look back at the first fall in Genesis, discussed previously, death was brought into existence. Both physical and spiritual death became an inescapable thing. Because of Adam and of Eve, we now know or have the possibility of knowing, an eternity without God. This is spiritual death. Because of that first sin, we now know a physical death and deterioration of our bodies. To reiterate, sin is the cause of this. Disobedience is the cause of this. Our flesh is the cause of this.

But twice we see in the verses given, that Jesus is life. He, through the glory of the Father, is who provided the ability to truly live, both on this earth and in heaven for eternity. He is the only way to that life, to that eternity.

So, when you look at these two aspects together, Jesus is life and sin is death, we can see how when we sin, every time we sin, is a denial of Him. Each sin is bringing death back into our lives. Yes, through salvation we will still find ourselves in eternity, and with each instance that that death is brought back into our lives we are denying Jesus.

There is a different aspect of this passage that I want to dive into deeper.

Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour, still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.

Luke 22:56-60

Peter denied Christ to others. It was not a subtle denial; it was not a denial done in passing. Peter fervently denied Jesus three times.

And he did it out of fear.

After what Peter just saw done to the Messiah, you can imagine his mind was racing with thoughts of what they would do to him because of his association with Christ. So, he lied. He fervently said that he knew nothing about Jesus and was just there. Just there. Just another one in the crowd looking onward at the action taking place.

Have you ever been in those shoes?

We all have. Whether it is from peer pressure when a teenager, wanting to fit in while a young adult, or in some situation while working a job, we have denied Christ. This may have been a direct denial, such as from Peter at the precursor to Christ's crucifixion, or it may have been more subtle, such as doing the thing your boss asked of you even when you knew it wasn't right and God would not approve.

That is a sin and a denial.

How is it a direct denial of Christ? It is denying Christ directly because you are actively choosing something that goes against what God wants for us and our lives, as well as it being a factor that takes the image of Christ out of yourself.

In John 8:12, Jesus states, "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'" He calls Himself the light of the world. When we find salvation when the Spirit fills us, long after Jesus has ascended and while we wait patiently for His return, the role has changed. You can see this in Matthew 5:14-16, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that <sup>[a]</sup> they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Jesus is stating that we are the light of the world, the light meant to show Christ to the world. He is stating that we cannot hide behind any obstacle, any barrier or wall, to conceal who and what we are now that God dwells within us through the grace found in Salvation. Whenever we attempt to hide and who dwells within us, we fall. And we have the chance to fall further than we would ever want with the continued concealment of Christ in our lives.

We are supposed to let our actions speak of the Lord and bring Him glory! Peter knew this. And when Peter realized what he had done, he had the correct response. Luke 22:61-62, "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly."

He wept. Peter felt remorse. Peter, I enjoy imagining it this way, decided at that moment that he would never deny Christ and found repentance for the actions he had made. Why I like imagining it this way is because of what Peter became for the early church, the rock that many would rely on to move forward and grow the body.

When we find ourselves falling, in this way or any other way, we need to see our actions for what they are. We need to feel remorse for doing them. And we need to actively decide to change ourselves in a direction that leads us away from ever doing them again.

By looking toward God, staying in connection with Him, and making these active decisions to move away from these little denials, these assortments of sins, we can find ourselves falling so much less.

## **Section Two: What it is to Fail**

### **Subsection One: Can't Give it Up, or Feet Stuck in the World**

Failure, by definition, is a lack of success. Another definition is the lack of expected or required action. Therefore, to paraphrase, failure is when you do not succeed, when you fall short of what should be, but, also, when you do not correct your actions, your thoughts, and yourself in its entirety. There are a couple of moments in the New Testament that stands out as great examples of failure.

The first is found in both Matthew 19 and Mark 10. This is the story of a young man who seems so excited by the things proclaimed by Jesus during His teaching; a young man that seems as if he wants to become a follower, a devout member, of the growing flock. He comes to Christ, and asks, "Good Teacher, what must I do to have eternal life? Good Teacher, what must I do to be saved?". Jesus tells the man that he must follow the commandments. When the young man tells the Lord that he has accomplished all those things, Christ tells him to then sell off the worldly riches that he has, to give up what the world has given the young man, and to follow Christ.

At this point, the young man becomes quiet. He becomes depressed. He is sorrowful. I can imagine a great struggle taking place inside of this young man because he is stuck between truly following the Lord and the riches that he has in this world. Unfortunately, he chose wrong; the young man chose his riches in this world rather than choosing the Lord.

That is how he failed.

This could have been a simple misstep, a stumble or fall, for the young man, but since there is no further mention of him after this point, the assumption is that he never turned away from the things of the world. He pursued them, and only them, even if he kept most of the commandments.

One factor that made him fail is because, despite all of his efforts, he did not love God first, with all of his heart. How do we know this? Because he could not get away from the possessions he had in this world. They were first in his life. He loved them over the Father. 1 John 2:15 tells us, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them."

There are times when we desire the things of this world, may become envious or jealous, or just want something so much that it becomes first in our lives; times when what we want in this life, a nice house, expensive car, electronics, or even a person that is in a relationship with another, that take our focus away from God.

James 4:4, "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." That is what we are when we put the things of this world before God. The main difference as to why most of us just fall rather than fail in this area is, unlike the young man that could not give up his riches for Christ, that we see the error of what we are doing and attempt to correct it. We come back to the Father and desire Him. Through every desire and addiction, everything

that is of the world, our eyes want to seek Him out diligently. We are still beings of the flesh, trying to overcome it with each day, but our hearts yearn for God, and not the things just of this world.

Now, as an example, what if we add a factor of wanting to follow the Lord to the young man? Add in the ability to sell off the property and possessions? Then we end up with Ananias and Sapphira.

Acts 5 brings us the tale of these two. After seeing what Barnabas does, selling off the entirety of his possessions to give to the early church and ministry of the Way, Ananias and Sapphira decided to do the same. But they decided to lie and keep a portion of what was made from it. When Ananias goes to Peter to give him the money from the sale, Peter knows that Ananias is lying. He gives Ananias a chance to speak the truth. Ananias lies again. And Ananias drops dead.

Now, it is Sapphira's turn. And what does she do? The same thing that Ananias did. She lied. Not just to Peter, but to the Spirit. They lied about something that they owned, something that was theirs, stating they were giving everything when they weren't. Very easily, they could have just stated that they wanted to give this much, this amount, from the sale of the land, and kept the portion that they wanted. After all, it was theirs, to begin with.

But they chose to lie. And to lie again.

Each of them had the chance to come clean about the actions they were taking, about the greed they felt toward the worldly things they had. Had they spoken the truth about it, they would not have died. But it grieved the Holy Spirit so much that they were not given another chance. To me, this says that they were not ever going to change; that they were not truly filled with the Spirit and looked to just look good for the world.

To bring back 1 John 2:15, the love of God was not in them, for they were in love with the world and what the world was; they were in love with the material things. In that way, they conformed to the world. For so many years of their lives, they were purely fleshly beings that followed nothing more than the desires of the heart and flesh and followed a pseudo-Judaism that had been corrupted, at that point, by man.

Romans 12:2 tells us not to be conformed to the world but transformed by the renewal of our minds. It tells us that this is the way to know the will of God and to follow the will of God. Ananias and Sapphira were conformed to the world. The young man was conformed to the world. They loved the idea of Christ and what He was offering, but they did not love Christ. They did not choose to follow Him and relinquish the hold the things of this world had on their lives.

So, they failed. They never turned away and made the right choice. They chose a path that kept them away from the love of God and truly knowing the Father.

That is what should be considered while reading this while studying, and pondering the things you want or need in your life according to your feelings. Is this what God wants for me? Is this something that I can bless the Father with? Use for His gain and not mine? And we need to make sure to be completely honest with ourselves when we do look. It would be too easy to say yes to every question in favor of God, but then let our flesh, our desires, and our hearts, conform to the world and what the world wants.

### **Subsection Two: Failures of Kings**

When we look at kings, especially early kings regarding the early nation of Israel, we must think of God-appointed men chosen for this duty. The early kings of Israel were selected by God through the hand of the prophet Samuel. These were supposed to be men above reproach, men after God's own heart, and men that would instill the will of God in the land. Yet, as time would tell, they were still men and still fallible as all men are. They made mistakes. They faced challenges. And they served their nation and God to varying levels of success.

Saul was the first king of Israel. On top of that, Saul is one of the examples of failing over falling.

1 Samuel brings us the history of how Saul came to be king. Samuel lamented over the fact the people's wanted a king rather than a judge, as had been the previous custom; the people wanted to be as the rest of the nations were. That sets Saul up at the very start. While he was chosen by God through His prophet Samuel, Saul only came into position because the people wanted to be like the rest of the world.

However, the real failure of Saul comes when the battle is looming, all-out war, and Samuel tells him to wait on him before sacrificing to God.

The Philistines mustered a mighty army of 3,000<sup>sq</sup> chariots, 6,000 charioteers, and as many warriors as the grains of sand on the seashore! They camped at Micmash east of Beth-aven. The men of Israel saw what a tight spot they were in; and because they were hard-pressed by the enemy, they tried to hide in caves, thickets, rocks, holes, and cisterns. Some of them crossed the Jordan River and escaped into the land of Gad and Gilead. Meanwhile, Saul stayed at Gilgal, and his men were trembling with fear. Saul waited there seven days for Samuel, as Samuel had instructed him earlier, but Samuel still didn't come. Saul realized that his troops were rapidly slipping away. So he demanded, "Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings!" And Saul sacrificed the burnt offering himself. Just as Saul was finishing with the burnt offering, Samuel arrived. Saul went out to meet and welcome him, but Samuel said, "What is this you have done?" (1 Samuel 13:5-11)

Instead of trusting what God had spoken through Samuel, Saul had to have it his way. Instead of waiting on God's timing, Saul had to save face and calm his disquieted people. Saul disobeyed.

Saul sacrificed what Samuel was supposed to sacrifice and passed by the blessing that would have been his had Saul just done what the Lord had wanted.

Saul replied, "I saw my men scattering from me, and you didn't arrive when you said you would, and the Philistines are at Micmash ready for battle. So I said, 'The Philistines are ready to march against us at Gilgal, and I haven't even asked for the Lord's help!' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering myself before you came." "How foolish!" Samuel exclaimed. "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. Had you kept it, the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom must end, for the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart. The Lord has already appointed him to be the leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command." (1 Samuel 13:11-14)

Because of his actions, Saul would lose his kingdom. The lineage of Saul would not continue to rule over the land of Israel, and another would take his place. How often is it that we miss out on the blessings and callings that God has placed upon us, out there for us, because we cannot wait for His timing? Because we cannot follow the directions He gave us?

Later we see Saul choosing himself over the will of God, choosing his own mortal life, rather than being the conqueror he was originally supposed to be.

"Meanwhile, Saul and his 600 men were camped on the outskirts of Gibeah, around the pomegranate tree" (1 Samuel 14:2)

If you read the surrounding verses, you find out that the Philistines had worked it in a way to keep Israel unarmed for the very reason that they might revolt against them. From a human standpoint, this fact makes what Saul did understandable, even relatable. But the error that Saul made is he had no faith. He worried only about himself and his reign as king, and the legacy he would leave behind in his son.

It is in Saul's son Jonathan that we see how Saul failed. Jonathan and his sword-bearer went forth, had faith, and the Lord showed up for them.

"...No one realized that Jonathan had left the Israelite camp. To reach the Philistine outpost, Jonathan had to go down between two rocky cliffs that were called Bozez and Seneh. The cliff on the north was in front of Micmash, and the one on the south was in front of Geba. "Let's go across to the outpost of those pagans," Jonathan said to his armor-bearer. "Perhaps the LORD will help us, for nothing can hinder the LORD. He can win a battle whether he has many warriors or only a few!" (1 Samuel 14:3-6)

Saul refused to act while Jonathan showed his faith. Saul had no faith. He was going to sit and wait, let the world move around him, and surely bring the destruction of Israel, rather than step out in faith. Saul worried over his own skin rather than the progress of God. Our relationship with the Lord strives on our faith in Him, our willingness to act, and do, and call upon Him. But Saul could not see that. Saul only saw the end of his reign as king.

That self-centeredness led to more self-centered actions. That idea of self-preservation lingered in Saul. Look at when Samuel anointed David as the next king of Israel.

When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres. As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David. The next day an evil[a] spirit from God came forcefully on Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand 11 and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice. (1 Samuel 18:6-10)

Just because his appearance was tarnished, Saul grew to hate David, he wanted to kill David. Saul wanted to take him out of the picture. This continues through chapters 19-24 in multiple attempts, such as sending David to fight one hundred Philistines on his own. How are we like this in our own lives? How do we use our desires for self-promotion, self-preservation? Saul has focused so much on himself, so much on the fact that his actions took him out of favor with God that Saul could not stand to see another come into favor. Are there times that we do that?

In Samuel 28 we see where Samuel has passed away, David is becoming more popular, and Saul made the decree that all witches must be put to death, must be vanquished, and exterminated from the world. Look at what Saul does in this situation. Saul was so caught up in himself, so focused on the I, me, and my, the fear that he had, that he broke his decree. That he used a witch or medium to summon Samuel that he may provide answers to all of Saul's problems when Saul was the one that created all his problems and needed just to come back into the Father rather than stay fully in himself.

And he paid the price for it. Samuel tells Saul that God has left him, that the Philistines will defeat him, and that Saul and his family will soon be with Samuel in death. Disobedience, self-absorption, and living only for himself, are what brought this on for Saul.

The first commandment tells us, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Saul failed because he put himself before God and His will. Saul was his own idol, first in his own life. This made Saul his own God. He had himself set above all else, through times of victory and times of fear.

Far too often, especially in society today, we are told that we need to put ourselves first, that we need to place our wants and needs, our greatest desires, before everything else. Popular culture pushes this idea on us, and more often than most would like to admit, we fall for it. We live for ourselves rather than God. This frame of mind leads only to a path of failure if we continue down it. The story of King Saul shows us that.

### **Section Three: Conclusion/Connecting the Dots**

When we mess up, when we do something wrong, we often consider that to be a failure. We consider it to be the end-all of any situation. What we may not realize is that it could be. There are so many more examples that could be used to express what it is to fail over what it is to fall. The ones that I have chosen to express are just a few of the many.

Each act expressed during the examples of falling could easily have become failures. What was expressed as failures could have been just stumbling blocks. The main difference between the two is if and how we recover from the action or even.

Jesus tells us that He has overcome the world in John 16:33, and by His gift of salvation to us, by Him coming to dwell within us through the Holy Spirit, Christ has made us overcomers. We are made into new beings in 2 Corinthians 5:17, ones that can stand up after we fall. People that can recover and turn their eyes back to the Lord.

Every person is fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). God has knit us together within the womb to be what and who He has desired us to be (Psalm 139:13), with our personalities put to seed, our iniquities, our weaknesses, rooted, and a goal placed on our lives. God has selected us. He has shaped us, created us from nothing with His own hands.

When we fall we cannot stay in the mindset that it will happen again so we should stay right where we are. We cannot let the fear of that moment, the worry and anxiety, overtake us and keep us from climbing back out of the pit we created. He did not make us to be fearful. When we accepted the gift of salvation and were created new, we were made so that we would be courageous. We were made to be warriors in this spiritual fight and given the armor so that we can be effective at it.

On that same note, we were not created to be self-centered, self-serving beings that looked only within and not toward the will of the Father. We were created to be servants. Jesus told us to be servants, to serve others as He served us (Mark 9:35). As such, we need to remain humble. We are warriors, mighty and strong in the Lord, and servants, humble and willing.

Most of all, we need to learn to stand up and come back to Christ when we have fallen. We need to learn not to be defeated, to brush our shoulders off, and come to God in prayer. In that time with Him, we must admit the fault that we had, admit the weakness of our flesh, and repent, actively repent, and seek the Lord even more (Acts 3:19)

There is no room in our lives as successful Christians to dwell in shame and attempt to hide away what the Father knew would be before we were born. There is no room for us to live just for ourselves and not for others. There is no time for us to live in fear or have anxiety about the actions we have taken and the mistakes we have made. Those attitudes will cause you to fail.

You may have taken a fall, but do not let it turn into failure. Stand back up and turn to the Lord. God is there to help raise you back to your feet.