

7 FAILING WELL



PREPARATION

- Read Chapter 7 “Failure, Disappointment and Hope” from the book “God at Work” by Ken Costa
- Watch the conversation starter “Failing Well”: www.godatwork.org.uk/series/failing-well
- Another great story in this area is at the Europartners’ YouTube channel -> conference 2015: **“What do You Fear?”** by Evert Jan Ouweneel

SESSION OBJECTIVE

- Learn to deal with feelings of failure, disappointment and hope
- Rebuild broken relationships and trust
- What can we learn from pain and failure?
- How can we rebuild hope and a positive perspective for the future?

Remember that there are people who are depressed or who have physical illnesses and find it difficult to believe and to rediscover hope.

These sessions are aimed at ‘average’ circumstances and ‘the average’ person in the daily context of life and work. And may not be applicable to all people and all circumstances or situations.

WELCOME

Welcome everyone to this weekend session
Give a broad outline of the weekend programme

FOR EXAMPLE

Friday evening:

- 06.30 pm Dinner
- 07.30 pm Start by praying for the Holy Spirit to be present during the weekend
- 08.00 pm Chapter 7 ‘Failing Well’
- 10.00 pm Time together to relax

Saturday:

- 08.00 am Breakfast
- 09.00 am Chapter 8 ‘Spiritual Renewal’ incl. film and discussion
- 10.45 am Tea and coffee and a short walk
- 11.30 am Chapter 9 ‘Challenges of Spiritual Growth’
- 12.30 pm Lunch
- 01.30 pm Prayer time
- 03.30 pm End of weekend

OPENING PRAYER FOR THE WEEKEND

Ask for openness and trust. Pray for God's presence and the strength of the Holy Spirit.

THE INTERACTIVE INTRODUCTION – PART 1

LEARN TO DEAL WITH FEELINGS OF FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT

Everyone has experienced feelings of failure and disappointment.

We have been overlooked for a promotion or we notice that our efforts are not really appreciated by our superiors. We have failed to secure an important order or a colleague lets us down and because of this we are unable to achieve what is expected of us. Or we have made a big mistake and are filled with shame.

During the 2008–2009 crisis, many businesspeople experienced these feelings of failure and disappointment when they went bankrupt or when they needed to return to the bank to apply for more capital.

We all suffer from such mistakes or disappointments. Some of these barely affect our current performance. Others, however, can leave scars that deeply affect us for years to come, especially when we find ourselves in similar situations.

It is important that we learn to deal with feelings of failure and disappointment. We often experience in our disappointment a sense of rejection, or we blame our failure on someone else. We may even be so badly affected by life that we have lost hope and feel that we are no longer capable of working towards recovery or renewal.

God wants to be there for us in difficult times like these; He wants to renew our strength and hope; not just put before us a positive view on the future, but provide us with love, hope, forgiveness and renewal, founded on the death and resurrection of His son Jesus Christ.

Broadly spoken, there are two types of failure and disappointment:

FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT BECAUSE OF OUR OWN MISTAKES

The only way of truly growing is by trying different things, with the chance of these things going wrong. If you want to make sure that you will never fail, then

you should do nothing or stay safely within the bounds of what is expected of you.

FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT THROUGH VULNERABILITY AND THE TRAGEDIES OF LIFE

We live in a world that we thought could be shaped into what we consider the perfect, ideal society: ideals of perfect health, beauty, youthful vitality, prosperity, wealth, and growth. These ideals are disrupted by old age, illness and death, and now also by the economic crisis.

FEELINGS

Share your own experiences with the issues discussed below

REJECTION AND GODS LOYALTY

Businesspeople who fail to achieve the success they had in mind for their businesses often experience feelings of rejection. They feel that their lack of success is a personal failure and sometimes believe that this lack of 'blessing' is a sign that God has rejected them.

It is important to remember here that we were created by a God that loves us with a unique and powerful love.

He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32)

God's loyalty is the source of Christian hope and comes from the knowledge that we were created by God and that He loves all of us (Romans 5:5) and, through the work of His son Jesus, is fully dedicated to us.

God has invested in our lives through the death of Christ, and has marked us with His stamp of ownership: the Holy Spirit. And for this reason, we can be sure of His love and His assistance. Our lives therefore have eternal value. For more on this, see Romans 8:23–39.

Feelings of rejection are very human, and are often fed by past experiences. Parents, friends or other important people in our childhood who could not love us as God intended them to are often what push us to prove ourselves on a business level. When we fail or are not successful enough, we often experience feelings of failure or disappointment.

God's unbreakable loyalty, trust and love can give us the courage to prevail. What is more, we may know that we were wanted and were, therefore, created by God. He loved us first.

ANGER AND THE FORGIVENESS OF JESUS CHRIST

In many situations where life does not go as we had expected, we often look for someone to blame. And we ask ourselves whose fault it is.

If a supplier ends up bankrupt because of the bankruptcy of a large customer, this customer is often blamed for everything that goes wrong. We focus all our feelings of anger, revenge and bitterness on this one customer.

This can also happen if people are made redundant because the company that they are working for is hit by a decreasing turnover. We direct our negative feelings towards the management or our direct bosses and make comments such as, 'I have always said it... money is just thrown around... management is incompetent'.

You may also start blaming yourself for all the trouble. In some cases you may be paying for the consequences of your own bad decisions. There are often reasons and consequences that can be pinpointed in difficult and painful situations. It is remarkable to see how God deals with these.

Jesus paid for our failure on the cross. He gave us riches instead of poverty. And we can ask God every day to take our guilt, mistakes and failures and exchange them for blessing, peace, security and purpose. This requires accountability on our part in our relationships and to our debtors.

Much of the pain and disappointment in the workplace is caused by people. Sometimes these are people close to us, for example, colleagues, and sometimes these are people who are not as close, such as project leaders or clients. Although it is not always easy, we as Christians are called to live in peace with everyone (Romans 12:18). This means that we must take the first step towards repairing broken relationships. First we need to learn to say 'sorry' and to forgive the other for what he or she has done to us.

I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you? (Matthew 18:32-33)

Besides clashes in personalities, relationships may also be fractured because of different values that different people hold. As Christians, we should feel very strongly about integrity, but not everyone feels this same way. If a colleague is being dishonest towards a client, this can clearly create friction. However, we are going to have to find ways of dealing with this, because we still have to work with this colleague.

SELF-PITY AND RENEWAL BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Certain situations may cause us to doubt ourselves and our future, to feel that we have had enough and cannot continue. In turn, we may develop feelings of self-pity and get stuck in this downward spiral of negativity. It may seem that the whole world is against us, that no one is willing to help and that there is no way out. These feelings can lead to paralysing fatalism.

Know that the Bible says that there is always hope. The final words here on earth will not be spoken in this world by humans. God Himself stands at the beginning and at the end. It is God Himself who, from the lowest point of human history, the murder of His own son, allowed for the birth of a new and better future.

The grain of corn dies in order that it may bear much fruit. Death in the Bible is not the end; it is merely a new beginning.

The Holy Spirit wants to equip us with God's resurrection power so that we might live anew.

[May] God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father... give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation ... that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope ... and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead. (Ephesians 1:17-20)

TASK

We are called to put notions such as 'unconditional hope' and 'faith' into practice in our lives. There is still energy in our existence. Search for this energy and try to get back up on your feet.

- Are you still healthy and can you still perform physical labour?
- Do you have some money set aside and are you able, with the right advisers, to start something new?
- Are you mentally fit and able to use your mental capacity to contribute to a company or organisation?
- Can you still pray for and bless others?
- Can you still maintain loving and valuable relationships?

Those that try too hard to hold on to this life will lose it; dare to let things go and begin anew with less. Follow Christ in His love and make yourself valuable by serving in love.

Our ancestors built a new Europe out of the chaos of the Second World War. The Jews rebuilt the land of Israel after the Holocaust. And the Netherlands built the delta works after the floods in 1953.

Remember that in this life, failure is refusing to get back up after you have fallen.

Note for the speaker

Remember that there are people who are depressed or who have physical illnesses and find it difficult to believe and to rediscover hope. Keep this in mind during the small group discussions.

THE INTERACTIVE INTRODUCTION – PART 2

FAILURE – AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW

Share with the group an example of failure in your life that gave you the opportunity to grow.

WE ONLY FAIL IF WE FAIL TO LET JESUS INTO OUR LIVES

It is inevitable that we will fail from time to time. If a project fails, this does not mean that you as a person have failed. We must avoid falling into a spiral of negativity. Jesus wants to complete our lives and our work – and He will.

[I am] confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6)

EXERCISE 7.1

1. List a number of 'failures' from the past year (in your work and personal life)
2. How did you respond to these failures?
3. Is this how you normally respond to bad news and failure?

Share your answers in your small group after this introduction.

ADMIT YOUR MISTAKES HONESTLY AND LEARN FROM THEM

In John 21, the disciples had been out fishing all night, and when they were asked whether they had caught anything they were honest enough to say, 'We have no fish'. But they still believed in Jesus' ability to turn their situation around. When they followed His instructions to fish on the right side, their nets were filled to bursting (John 21:6).

FAILURE CAN SOFTEN YOUR PRIDE AND TEACH HUMILITY

God can use misfortune and failure, even though He did not cause it.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)

RESTORING RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

The Bible teaches us that we must be people of compassion and of truth.

If our trust in others has been fractured, we must learn to forgive them and rebuilt our trust in them. Reconciliation lies at the heart of Christian faith and pushes us, usually against our instincts, to begin to rebuild trust.

Trust can be fractured by the wrong choices:

- Infidelity that has come to light.
- A possible bankruptcy that a partner does not know about, but will have to bear the consequences of. Business owners and people with money problems will often hide their accounts and carry on living as if there is nothing wrong. This works well, until the debt collector arrives on the doorstep and the unknowing partner or family members are confronted with enormous debts and much misery.

These are examples of broken trust that are not easily restored, even if there is forgiveness and both parties want to resolve the issues.

HOW TO REBUILT TRUST

Trust takes time to grow but is quickly destroyed. Remember that in processes like these, trust does not automatically reappear the next morning.

- Building trust after an unresolved conflict takes time – pain needs time to heal. Recognise this and take the time. Make sure that the damaged trust is not fractured again because you think the issue is already solved. The person who causes the loss of trust often believes that the situation is already resolved, while the victim is often still processing the pain.
- Recognise that people will keep making mistakes. The chances of you being hurt again in the future are big. Unfortunately this is a truth. Try to be realistic about this.
- The enemy will try to feed the victim's pain. Satan tries to feed the painful memories, and will keep bringing up critical questions in the victim's mind about the other person, making the victim aware again and again of the

mistakes made by the person that damaged the trust. As the victim, be alert and fight these attacks by Satan by praying for the other person. Pray that the other might be blessed and helped.

Note for the speaker

Remember that this is easier in business conflicts than in deep personal issues, such as incest. Make sure that this distinction is clear and that the course sticks to work and work related relationships. If other, deeper issues do arise during the sessions, refer people to professionals.

HOW TO RESTORE AND RESURRECT HOPE

The following six steps can help to start dealing with the disappointment and in leading the victim to recovery.

1. Turn to God

After Jesus' crucifixion, two of the disciples were walking to Emmaus. As they discussed recent events, somebody came along and joined them, and finding them downcast enquired what they were talking about. They told this man their story, and he in turn was able to put the crucifixion into a better perspective. It was only afterwards that they realised that this man was Jesus. It is important to talk to God about our disappointments and give Him the chance to put them into a broader perspective. The danger is that in our disappointment we do not turn to God. And when we do turn to Him, it is often to blame Him and remind Him of His responsibility. After all, He could have saved us from disappointment.

2. Face the facts

Abraham and Sarah were very realistic when it came to their wish for a child. Physically speaking, they were too old, but they remained open for God to work in and through them. And we too must face the facts: Where do we stand, what has happened and what does this do to us? At the same time, we can remain open to God's power that can overcome any obstacle.

3. Meditate on Scripture

Led by the Spirit, we can find promises in the Bible appropriate to our situation. He enables us, encourages us and helps us through these times of disappointment to grow in faith.

4. Keep a journal

Especially when you are going through a particularly difficult period, it is helpful to write down your thoughts, Bible verses and the encouraging words of others. After a while, when you read back through your journal, you will see a certain pattern and God's hand working through this.

5. Persevere in hope

We naturally long for immediate and instant solutions. In reality this is seldom what happens. But by holding on to our hope and faith, we will see that God eventually takes us where He intends for us to be. Disappointment wants to restrict us, but hope is dynamic and powerful and gives us new perspective.

6. A group of trusted friends

Share your life with people that you can be open with, who have good advice and can pray for you.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR WHEN LOSING A JOB OR FOR BUSINESS FAILURE

Share examples from your own life

Use a practical and pragmatic approach, based on the trust that God has in you.

- Continue building your networks
- Look into new markets
- Focus on your strengths and search for an environment where your weaknesses are accepted and you can be yourself
- Be patient and guard your boundaries
- Dare to be happy with less
- Wait on the Lord (Psalm 27)

Psalm 27

Here we have an example of David speaking about his trust, hope and faith: He then turns out to be going through one of the darkest periods of his life.

The positive note at the beginning of this Psalm was perhaps a kind of 'whistle in the dark', keeping up his courage and trying to drown out his fear. But then he lands back with both feet on the ground and calls out to God, who does not seem to be there. Still, he keeps waiting and trusting and speaks words of encouragement to himself.

[B]e strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. (Psalm 27:14)

