

LESSON 1: DEALING WITH FAILURE

This includes:

- 1. LEADER PREPARATION**
- 2. LESSON GUIDE**

1. LEADER PREPARATION**LESSON OVERVIEW**

We are all going to fail. A lot. It's just a fact of life—even if we don't want to acknowledge it. Too often we allow our failures to destroy us emotionally, physically, and spiritually. We believe the lie that experiencing failures means we ARE failures! God's enemy tries to use these lies to take away our freedom and hold us prisoner. But we can help our students find ways to grow and trust Jesus more when they fail.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1. WHAT:** Failure is part of life—what we do with that failure is what's most important.
- 2. WHY:** If we don't respond to our own failure properly, it may ruin us, but responding to failure appropriately will move us forward, not backward.
- 3. HOW:** Teenagers will be challenged to recognize that we all have moments of failure, and they'll be encouraged to forget about past failures and instead view the ultimate goal they have in Jesus as motivation to move in the right direction.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 4

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

Psalms 73:26 and Philippians 3:12-14

TEACHING PREP

**LEADER
TIP**

Use this short overview to prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your group, you'll want to absorb it as you prepare to lead.

Read 2 Corinthians 4.

Failure is part of the human experience. What's amazing about failure is that we can learn much from it. Unfortunately, we often lose our way when we fail. As you read this passage and the other Scriptures for this lesson, focus on the ways failure is addressed and handled.

We are fragile and face pressures that push us to achieve, win, and come out looking perfect. Sometimes we feel pressure from others to perform, sometimes we put the pressure on ourselves, and sometimes we don't even know where the pressure is coming from. But we are not perfect. We mess up and make mistakes. But experiencing failures doesn't make us failures.

Here in 2 Corinthians 4, the Apostle Paul offers personal experience as a lens for looking at failure differently. In the midst of pressure and confusion and suffering and persecution, Paul turned toward Jesus. We can make that same choice in our lives. Jesus is our rock and our foundation, a source of strength and stability. Knowing this can help us to hold on during the storms that plague us—and this truth helps us return to the path of freedom when our failure happens in an area of weakness or an area that we thought was no longer a temptation.

This lesson presents opportunities for you to share how you have responded well and responded poorly to your own failures—with a measure of wisdom and discretion, of course.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

TEXTS OR TWEETS

Send one or both of these messages to your students prior to your meeting. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Ever mess up? Blow it? Completely fail? Want some encouragement and help in moving forward? Come out tonight—you will be encouraged!
- Are you ready to discover a new way of responding to your failures? Get ready for great conversation this week.

PARENT EMAIL

Send this email to parents following the lesson to encourage them to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We've launched a new series focusing on the theme "Staying Free." Each week, students are examining a different passage of Scripture to discover truths and insights about how they can stay free in Christ even when things don't go the way they had planned.

In this first conversation, we looked at 2 Corinthians 4 and talked about how we deal with failure. Obviously, this is a common theme for us all and is quite relevant for teenagers. We talked about how we all experience times of failure, that God is interested in our response, and how failure can push us toward a deeper faith.

This week, I encourage you to spend a few minutes talking with your teenager about our lesson. Consider building your conversation around these questions:

- Why do most people view failure as a negative thing that should be avoided at all costs?
- How do you typically deal with things when you mess them up?
- Do your past failures ever keep you from moving forward and make you feel like you aren't growing as a person and as a follower of Jesus? If so, how do you need Jesus' help?
- What is one way you are learning to move beyond past failures?

Thanks for all your prayers for our students and our ministry. Have a wonderful week!

LESSON 1: DEALING WITH FAILURE**2. LESSON GUIDE****GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]****LEADER
TIP**

Preview the following video for your group: youtube.com/watch?v=zLYECljmnQs. You will need an Internet connection and a computer or tablet to display the video for your participants. This clip takes a look at famous people who have famously failed—a great opener for today’s conversation. Be prepared to stop the video at the 2:35 mark.

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, show the video, and then ASK:

- Which story in that video was most surprising or inspiring? Why?
- How would our world be different if these people had listened to the voices telling them they weren’t good enough to keep trying? Be as specific as possible.
- What do you think motivated them to keep going and succeed?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Each of these famous people experienced failure or had to endure other people saying they’d never succeed. Thankfully, they did not give up or listen to those voices of criticism and discouragement. But imagine all the people who have given up—or have believed the critical, negative words from other people. Our world has missed out because they had something to contribute, something to offer—but failure became their impassable and insurmountable obstacle. Fortunately, it doesn’t have to be that way for you and for me.*

TEACHING POINTS**LEADER
TIP**

Use the Teaching Points to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. Remember: All throughout these lessons, it’s up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read 2 Corinthians 4 together as a group. Consider dividing verses among your students so several people have a chance to read.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Let’s spend a few minutes unpacking this Scripture and see what we can uncover about how to deal with failure.*

1. FAILURE IS A COMMON EXPERIENCE

ASK:

- *Tell us about a time you failed at something—but make sure it's something funny that we can all laugh about together, not a failure that's still painful for you to discuss.*
- *Why do most people view failure as a negative thing to be avoided at all costs?*
- *Is that your attitude toward failure, too—or did it used to be your attitude? Explain.*
- *Think about specific things that you are really good at and do well—how does failure cause you to forget those things?*
- *Have you ever felt like you were the only one that wasn't good enough at something? What was that like, and what did you learn from that experience?*
- *What is the biggest thing in life that you fear you'll fail at?*
- *What's the difference between experiencing a failure and seeing yourself as a failure?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *If we view failure as something to avoid at all costs, we'll never take risks. We won't apply for that college or try to meet that person or walk away from that addiction or tell that friend about our faith in Jesus. But if we acknowledge that failure is part of life, then we're more willing to take those risks and to pursue freedom in Christ. Think about those people in that video who failed but then achieved success. We aren't alone. Failure is something that is common to all of us. And just because you experience a failure doesn't mean you are a failure—always remember that!*

2. HOW YOU RESPOND TO FAILURE MATTERS

ASK:

- *How do you typically respond to your own failures?*
- *What kinds of negative emotions have you faced during and after a big failure?*
- *Have you ever failed at something without getting discouraged or beating yourself up for it? If so, share how that happened.*
- *Look at verses 8 and 9—when have you been “pressed on every side by troubles,” or “perplexed” or “hunted down” or “knocked down” but not defeated? What made the difference?*
- *What does it take to get knocked down by an area of weakness but not fall back into an addiction or a pattern of destructive behavior?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Jesus will never abandon you. He promises it. You may feel like you have failed yourself, everyone around you, and God. And other people may reject or abandon you because of a failure. But Jesus will not leave you. Jesus will never reject you. You can have hope in him, and he can carry you through life's difficult moments—even if you relapse or return to old ways or give in to a sin you thought was no longer a temptation. And with that kind of knowledge, you can choose to view failures as a temporary setback and an opportunity for growth.*

3. FAILURE CAN PUSH YOU TOWARD A DEEPER FAITH

ASK:

- Read *Philippians 3:12-14*. What's the most recent goal you set for yourself? If you've achieved it, what did it take? If not, what is it currently requiring?
- What is the value of setting a goal?
- As a follower of Jesus, what kinds of "goals" can help you to move forward after a failure?
- What does it take to learn important truths or gain beneficial experiences from failure?
- Do you learn more from your own failures or other people's failures? Why?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *This passage from *Philippians* encourages us to look toward the future in order to walk through our current difficulties. Our past failures try to come up and grab us and keep us from moving forward, but when we look at the prize that God is calling us to, we can find freedom and find the way forward.*

EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

Ask students to form groups of two or three for these questions.



ASK:

- Think of a few specific "failure" moments from your life. You don't have to share any details, but how have those failures affected you?
- Have any of those failures affected you in a positive way, by producing more Christ-like character or leading you to live differently?
- When do you struggle most to let go of the past?

Bring everyone back together, and ask for volunteers to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

LIVING IT OUT

ASK:

- Do your past failures ever keep you from moving forward and stop you from feeling like you are growing as a person and as a follower of Jesus? If so, how do you need Jesus' help?
- How do you need Jesus' help in thinking differently about future failures?
- What would it look like this week to begin letting go of your past failures and start moving forward?
- How can this group pray for you this week in the area of handling failure?

Ask students to each find a quiet spot in your meeting area for a few minutes of prayer and reflection. Encourage students to read *Psalm 73:26* and turn that verse into a personal prayer during this time. Consider praying together as a group or asking if any students would like prayer from the rest of the group. Particularly emphasize how even when we fail, we are not failures—and how Jesus wants to lead us back to the place of freedom in him.

SUMMARY



LEADER
TIP

Provide a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) this lesson's content, (2) the dialogue that took place today, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the Scripture below.

"My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever" (Psalm 73:26).