

***A Word from Woody. . .***  
**“What to Do when We Fail?”**

Have you ever tried to do something and it didn't work out? Perhaps it involved a failing grade on a test, or not making a sports team, or trying to win the heart of a love interest who did not reciprocate the affection. We have all been there, done that. The question we all face in such moments is: What do I do when I fail?

In a recent interview, the famous comedian Jerry Seinfeld was asked about this very thing (*Parade*, October 4, 2020, pp. 8-14). The interviewer asked, “You performed on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson in 1981, but it still took eight years until [the tv sit-com] *Seinfeld* launched. Was that a stressful time?” His answer makes one think. He said, “I always say this to my kids: If I had to trade in the experiences I've had in my life, the last ones I'd trade would be the really bad ones. Those I'd hold on to until the end, because those are the ones that harden your resolve.”

Athletes go through such failure on a regular basis. Hall of Famer Bob Lilly of the 1960s and 1970s Dallas Cowboys, just after having lost Super Bowl V by a last-minute field goal and out of frustration at having never won the “big game”, reportedly threw his helmet the length of the football field. The Michael Jordan-led Chicago Bulls of the 1980s and 1990s were the stepchildren of the NBA being bullied and pushed around by the likes of the Los Angeles Lakers and the Boston Celtics. The list, of course, could go on. Perhaps you are experiencing a time of failure in your life, where your dreams have not been realized. What is one to do?

The gospel, interestingly, seems built for such circumstances. I believe there are at least three words of wisdom we can cull from Scripture. The first word of wisdom is: God has got our future. In Matthew 6 Jesus explained that we all need the basics in life—food, drink, clothing—and God knows this. God even takes care of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field with such things. Jesus then encouraged His listeners, “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” I.e., we just need to focus on the present with obeying the Lord and honoring Him, and He will take care of our future and all we need.

The second word of wisdom is: God has got our present. In Paul's letter to the Romans in chapter 8, Paul reminded the believers that he considered the present sufferings as not worth comparing "with the glory about to be revealed to us" (v 18). He went on to tell them that creation is subjected to futility and groans as though in labor pains until its redemption. We don't know how to pray, Paul went on, so the Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us. It is around this point that Paul stated, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (v 28). Two things need to be recognized in this verse. First, the emphasis is on the phrase "for those who love God", for it comes just after "we know that" in the original language. Second, the verb in the phrase "work together for good" is in the present tense—i.e., Paul wanted his readers to know that when we chose to love God He is working good *now* in their present difficult circumstance. The Lord is still doing this today.

The third word of wisdom is: In the midst of our failure and disappointment and weakness, God is teaching us to rely on His strength, *not our own*. In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul spoke of being given a thorn in the flesh, "a messenger of Satan to torment me" (v 7). We don't know what exactly this thorn in the flesh was. Paul said he asked God three times to remove it, and God's answer to him is one we need to remember. ". . . 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness'". Instead of sulking, Paul responded, "So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (vv 9-10).

When we look back on history, we see that Jerry Seinfeld did indeed learn from his struggles and disappointments, and the result was an iconic show that lasted from 1989-1998, and is now seen in re-runs. Bob Lilly and the Dallas Cowboys bounced back from the crushing loss in Super Bowl V and won Super Bowl VI. And Michael Jordan and his Bulls eventually won six NBA Championships. I am not aware of Christ playing a role in these three men's lives as they encountered past failures. So, just imagine the even greater achievements we can do for the Lord and His eternal Kingdom if we take to heart the three words of wisdom above!

In Christ's Love,

Woody