I want to begin with the question, have you ever failed at something? If you’re over the age of 1, you almost certainly would have to say “yes.” Maybe your failure took place in school; you didn’t get into the college that you desperately wanted to get into; or you didn’t get into the graduate program that you applied for because your GPA or your board scores weren’t high enough. Maybe you failed in your marriage. If you are honest to God, you might say that yes, a part of the reason why my marriage didn’t last was my fault. Many of us have failed at some point in our careers. Maybe you didn’t score high enough on a Civil Service exam, or some other test, to get the job you wanted to get, or someone else was promoted to the job that you really wanted, or you’ve been fired some multiple times. Or maybe you’ve experienced financial failure perhaps because of something you did – overspending, or bad money management, or maybe you’ve had to go bankrupt, or you had your house foreclosed on. Failure can extend to distinctively Christian activities – a ministry or mission venture may not have gone as you hoped. You were not hired for the position you sought, or you didn’t get the money you needed. Some failures, of course, are not our fault. We get laid off because of a bad economy, or we get ill and are unable to work. And some failures are spectacular! A few of you got the opportunity to fail in public, in front of the church, or you got your photo in the newspaper regarding your particular failure.

It is absolutely a fact of life that most of wildly successful people have experienced repeated failures. America’s greatest president, Abraham Lincoln, once looked in the mirror and:

Saw a tall, strange-looking man with arms and legs totally out of proportion to his torso, a face that resembled a rutabaga, shriveled skin, hair that was absolutely rebellious, and ears that seemed to flap in the wind.

As Lincoln looked at himself in the mirror, he said:

It is true, Abe Lincoln, you are the ugliest man in the world. If I ever see a man uglier than you, I’m going to shoot him on the spot.

Lincoln was born into poverty. The story of being born in a one-room log cabin with a dirt floor is not just a myth. It is absolutely true. His mother died when he was 9. His beloved fiancée, Anne Rutledge, also died, as did two of his sons. Lincoln was defeated on his first run for the Illinois State Legislature. He was defeated in his first run for Congress. And after he was elected to just one term, he was defeated in his reelection bid. Lincoln was defeated for the U.S. Vice Presidential nomination. He was
defeated in his run for the US Senate. In other words, he lost five elections before becoming our greatest American president.

And then there is Harry Truman. Truman’s terrible eyesight spoiled his plans of going to West Point. His father’s failed business spoiled Harry’s plans for going to college. He studied business for one semester at a small commercial college and then dropped out. When his father’s business failed, Harry took to running his father’s farm and failed as a farmer. Over 8 years the farm sank further and further into debt. At age 27 he proposed marriage to the girl of his dreams, Bess, and she turned him down. He then took all of his savings and invested it in a zinc and lead mine, but prices dropped and he lost all of his investment. Then he invested in an oil well, and that went belly up and left him completely broke.

At age 34 Harry joined the Army and led his men successfully in battle. He returned home as a hero. He went into business and the business totally failed. It wasn’t until he was in his 40’s that he began to win elections for public office.

Failure is not just confined to the political or secular worlds. Talk with Christian leaders and you will almost always hear stories of spectacular failures along the way. Most of you have probably heard of the Calvary Chapel movement. It is a movement of Christian churches that is similar in some ways to the Vineyard movement. Back in the 1970’s, Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa performed over 8000 baptisms in just a few years period. It was the height of the Jesus movement and they saw well over 10,000 people come to Christ just a couple of years.

But the pastor of Calvary Chapel and the founder of that movement, Chuck Smith, spent 17 years repeatedly failing in ministry. During those 17 years he was forced with his wife to move 17 different times to supplement his ministry income. He calls those 17 years his wilderness years, his desert years. Failure after failure.

And then there is Gary Thomas, one of my favorite Christian authors. He’s written a fantastic book on marriage. It is one of my favorite books on marriage titled Sacred Marriage: What if God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More than to Make Us Happy? It is one of the great subtitles in history:

What if God Designed Marriage to Make us Holy More than to Make Us Happy?

Gary Thomas was asked to make a commencement address. He knew the kids wouldn’t remember anything he said, so he decided to do something really novel. He brought up a huge roll of paper and then invited a couple students to come up and help him unroll this huge roll of paper. It spilled over the front of the stage and down through the center of the aisle. Parents and students wondered what he was doing; what was this huge roll of paper? Gary Thomas and his wife and kids had spent the night before taping together 150 of the rejection letters that Thomas had received over the years from publishers for his various manuscripts. It took him eight years of trying before he got his first book published! 150 rejection letters! Thomas said:
I felt like God had given me something to say, but nobody wanted to listen.

Why does God let us fail? Why does God not bless everything that we try? Why does God not allow us to move from one mountaintop of success to another?

I started a series last week on leadership. We’re going to be spending the rest of the summer studying the subject of leadership in the life of Moses. We’re going to be looking at specifically the way that God goes about making leaders. One of the things that we discover in the life of Moses is that when God makes a leader, he almost always uses failure and pain in shaping that leader’s life. Today my message is called “Lessons We Learn Through Failure.” Let’s pray.

Exodus 2:5-10
Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. 6 She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said. 7 Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?” 8 “Yes, go,” she answered. And the girl went and got the baby’s mother. 9 Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him. 10 When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, “I drew him out of the water.”

Now Moses’ life can really be divided into a 3-act play, each lasting 40 years. The first 40 years were spent as the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter in Egypt. It was 40 years of privilege and staggering success. The second 40 years were spent in the desert; 40 years of isolation and obscurity and the experience of failure. And the last 40 years were spent leading the children of Israel in their desert wanderings to the Promised Land.

We’re going to talk about failure today, but I want to begin by talking about good choices. First in the life of Pharaoh’s daughter, we see

A choice to reject her father’s sin

Pharaoh was the dictator in Egypt and had issued a genocidal decree ordering that all the Israelite male babies born be immediately drowned in the Nile River because the Israelites were becoming a threat to Pharaoh’s power in Egypt. But Pharaoh’s daughter had a different spirit from her father. She made a very deliberate choice to not follow in her father’s sin. When she saw the baby Moses, she had compassion on him. We read in Exodus 2:6 these words:

Exodus 2:6
She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said.

Pharaoh’s daughter protected him. One of the more extraordinary decisions on the part of a human being to make a clean break from his family’s sins is seen in the life of Wilhelm Verwoerd. Wilhelm was the grandson of H.F. Verwoerd, the architect of South African apartheid. In 1990 Wilhelm wrote a letter to Nelson Mandela in which he said this, in part:

As an Afrikaner, who benefitted from apartheid at the expense of other South Africans, as the grandson of the architect of “separate development” — the man who above all others was responsible for your long unjust twenty-seven year long incarceration and the suffering of so many other people — I wanted to say to you: I am very sorry.

I can’t ask forgiveness on his behalf. In any case, such a request would easily sound meaningless because I understand so little of what you endured during the last few decades. What I can do is to assure you that my wife and I want to spend the rest of our lives trying to convert words of apology into deeds. So I will spend the rest of my life working to bring about a reconciliation of the races and the fruit of repentance for my own family and my own people’s guilt.

Wilhelm Verwoerd on numerous occasions has literally put his life on the line breaking the chain of sin that was handed down to him by his grandfather.

Friends, like Pharaoh’s daughter, like Wilhelm Verwoerd, you can break the chain of sin that has been passed down to you from your parents or grandparents. In your generation you can say, “This stops with me!” You can have a very different spirit than that of your parents or grandparents. You are not predestined to be just like dad or mom. You don’t have to follow in dad’s footsteps of abandoning his family, or his alcoholism, or adultery, or his treatment of his kids. You don’t have to follow in mom’s footsteps of her anger or anxiety or codependency or perfectionism. You can say, “In my generation, the sin of my father and mother stops with me. I’m making a different choice.”

And you know you can make a different choice if you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ. Here is what the Bible says that for any who turn to Christ in faith, that you are adopted into a new family. God is now your father. Jesus Christ is your older brother. The Holy Spirit is living within you. And you as an adopted son or daughter of God are able to draw from the heritage of God, your Father, and Christ your elder brother. You don’t have to live with the old inheritance any more.

Just as a little parenthesis, I love this ironic statement in verses 7-9:

**Exodus 2:7-9**
Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?” 8 “Yes, go,” she answered. And the girl went and got the baby’s mother. 9 Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him.

Note that when you are in the will of God, God will often pay you for what you would do for free. Moses mother would nurse her baby for free. But when you are in the will of God, God will often pay you for what you would do for free. It may be that God begins to allow you to be paid to do ministry that you do just as a matter of joy. There are times in life where you say, “You mean, I get to be paid to do this?”

We not only see Pharaoh’s daughter’s choice to reject her father’s sin, but we also see Moses’ choice.

A choice to reject the world’s success

We read in Exodus 2:10:

**Exodus 2:10**
When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, “I drew him out of the water.”

Moses became Pharaoh’s daughter’s son. In his first 40 years of life, Moses just moved effortlessly from success to success. Here is what we read in Acts 7:20-22:

**Acts 7:20-22**
At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his parents’ home. 21 When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. 22 Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

The Greek word that Stephen used here in the book of Acts to describe Moses can be translated “fair” or “handsome.” In Exodus 2:2 we read this:

**Exodus 2:2**
and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months.

Women looked at Moses and said, “Oh…he’s fine!” Moses had the benefit of great looks. He had the benefit of a great education:

**Acts 7:22**
Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.
In other words, Moses went the finest universities in Egypt, learning from the best scholars of his time. He was a brilliant speaker and leader, as Stephen said in Acts 7:22:

**Acts 7:22**
Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

Josephus the great historian indicates that when the Ethiopians attacked Egypt and were on the verge of defeating them, Pharaoh appointed Moses to be general over the Egyptian army. And under his dynamic leadership, the Ethiopians were driven back and defeated. Now, we don’t know if this is just part of tradition, or if this is historically true. But we do know that Moses was not only handsome, not only exceptionally well-educated, but he was also a brilliant leader and a brilliant communicator. Here is what we read about Moses:

**Exodus 2:11**
One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people.

Moses saw something. He saw one of his own people being beaten. In fact, Exodus 2:11 underlines the identification of Moses with the suffering of his people by saying twice:

**Exodus 2:11**
One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people.

Surely, this wasn’t the first time that Moses had seen the terrible tragedy of slavery, or the suffering of the Israelite people. But perhaps in the past he had pulled the shades shut not only in his chariot, but perhaps also in his heart. Perhaps in the past he refused to really look at what was going on because to look would mean that he would have to feel and to feel would mean that he had to act. And he wasn’t prepared to do that. But this time, Moses chose to lift the shades on his heart and he looked. Somehow in the providence of God, God in that moment caused Moses to see what he didn’t see before, what he wasn’t willing to see before.

We have a man in our congregation who is an Iranian immigrant. He came over to this country as a young man. Starting with nothing, he became a success in business. He told me once, “Rich, for years I looked at poor people in America and I said to myself, what is the matter with that person? I came to America with nothing and I was able to make it. Why can’t that person lift themselves up as well and become a success in a country as great as America?” But sometime after this Iranian man came to Christ, he said, “Something in my heart changed, Rich. I found myself looking at the poor with
new eyes. Something inside of me softened. I felt like I needed to offer help and not just judge.” And so this man began to work in our food pantry. For the last few years, Hassan has overseen our food pantry ministry every Saturday morning, in the snow, rain, in the summer, when he’s tired. He goes down there week after week and oversees our volunteers to make sure hungry people are fed in our city.

Yet Moses made a choice to reject the world’s success. Hebrews 11:24-26:

**Hebrews 11:24-26**
By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

Why would anyone choose to sacrifice comfort and success, to live at a level several notches below what their income will allow, to drive a simpler car so they can financially give more to the work of God? Why choose to give up a successful career in order to go into lesser paid ministry, or give up houses and comfort here in America to join one of our mission teams around the world? Why do people make choices today like Moses did to turn their backs on the world’s success?

I want to show you a brief video clip of a man who leads a clean water project in Tanzania. Our Tanzania Missions Team works alongside of this man to bring clean water to Tanzanians living in the city of Dar Es Salaam.

**A Video Clip**

My son, Daniel, is actually overseeing this man’s water project for the next several months while he is on furlough. Our team is partnering together with this small NGO to bring clean water. And we’ve been partnering together with Thirst Relief in Brazil on the Xingu River as well as in Tanzania.

Why would anyone choose to go to a place like Tanzania when you could stay in America? Why does anyone choose downward mobility? Why did Moses choose downward mobility? When everyone else is getting on the up escalator, why did Moses choose to go down? Here is what it says in Hebrews 11:26:

**Hebrews 11:26**
He [Moses] regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

You know, the subject of rewards in the kingdom of God is one of the most neglected issues in contemporary Christian teaching. We almost never talk about eternal rewards. It seems too much like pie in the sky when you die. But the Bible talks about rewards in
the future kingdom everywhere as the motivation for personal sacrifice right now. Why sacrifice? Why not just indulge yourself and indulge all of your desires?

Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 19:29-30:

**Matthew 19:29-30**

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

God promises us a reward for doing good works:

**Ephesians 6:8**

because you know that the Lord will reward each one of you for whatever good you do.

**Romans 2:6**

God “will repay everyone according to what they have done.”

**Romans 2:9-10**

There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; 10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Jesus particularly promises reward when we show compassion to the poor:

**Luke 14:13-14**

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

Paul reminds us that there is a time-table to being paid by God:

**Galatians 6:9**

Let us not become weary in doing good, for **at the proper time** we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

In other words, God does not settle all of his accounts in this life. Some people receive everything that they’re owed right now. Others who sacrifice for Christ and choose to give up money or success to further the work of God’s kingdom will be rewarded in the future.

So you say, “God, my ministry never fired out; I tried, but I failed.” “The small group never happened.” “This mission didn’t accomplish its goal.” “My sacrifice didn’t bear any fruit.” “Did I just waste my time?” “Did I give up my career for nothing?”
God says to you who think you failed and wasted your time, you or your security, “Don’t worry. I have total integrity. I always settle my accounts. I always pay what I owe. If you did your work for me, even if it failed, I will reward you.”

What do we mean by rewards, or what Jesus calls treasures in heaven, or what Paul calls crowns? It appears that our experience of Jesus will not all be the same. There are going to be differences in position in God’s kingdom. There are going to be differences in authority in God’s kingdom. There are going to be differences in the amount of reward we receive. Some Christian thinkers have said that the kingdom of God is going to be wonderful for everyone, but it will be more wonderful for some than for others because over the course of a lifetime a person has developed a greater capacity to enjoy God in his kingdom than has another person. Or to put it a little differently, we could have two jars of unequal size and both jars can be full. But the one with the greater capacity contains more water, so in God’s kingdom the one who has developed a greater capacity for God in this life will be more full of joy than another who has developed a little capacity for God. Both will be full, but the fullness of joy will depend on what a person has done with their relationship with Jesus Christ in this world.

You say, “Rich, I thought salvation was a gift. I don’t understand when you are talking about rewards, you seem to be hinting that rewards are earned.”

In thinking about this great subject of rewards and why we would choose to do a difficult thing, why we would choose to sacrifice money that we could spend on ourselves now and give it for God’s kingdom through the church, why we would choose downward mobility, we need to distinguish between salvation and rewards.

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<th>Salvation</th>
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<td>Salvation is a free gift of grace</td>
<td>Rewards are earned</td>
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<td>Salvation is a matter of what Christ does for us.</td>
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<th>Salvation</th>
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<td>Salvation is the same for all Christians</td>
<td>Rewards differ between Christians</td>
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<td>Salvation is for those who believe</td>
<td>Rewards are for those who sacrifice and work</td>
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<td>Salvation cannot be lost</td>
<td>Rewards can be lost</td>
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Let me ask you a question: Do you ever think about heavenly rewards? Do you ever say to yourself, “I’m just going to say ‘no’ to this sin, no to my flesh. I’m going to make a choice to please God not because it is going to pay off in the very short term, but it will pay off in the long term”? Do you ever comfort yourself after failing at something, failing in your effort to help someone, failing after years of trying to reconcile a marriage, by
this thought that “The sacrifice I made, it wasn’t simply a waste. God saw it and if not now, in eternity, I will be repaid”?

If you are retired, or thinking about retiring in the next few years, what are you going to do in your retirement years? Are you going to spend your time puttering around the golf course, being a snowbird – enjoying the sun in the winter, coming back up here in the summer, spending all of your time tramping around the world? Do you think that God has invested all of your experience, all of the things you know, so that you could waste them playing golf day after day? Or fixing up another home? Do you think about a reward in heaven?

You know if you are retired, or if you are considering retirement in the next three years, why not rather say, “I’m at a place in my life right now where I don’t need to work 40, 50, 60 hours a week in order to support myself. I’m going to give 2-3 days a week to the promotion of God’s kingdom here through the church.” If that is your situation, you are retired and you say, “You know, I really could do something meaningful. I could give 2-3 days a week; I’m healthy enough to do that,” why not email me at the church at:

Rich.Nathan@VineyardColumbus.org

I will set up a time to meet with you or point you to the pastor I think might be best suited to use your gifts and abilities.

Moses made a good choice. But then Moses made a bad choice.

**Exodus 2:11-12**

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. 12 Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

We see here an act of anger and violence.

An act of anger and violence

The pages of history are stained with the blood of those who have been killed in pursuit of some good cause. Moses killed the Egyptian in the name of the oppressed. So many people have been killed throughout history in the name of the oppressed or in the name of the poor. Abortion doctors have been killed in the name of the unborn. Around the world, and particularly in Asia and the Middle East, thousands of people are killed today in the name of God. In Christian history, tens of thousands of Jews have been killed in the name of Christ.

Moses act was an act of anger and violence. Here is what James 1:20 says:

**James 1:20**
because our anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

It was not only an act of anger and violence, but it was also an act of impatience.

An act of impatience

Moses probably had a growing sense of calling. The Spirit of God was perhaps speaking to him over the course of years underlining and confirming that he was called to deliver his people from their slavery. Perhaps over a period of years Moses had a strong internal calling that he was supposed to be the deliverer of the nation of Israel. And so knowing the will of God, Moses decided to act. And his act was an act of impatience.

So much of our failure comes from a simple unwillingness to wait for God to act. Instead of waiting, we have to make something happen.

You know, it is one thing to know God’s will. It is quite another thing to do God’s will in God’s time and in God’s way.

Let me drop this down and make it personal for you. You may know in your heart of hearts that you are not called to be single. You don't possess the gift of celibacy. The clock is ticking and you are getting older. You are lonely and desperately want to be with someone. You know the will of God. You believe God’s desire for you is to be with someone else. But there is a difference between knowing the will of God and doing it in God’s time and in God’s way, and not knowing the difference creates failure in life.

So you say, “God, you are not working fast enough! I would love to meet a great Christian man or woman, but you haven't brought along one of those. So I'm going to make something happen. I'm going to date outside the faith. I'm going to play pretend and take the most nominal indicators of Christian faith and rationalize it in my mind and say, 'Yes, that person really is a thorough-going Christian!’ I know that they are going to grow and everything is going to be okay. I’m going to close my eyes to the obvious flaws and holes in this person’s life. I won’t wait on you, God, to bring along someone who is emotionally, spiritually, and financially healthy. I'm not going to wait on you, God. I've got to make it happen!”

Have any of you done that? You’ve grabbed the steering will of your life because God wasn’t moving fast enough. And so you grabbed the wheel and jerked it away from God and unfortunately your car has flipped as a result of you jerking the wheel from God. Have you ever done that?

Father Abraham did. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, knew God’s will. But he and his wife could not wait for God to bring along the baby God promised, who would be heir of the promises. And so Abraham slept with Sarah’s servant, Hagar, and they had a child, Ishmael. And Ishmael grew up and caused great pain for them and for their promised son, Isaac.
Often in our impatience, we bring forth Ishmaels. We won’t wait on God’s time. We won’t do things in God’s way. And you know, one of the ways God disciplines us is by letting us have what we impatiently demand.

“Okay,” God says, “you won’t wait on me? You won’t trust that I have your best in mind? Then you can have what you’re going after!” One of the ways that God in his sovereignty disciplines us is that he allows us to have what we will not wait on him to get. “Okay, go ahead, date that man or woman, marry them. Go ahead. And you are going to have to experience is years of a very challenging relationship. Go ahead, buy the big house. You have to have the expensive car. You aren’t willing to do your finances God’s way. Now you will have to be saddled with this massive mortgage or the debt of that car. Go ahead!”

If you won’t seek God’s mind and do his will his way in his time, God will give you what you are after and often it will produce an Ishmael.

Ultimately, what we see in Moses’ choice of murder is what the Bible calls an act of the flesh.

An act of the flesh

Nowhere do we read that God initiated this murder. This was something that Moses chose to do on his own, apart from prayer, apart from God’s guidance.

Chuck Swindoll, the great radio preacher and current President of Dallas Seminary, once said this:

Moses dedicated himself to the will of God, but not to the God whose will it was.

Let me say that again. “Moses dedicated himself to the will of God, but not to the God whose will it was.”

Oh, what a profound statement! Most of the time when you see things going terribly awry in the life of a church, or the life of a Christian leader, it is not because that church or leader is not dedicated to the will of God. It is that the church or leader is not dedicated to the God whose will it is. We see this in churches all the time. We know its God’s will to have the church grow, so we’re going to engage in this great building program for the glory of Jesus Christ. And when the money doesn’t come in, you start hearing the high pressure, arm-twisting tactics of the leaders. Folks are strong-armed to give. There is constant talk about money. The building campaign is not carried out with God’s integrity and God’s gentleness.

Dedicated to the will of God, but not dedicated to the God whose will it is.
We see this all the time with Christians who are involved in some particular justice issue in the world. There is often an understanding of what God’s will is concerning a particular issue of social justice – prolife, or the poor. But because the person is not dedicated to the God who wills justice, the approach taken is the arm of the flesh. It is militant. It is angry. It is mean-spirited. It is narrow and judgmental. The person carrying it out is full of pride.

One of the things I respect so much about a pastor on our staff, Dan Franz, who leads our Urban and Mercy Ministry here in Columbus. Dan has worked with folks in the homeless community for years. Dan has worked with hard-core addicts, crack addicts, alcoholics, people who struggle with mental illness, people who are in nursing homes and prisons. One of the things I love so much about Dan is that he hasn’t gotten jaded over the years from working in this tough environment. He hasn’t grown cynical and he hasn’t gotten a hard shell. Most people note Dan’s gentleness, his graciousness and kindness. Dan’s first priority is not justice. His first priority is to serve the God who is just.

Let me ask you a question: Is there some issue that you care passionately about? Something that God has touched your heart with? Can you honestly say that your highest priority is God and your relationship with God over the ministry, over the issue, over your perception of the will of God?

Moses makes a radically bad choice. He chooses the arm of the flesh. So we see the downward spiral. First, the people rejected his leadership:

**Exodus 2:13-14**
The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?” 14 The man said, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “What I did must have become known.”

And then he had to flee out into the desert:

**Exodus 2:15-21**
When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well. 16 Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father’s flock. 17 Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock. 18 When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, “Why have you returned so early today?” 19 They answered, “An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock.” 20 “And where is he?” he asked his daughters. “Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat.” 21 Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage.
Moses moved quickly from his experience of almost unbroken success in life to a 40 year long period of the desert. It is amazing how quickly the roof can cave in. One day you think everything in your life is going well; the next day your spouse announces they want out of your marriage, or you discover cancer, or you are fired or laid off. What is the desert? If you go to Midian today which would be in the Sinai Peninsula, the Sinai wilderness, you would see a bleak, really desolate place – a place of dry sand and gravel. It is barren. It is a place with chunks of rock and an occasional scraggly bush. It is hot, dry, and barren.

Moses failed through his act of anger and violence, through his act of impatience, through his act of refusing to wait on God, through his act of what the Bible calls the arm of the flesh. He failed. He spent 40 years out in the desert.

Have you ever spent time in the desert? When God makes a leader, he almost always has them spend time in the desert.

How do you know when you are in the desert? Well, the desert is:

A place of isolation

The isolation could come about as the result of sickness, or caring for a sick relative. Isolation can come about by unemployment. The isolation could come about as the result of being put in prison, or persecution. You can even be in the desert, in isolation, in a ministry or mission. The desert is always a place where you are cut off from others. The desert is not only the place of isolation, but:

A feeling of uselessness

You feel like you’ve been set aside. Maybe you had a fruitful ministry for a period of time and then through some failure, or a choice to engage in a new ministry, you find you are in the desert of uselessness. Most missionaries experience the desert for a period of time as they adjust to a new culture. “I was so fruitful in the U.S. and now I am in Africa, in the Middle East, in Europe. I don’t understand the culture. I don’t really like the food. I can’t speak the language. I don’t know why people are reacting the way they are to me. I feel useless, God. I feel like you’ve put me on the back burner. When am I ever going to see fruit again in my life? God almost always puts people he is making into leaders through a long period in which they feel useless.

And the desert is:

An experience of embarrassment

Think about Moses high school class reunion. He gets together with his old high school buddies for the 25 year reunion. Moses was voted most likely to succeed! Good looking; athletic; he’s a leader. At the class reunion, people say, “Hey, Moses, what are
you doing now? Are you getting that custom built throne made for you when you take over after Pharaoh?"

“No, not exactly.”

“Well, what are you doing, Moses?”

“Well, I’m not exactly a prince any longer.”

“Really? What are you doing?”

“Well, I’m a shepherd.”

“You’re a shepherd? So, you’ve got a huge ranch, huh? You’re raising thousands of sheep. I guess that’s okay.”

“Well, I don’t exactly have a ranch.”

“You don’t?”

“I’m living in the desert.”

“Oh, you’ve got a place out in the desert?”

“Well, not exactly that either. I work for my father-in-law. I don’t own my own sheep.”

Have you ever been in the situation where you are talking with some extended family, or an old friend, or a former colleague at work and you are telling them what you are doing, or how your life has gone? You mention the divorce, the baby born out of wedlock, the financial problems. You see in their face that they are saying, “Oh, my goodness! I’m sure glad I’m not you!” The desert almost always involves an experience of embarrassment.

John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement, wrote about his desert experience. God almost always brings desert experiences of embarrassment into the life of someone he’s making into a leader. John was called by God out from the music business just months before his group, The Righteous Brothers, was going to go on tour with the Beatles in the U.S. He said one day an old colleague from the music business came to visit John at the place he was working after he left the music business. This guy walked into the front office and said, “I’m looking for John Wimber.” He assumed John had become an executive in this company. John heard his name. One of the bosses said, “Oh, John Wimber is over there.” At the time, John was upside down inside of an oil drum scrubbing it out. This colleague from work walked over and there is John upside down cleaning an oil drum. He said, “John, what are you doing here?”
The desert is an experience of embarrassment. Why does God bring us into the desert?

Why the desert? So we can learn to do God’s will God’s way. We learn in the desert to not depend on the arm of the flesh. It is so important for people who have always succeeded, who have gone from mountaintop to mountaintop to experience failure and the desert so that we learn to stop operating in our own strength and we learn how to rely on God and to follow God’s leading. Things have to be taken out of our lives, friends, don’t they before we rely on God. We have to get to the end of self, to the end of what self can produce before we cast ourselves totally on the Lord.

Why the desert? For some of us, we have to experience failure and the desert to learn to take God seriously, what the Bible calls the fear of the Lord. Sometimes, for a long period of time, you are able to dance around with sin like a game. You say, “Well, God is not to be taken that seriously and it really doesn’t matter if I obey his commandments or not.” And then one day God permits you to feel the weight of a long series of bad choices. The rug is pulled out from under you. You fail and you fail big time! In that failure and in the desert that results from the failure, you learn the fear of the Lord. “God, for years I’ve played games with you. I rationalized away disobedience. I told myself it really didn’t matter if I pleased you or not. I could always ask your forgiveness and everything would be okay. In the desert I learned to take God seriously.”

And in the desert I learn to be grateful. “Lord, I took blessing for granted in the past. I thought my life would always work.” When everything is stripped away and you are on your back you learn how to be grateful for even small blessings: A day without pain, my daily bread, someone saying something kind to you.

We are going to see next week that God is there in the desert. God is there in failure. God is there when we feel utterly alone. But no one is made into a leader without first walking through the desert. Let’s pray.
Lessons We Learn Through Failure

Rich Nathan
July 12-13, 2008

Moses: Making of a Leader: Leadership Lessons from the Life of Moses
Exodus 2:5-25

1. Good Choices

   A. A choice to reject her father’s sin (Exodus 2:5-10)

   B. A choice to reject the world’s success (Exodus 2:11)
      1. The great success (Acts 7:20-21)
      2. The great choice (Hebrews 11:25-26)
      3. The great reward (Matthew 19:29-30)

2. Bad Choices

   A. An act of anger and violence (Exodus 2:12; James 1:20)

   B. An act of impatience (Genesis 16)

   C. An act of the arm of the flesh (Jeremiah 17:5)

3. The Desert

   A. A place of isolation

   B. A feeling of uselessness

   C. An experience of embarrassment

4. Lessons in the Desert