

Another Chance

Do you know how it feels to have the strangling grasp of discouragement around your heart because of a failure? Have you ever thought, God will never forgive me after what I've done. I might as well give up! I'll never be what God wants me to be if I keep messing up this way. I wonder if God even cares?

Although Satan tries to make a person feel as though he or she is the only one who has ever failed, God's Word shows us this is not true. Some of God's servants actually did backslide, but they repented and recovered to work mightily for Him. Others learned from errors of neglect or of poor judgment and became wise, true, and faithful servants of the Lord.

In applying this to our lives, let's consider the following hypothetical situations:

- Suzi had known better; her parents would be shocked and hurt, and she would have the added responsibility of raising the precious, innocent baby who was soon to be born. If only she had listened when God had talked to her heart! Could God forgive her? Could she forgive herself?
- John knew he should have talked to his uncle about the Lord. God had impressed that upon his heart when he had heard that his uncle was ill with cancer, but he was afraid of what his uncle and the rest of the family would think. Then

came the phone call . . . his uncle had slipped into eternity. John's heart was broken, and he thought, O Lord, what have I done? Why didn't I obey? Will You ever trust me again?

Consider the following questions: Will God give us a second chance if we have sinned or erred in doing His will? How can we find His forgiveness and renewed strength and direction? Let's look to God's Word for the answers.

1 ● The topic of backsliding is controversial in many Christian circles. Is it possible for someone who knows the Lord to fall away from Him? Ezekiel 33:11-13 answers that question for us, making it clear that it is possible for us to sever our relationship with God and to void our born-again experience. A person backslides if he or she turns against the gift of God's salvation because of willful disobedience to His revealed will.

There are times when we make errors in judgment or make wrong decisions even though our motives are correct. The Spirit of the Lord is faithful, during those times, to bring these errors to our attention and to help us make them right if necessary. In these cases, the deeds—although wrong—bring no condemnation since they were done in ignorance.

It is important to know where we stand in God's sight, so we can make the right choices to draw closer to Him. Read Revelation 2:4,5 and Revelation 3:2. Using these Scriptures as a basis, what should our response be toward God and toward others if we have backslidden? How should we rectify an unwise decision or action?

2. Some people might feel that if they have repented and started toward God, their problems are over. The Biblical principle of reaping what has been sown (Galatians 6:7,8), however, is still in effect, and the consequences might have to be faced even after repentance. In 1 Chronicles 21, we find the record of King David's sin of numbering Israel. Even though he repented, his error caused tragedy for all of Israel. David was grieved by this, and he quickly moved to rectify his action by building an altar to the Lord. Make a list of the people or circumstances that might be affected if you failed God, even though you later repent. Then, apply David's response. What should someone do if he or she fails God and hurts His people?

3. Since we live in an increasingly wicked world, God must check, chasten, polish, and instruct us in order to help us become increasingly Christlike. Satan might tell us we have received this discipline from the Lord because we have sinned. We can, however, go through this process without losing our relationship with God. Paul the Apostle told the saints in Philippi (Philippians 3:7-14) of his desire to give everything to his relationship with the Lord. In verses 12 and 13, he admits his shortcomings, but he does not let them stop him from pressing forward. Instead, he puts them behind him and pursues God's will for him in the future. How does God strengthen us and help us to forget the past and to look ahead to the future?

4. Apostasy—the abandoning of one’s faith or belief in God—has two parts. The first is when a person abandons the Lord. The second is when the Lord, after much patience, wooing, and conviction, withdraws His Spirit from dealing with that person. You might say, “God loves us too much to do that.” It is true that God loves us infinitely, but it is also true that we can harden our hearts to the point where we cannot respond to His love. In Genesis 6:3, we read that God limited man’s appointed time on earth in order to let man know the urgency of responding to His love. We are on dangerous ground when we harden our hearts against God, because no one can find salvation unless God draws him (John 6:44). In 1 Samuel 16:14, we read of when God’s Spirit was withdrawn from King Saul because he lost his humility and was filled with his own ways. See 1 Samuel 9:21; 10:9,22; 13:9-13; 15:22-26, and record some of the things King Saul did that led to this. What is the dreadful consequence of such continued action? See 1 Timothy 4:2.

5. If we fail, what is the main issue when it comes to God’s giving us another chance? It certainly is not a question of His love for us. It is a question of our love for Him, and of our response to His love for us, that makes the difference. David failed God, and his beautiful prayer of repentance is recorded in Psalm 51. Jesus predicted Peter’s denial; He knew that Peter would fail Him, but He told Peter, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32). Scriptures do not tell us when Peter repented, but we could suppose he shed tears of repentance when he “went

out and wept bitterly.” How can we show our heart’s true motive, or intent, if we have failed the Lord?

6. Even though it is possible to backslide, it is not necessary. Jude says that Jesus is “able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24). What are some ways we can guard against failure?

Key Texts

Genesis 6:3; 1 Samuel 9:21; 10:9,22; 13:9-13; 15:22-26; 16:14; 1 Chronicles 21; Psalm 51; Ezekiel 33:11-13; Luke 22:32; John 6:44; Galatians 6:7,8; Philippians 3:7-14; 1 Timothy 4:2; Jude 1:24; Revelation 2:4,5; 3:2

Other Scriptures Used in This Study

Psalm 139:23,24

Suggested Verse for Memorization

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. — Isaiah 55:7