

Why Do We Fail?

By: Sally Hohnberger

“With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”
—Mark 10:27—

I was thoroughly exasperated with myself. I had just done it again! This time it was overeating between meals—when I wasn't even hungry! My failure came on the heels of many significant victories in the area of appetite. Through God's personal aid I had faced my chocolate addiction, put my sweet tooth in its proper place, corrected perverted tastes and dealt with several other dietary imbalances. I was enjoying the freedom that comes from self-control under God and the improved health that accompanies it. And now this! “Why, oh why, did I fail here now?” I cried out to God.

He directed my reasoning thus: “Evaluate why you were successful in these other areas and look for the common denominator. Compare that to your present fall. Don't be afraid, for I am with you.”

I soon found some quiet time to reflect with God uninterrupted and I discovered something. Every one of my victories was preceded by

a decisive decision to do God's will rather than my own. This choice was more than desiring the good God offered. It went beyond agreeing that His way is best. It led me to the point of cooperating in my actions to do His will, trusting in His power to change the perverted desires, habits, concepts, emotions and inclinations that clamor within me.

Was it a battle to go against the flesh? Oh my, yes! I believe it is the greatest battle ever fought. But I chose in each of those victory situations to let God be Lord over my table, my tastes, and my mouth. Nothing would pass my lips that was not approved by God. Every moment of temptation throughout the day was an opportunity to reaffirm my morning commitment to God to be His child. I'd filter each desire through God both during meal times and between. He helped me to understand just what, how much and when I needed to eat. I put my decision and action on God's side of the question and endured the pull of the flesh for its short duration while God cleansed the wrong thought, desire, taste, or whatever. By the grace of God working effectually in my mind

and heart I'd do His will not my own. Victory was consistent when I was determined, decisive, and cooperative outwardly with God. Trusting in His power to work inside with my wrong thoughts, feelings, etc. bringing them into obedience with my consent.

The battle was real in the interim between my choice to follow God and victory. But while my actions cooperated with my choice, in due season-often fifteen minutes or so-victory would come. Self-control and peace would reign. My desires, my thoughts, my emotions were all subdued by the indwelling Christ. (See Hebrews 2:8). The temptation was gone! No more oppressive, compelling spirit to act contrary to God, or to do the old ways. I was free to follow Christ-the power was there. The victory was sweet. The joy overflowed that I did have self-control in Jesus. Being satisfied with a salad, saying "no" to dessert this meal, being content with a smaller meal than I wanted, or being willing to have just a fruit meal this morning, was a joy that brought forth rejoicing and gratitude to God. I drew closer, more trusting of God as a result.

In contrast, my failures went something like this. We had enjoyed a lovely breakfast, which was sufficient and attractive. I went to my desk to work.

About thirty minutes later Satan posed a tantalizing suggestion to my mind. "You forgot your homemade cookies for dessert. Wouldn't they taste good?"

Without consulting God, I reasoned, "Oh, I did forget. But we had fresh strawberries on sweet bread with a homemade sweet cream-that's like dessert in it self. I don't need a cookie. Besides it's between meals and I'm working on not eating between meals." And I returned to involving myself in my work to distract my thoughts from eating. "Oh but just one wouldn't hurt you. It would taste so good." He spoke to my weakness, to my perverted habit that still had an answering cord.

"Oh, it would taste good." I began to cooperate in my thoughts. "But I committed to God this morning to fight this wrong habit. I'm not

even hungry-I had a satisfying breakfast." But I was still inclined. My history, my old habits were still driving me here.

"Jim is outside and won't see you take it. It's all right. It would taste so good. Now is your chance, later won't work, so you better hurry up and do it now," he pressed upon me.

"Sally, don't go there. This is Satan's enchanted ground. Call upon Me, reach out and take My hand, My strength is sufficient for you." God was offering me a way of escape from sin and its temptation.

I wrestled, I pondered, and I considered whether to eat that cookie or not. Within my mind there was a conflict and confusion with the indecision. I understood God's clear will for me. But my history, my habits, my taste buds were clamoring for that cookie! God gave me space to make a "free will" decision to either follow Him or not. But my thoughts, flesh, and Satan coerced me to do what I have done before and I cooperated.

Strangely, impulsively, compellingly I got up and went into the pantry to get just one cookie. After all I reasoned, "It's a healthy cookie. It's only been 30 minutes since breakfast. I'm just going to take one." I committed.

I didn't decide to trust or follow God did I? Instead I obeyed the voice of my flesh, my wrong habit, and my old thinking process of loving myself in this way. And I didn't stop at eating one. I ate three cookies before Satan began to pour on the guilt.

"There you go again." He taunted. "You have no self-control. God isn't here for you like He promised." Satan insinuated doubt about God to my mind. "God may be able to change others but not you. You are a hopeless case! No one can love you this way. You might as well eat more to soothe your sorrows now. Your promises are like ropes of sand. How can God ever love you-you can't keep any commitment?!"

Guilt, remorse, anguish were accepted and taken into my soul-my thoughts and feelings. My work at the desk was colored and suddenly I didn't feel God could use me to counsel others. I

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was inclined to accept all these thoughts, reasonings, and concepts as true and distanced myself even further from God. This was an old path-easy to follow.

So what made the difference between success and failure?

I didn't decisively put my will on God's side and determine to follow Him regardless of the cost. Not to decide is to decide. I didn't choose the right, and depend upon Christ's strength to work in me to will and to do of His good pleasure. Our humanity apart from God is inclined to serve sin and self. When I do not ally myself to God to fight the wrong-the sin-I don't have sufficient power to wrestle or constrain self. Thus self rules over me and I remain Satan's subject. My flesh, my old habits, my history compel me to obey them even when they are wrong. First I cooperated in these thoughts, then the corresponding action. When I follow self-by yielding my will to do it, I am not free but in bondage-a forced servitude. In contrast when I'm in Christ I'm free to serve Him and right while I lack no power.

Why do I follow my flesh when I've experienced both sides? Isn't it crazy to let the flesh rule over me in this way? It's torture, it's remorse, and it's guilt-why do I respond this way?

Simply because I'm familiar with it-it's strangely inviting. The comfort of an old friend accompanies our inclination to perverted ways. Even though we don't desire the bondage of old habits, we are strangely drawn to and comfortable in them. These old Giants in the land of our character reside there until we enlist under Christ to be our General to lead us in battle, and show us how to wield the sword of the Spirit to slay them. Then and only then can Christ reign and fill us with all His goodness.

You may not deal with appetite as your darling little sin. Overcoming is the same wherever your weakness may be. We must follow Christ's example and learn that the slaying of our Giant begins with saying and doing, "Not my will, Lord, but Thine be done." (See Luke 22:42)

Name the Giant in the land of your experi-

ence. Is it despair, insecurity, unworthiness, or guilt? Is it pride, envy, jealousy, and covetousness? Is it fretfulness, faultfinding, and a dominating demeanor? Is it immorality, or just perversion? Is it fear of rejection? Is it fear of something else? Is it controlling others in order to feel in control?

We fail, friends, every time, anytime we will not let Jesus rule over us! When we fear to face our Giant, when we hesitate to decide-we are deciding against Him. If we don't decide to follow Him-we can identify our "true decision" by our actions. The Bible says, "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his works be pure and whether it be right," Proverbs 20:11. Are we following Christ or the other gods, like Self, Satan, or perverted habits? It's our actions that show which god rules over us. There is no middle ground. This is why Satan leads us to indecision, to indifference, to confusion, to fear, because we will hesitate to decide and not to decide is to decide. If we do not choose God out rightly, Satan retains that ruling position over us-we are by default his subjects.

We fail when God is not the One in charge of what we think, feel, say or do. We are the pilots and we expect Him to be our co-pilot-but that doesn't work! We are not giving God all, are we? We are in charge! The whole Bible is all about who is in charge of our lives. If we are in charge-trouble is just around the corner. If God is in charge-success, self-control in Him, and joy is just round the corner. Which are you choosing?

I watched a dear friend struggle in his marriage to just love his wife in a new heaven-born way. God was clearly asking him to love his wife with nothing in it for him. It was painful and pitiful to watch Satan taunt this man through lying thoughts, concepts, emotions, and bad habits. Satan reasoned with him, confusing the real issue by agitating his feelings towards his perceived needs not being met and nurturing thoughts about how unloving his wife was-even when it wasn't true. "If only she would, ..." he'd bemoan. His perceived needs were rooted in selfishness-which he admitted at times, but he'd for-

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get his need to treat her lovingly in the moment-his old way was comfortable. He feared, hesitated, and failed to decide to let God rule over him, failed to filter through God his every thought, word, and deed. Without God at the helm, he could only treat his wife as before-often with coldness, indifference, and a demeaning spirit. The wife's response was withdrawal-timidness to be intimate-which only aggravated his state of mind. Feeling manipulated by her, he'd respond by lashing out at her, telling her of her need to change, giving her the silent, cold shoulder, all the while neglecting his part.

Reality is, he was trying to manipulate her by his cold responses-being led by Satan and his old history and habits of responding-wanting her to return to their old dysfunctional ways. His need to change appeared uncomfortable and he hesitated to trust God. He clung to the comfort of his darling little sin. His lack of decision to follow Jesus wholly, and his failure to look to Christ's power to be Christ-like and love his wife, was causing him to lose miserably the very thing he desired.

Satan wants to keep many husbands or wives in this position of indecision and hesitancy to follow God with all their heart. Keeping the focus of letting God change "me" is the real solution. But Satan likes to keep this truth hidden. He likes to push the emotional button called "blame the spouse" because it keeps "me" from looking at what I need to change. This is so natural to our flesh-just like Adam and Eve.

Satan insinuates in our thoughts that we will not like this new way. It's uncomfortable! It's so hard! And as we agree with him, he keeps us under his control, obeying the dictates of his character, obeying his negative feelings, and thus we fail. Satan is a liar and the father of all lies. We cannot believe Satan and those thoughts he brings to our minds that are against God's Word, character, life or Spirit.

How silly that we follow him so easily, but oh, how often we do! We won't let this Jesus rule over us! But instead we let Satan rule! This is what I did when I chose to overeat. I obeyed Satan, my history, and my old habits that inevitably brought me into misery and failure and not joy as Satan poses disobedience to be. My friend did the same

in his marriage. Isn't it harder to remain in our old ways than it is to brave the "new ways" under Christ's leadership? I think so.

Your marriage can be a loving, safe, caring, fulfilling relationship if you let Jesus lead your every thought, feeling, emotion, concept, and response. Let God define what true love is to you. Grasp God's thoughts and embrace them in your responses. Jesus is a big-enough God to implant righteousness in you. He awaits your cooperation! He is the Creator. He is able and willing to evict the selfishness in you, the wrong concepts you cling to, every old way that dominates over you, if you let Him have your whole heart. He wants to cleanse your heart, your mind, your soul, your marriage, and your family unit to be Christ-like in thought, word, and deed. Won't you change masters by doubting Satan and trusting God recklessly?

Heaven is ours when we open wide the door of our hearts, and follow Him as our Lord and our Saviour. Then He turns our failures into victories.

Power for Living



Power to become the sons of God. —John 1:12

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Empowered Living Ministries

3945 North Fork Rd, Columbia Falls, MT 59912

Office: (406) 387-4333 Fax: (406) 387-4336

Toll free (877) 755-8300 (orders only)

Email: office@empoweredlivingministries.org

Web: www.EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org