

INTRODUCTION

Bill invited his boss to his house for dinner. He was hoping to make a good impression, so his wife prepared an excellent meal. Eight-year-old Adam was clean and scrubbed and warned to be on his best behavior. After introductions, little Adam wanted to impress his dad's boss, so he ran into his room and grabbed a deck of cards. He brought them out to the boss and gave them to him. He said, "I want to give you these cards because my dad says that you're not playing with a full deck." Oops. Somebody messed up.

This is the second message in the series on HOPE. In this lesson, we will answer the question, "Is there any HOPE for me when I've messed up?" The acrostic for HOPE is Having Only Positive Expectations. Can you have hope when you've messed up?

Meet Melanie. Melanie is one of those drop-dead gorgeous girls who never had trouble getting guys to notice her. She never was without a date, and by the time she was old enough to get married, proposals were streaming her way.

When Melanie met Ray, she was sure they would marry and live happily ever after. But she was wrong, because Ray turned out to be a jerk. After three years, the marriage was a disaster, and divorce soon followed. Melanie was determined not to make the same mistake again, so when Robert came into her life she was careful. But Robert was more levelheaded than Ray, and he promised her the world. So Melanie walked down the aisle again. Within a year, that marriage was over, too.

Then Reggie came along. Sweet, fun-loving Reggie. Ray and Robert were boring. Melanie knew all she needed was a little fun, so she and Robert flew off to Las Vegas and got married. Melanie's family and friends at work started taking bets on how long it would last. Sure enough, after fourteen months, the fun was gone, and so was Reggie.

Fast-forward ten years. By now Melanie has gone through a total of five husbands and five divorces. She's in her late 30s, and her face carries the tracks of thousands of tears and each wrinkle has its own story. Her friends and family laugh and say she's a big flirt, but they use other descriptive words when she isn't listening.

Melanie met Phil at work, and they started dating. Phil went through three failed marriages himself. Melanie moves in with Phil, but neither of them even wants to mention marriage. Melanie knows her life is messed up and she's miserable. She doesn't know where to turn, then one day a friend at work mentions her church. Desperate, Melanie shows up for Sunday at church in a dress way to short and too tight for some churchgoers.

Now, let's hit the pause button and stop the story. I made it up to get you to think. There are thousands of messed-up Melanies out there. Or I could simply change the gender and say there are thousands of messed-up Mikes out there. Here's the question. When they show up at our church looking for hope—how are they treated?

If you are here and you've messed up, I've got good news for you. No matter how badly you

have messed up, there is HOPE for you. Don't take my word for it; take Jesus' word. Look in John 4:5:

So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," She replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet."

Then Melanie, I mean the Samaritan woman, quickly changes the subject and starts talking about where to worship. Jesus steers the conversation to the topic of the Messiah. Pick up in verse 25:

The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus said, "I who speak to you am he."

The woman got so excited about the living water that she left her water pot and ran back into town. She brought many of the people of Sychar out to meet Jesus. Notice one final observation in verse 39:

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."

You've heard of the Good Samaritan. You might call this woman the Bad Samaritan. Even though her life was a mess, Jesus offered her hope. And for all the messed-up Melanies and miserable Mikes here today, Jesus wants to give you HOPE. Let's learn three important things about Jesus and hope.

1. JESUS KNOWS ABOUT YOUR FAILURES

As God, Jesus knows everything. He knew all about the marriage mistakes and moral failures of this woman. And Jesus knows about our mistakes as well. In 1647 the Italian painter, Guercino (a nickname that meant "squinter") completed a painting of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman. It appears as if Guercino captured the very instant when Jesus pointed to town saying, "Go get your husband." The woman is staring off into space with an expression that reveals a combination of emotions—regret for her mistakes and a longing for hope.

The truth is, all of us are like that woman at the well. We've *all* messed up. When I started thinking about a Biblical character I could use for this message, I found the choices were almost unlimited. Everybody in the Bible, except the Lord Jesus, messed up at one time or another. We tend to canonize the Bible characters as if they were super humans—not like us. But they struggled with failure the same way we do.

Hebrews 11 contains a list of "Who's Who" from the Old Testament. This chapter is often called the "Roll call of Faith." But when you examine the list, you realize it just as easily could be called the Roll Call of Failures! For instance, Noah built the ark, but he also got drunk and naked and exposed himself. Abraham was the Father of the Faithful, but he also lied about Sarah being his wife when they visited Egypt. Isaac messed up and blessed the wrong son. Jacob, whose name means "grabber," stole the birthright from Esau. Moses, who delivered God's Ten Commandments, was a murderer himself. Rahab is listed, and she was a prostitute. Samson was a he-man with a she problem. He had a bad hair day, and lost his strength. And even David, a man after God's own heart, stole a man's wife and committed adultery. And in order to cover it up, he had her husband killed.

The list goes on. The Bible says we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) I heard one young preacher talking about that verse and he got his words a little mixed up. He said, "We're all guilty of falling short. But God can help us with our falling shorts!"

Failure is a part of life. But just because you fail, doesn't mean you're a failure. There is hope for you. Someone said, "Failure is not failing to reach your dreams. Failure is not having a dream. Failure is not setting a goal and missing it. Failure is not having a goal. Failure is not falling down. Failure is refusing to get back up."

Before Jesus started his conversation with the woman at the well He already knew everything about her. He knew she had failed in marriage five times, and was committing adultery as well. That's WHY Jesus sought her out, because she was messed up. Jesus said to the religious professionals of his day, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinner to repentance." (Luke 5:32) If you've messed up, Jesus is seeking you today. He wants you to know that there is HOPE for you.

2. JESUS LOVES YOU IN SPITE OF YOUR FAILURES

The woman at the well already had three strikes against her. First, she was a woman. Except for

their wives and family members, men didn't even speak to women. Women were considered inferior creatures. A daily prayer of the Pharisees was, "God, I thank thee that I was not born a Gentile, a dog, or a woman."

In addition, this woman was a Samaritan. These were half-breed Jews who had intermarried with the Assyrians 12 generations earlier. Today, Sychar and Jacob's well still exist in the West Bank, which is Palestinian territory. The way the Palestinians and the Israelis regard each other today is exactly the way the Jews felt toward the Samaritans in Jesus' day.

She was a woman living in adultery was her third strike was. In our culture, we usually say, "Three strikes and you're out!" But instead of saying, "Strike three, you're out!" Jesus said, "Strike three, there's hope!"

When it comes to love and acceptance, our world says, "look a certain way, or act a certain way and you'll be loved." Our culture teaches us that love is something that can be earned. The trouble with that is many of us don't have what it takes to be loved.

Years ago, singer/songwriter Janice Ian made the same observation in her song entitled, "Seventeen." The song says, "I learned the truth at seventeen; / That love was made for beauty queens, / And high school girls with clear skinned smiles... / And those of us with ravaged faces, / Lacking in the social graces, / Desperately remained at home, / Inventing lovers on the phone..." She finished by dedicating the song "To those of us who knew the pain / Of Valentines that never came, / And those whole names were never called / When choosing sides for basketball."

There are no beauty contests when it comes to God's love. There is nothing you can do to earn God's love. He knows me for who I really am, and He still loves me—warts and all. I think that's one reason why the animation movies Shrek and Shrek 2 are so popular. Fiona was once a beautiful princess who lost her beauty. But ugly old Shrek loves her for who she is on the inside, not on the outside. And in a way, his love makes her beautiful.

That's the kind of love Jesus has for you. The Bible says, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (I Samuel 16:7) Yet when God looks at our heart, He doesn't see anything there that *deserves* His love. But He loves us anyway. It is His love that makes us beautiful.

God loves you, but don't miss the point: God doesn't love you because you're valuable; you're valuable because God loves you.

3. JESUS OFFERS FORGIVENESS FOR YOUR FAILURES

The marketing slogan of Northwest Mutual is "It's time for a quiet conversation." Jesus had a quiet conversation with the Samaritan woman, and it changed her life. If you've messed up, He wants to have a quiet conversation with you as well. He's saying the same thing to you that He said to the woman at the well. "I know all about how you've messed up. I love you. I not only know about your past mistakes, I know about your future mistakes, and I still love you. And I'm

offering you living water. I offer you forgiveness and the kind of life that will satisfy you forever. If you trust me, you can start over." If you want to experience His forgiveness and start over, there are three things you've got to be willing to do with your mistakes and failures.

(1) Admit it!

When Jesus confronted the woman at the well with her sexual immorality, she didn't deny it. She agreed with Jesus. She said, "Sir, I can tell you are a prophet." If you want to be clean, you've got to come clean with God and admit you are a sinner. That's hard for us to do, because it is human nature to defend our actions and to justify our behavior. We don't like to use bad words to describe our failures. We don't call it "wickedness" we call it "a weakness." Today, when two married people have sex with someone other than their mate, they don't call it adultery. They call it "an affair." Instead of calling it "a lie" we call it "stretching the truth." Instead of calling profanity "blasphemy," we call it "using colorful language."

But the Bible says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." (Proverbs 28:13) When you confess your sin, you are not telling God something He doesn't know. The word for confess is *homolegeo*, which means "to say the same thing." When you confess your sin, you are saying the same thing about your behavior that God says—you are agreeing with Him that it is sin.

You don't have to say, "Now, Lord, I've got some bad news for You. I know this is going to surprise You, but yesterday, I looked on a woman with lust in my heart." Do you think God says, "What? I can't believe you would do something like that!" That's *not* the way it works. God already *knows* where and when you've messed up. You confess that sin when you admit to yourself and to God that it is sin. Admit it.

(2) Quit it!

You've got to be willing to repent. When people mess up, they usually beg for another chance. An employee who messes up says to the boss, "I'm sorry. It won't happen again, please give me another chance." An unfaithful spouse says, "Honey, I'm sorry, please give me another chance."

You've probably heard or read that God is a God of the second chance. But when you ask for a second chance, then you find yourself asking for a third and fourth chance. When does it end? The woman at the well didn't need a second or third chance; she needed a new life. God wants to give you something much more valuable than a second chance; He wants to give you a changed heart. You'll never experience the fullness of God's grace until you understand that you don't just need a second chance. You need a change! That's what repentance is. It means a "change of mind" that leads to a "change of behavior."

In John 8 we read about Jesus' conversation with another messed up woman. She had been caught in adultery and the Jews wanted to stone her. Jesus said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8:7). When her accusers left, Jesus didn't say, "I'm giving you a second chance." He said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8:11) In order to experience God's forgiveness you've got to admit it and quit

it and

(3) Forget it!

Once you have confessed and repented of your sin, then you must accept God's forgiveness. You must believe God has completely forgiven you. God makes many promises in the Bible that assure us of His forgiveness. He says "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." (Isaiah 1:18) The Bible says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12) The Bible promises, "You hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19) The Bible says "In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back." (Isaiah 37:22) God says, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." (Isaiah 43:25)

God really can forgive and forget. Our trouble is that WE can't forget. Once you have accepted God's forgiveness, sometimes the hardest part is forgiving yourself. The devil can't prevent God's forgiveness, but he knows he can try to make us doubt we're forgiven. That's why the Bible calls him "the accuser of the brothers." (Revelation 12:10) Even when you've confessed and repented of you sin, he wants you to feel dirty. He slides up and whispers, "You're no good; you're no good; you're no good; baby, you're no good."

People often ask, "How can I distinguish between the accusing of Satan and the conviction of the Holy Spirit?" When my wife calls me on the phone, I don't have to ask, "Who is this?" I recognize her voice because we talk all the time. If you know the Lord intimately, you'll recognize His voice.

So, if you have confessed and repented of sin, then accept God's forgiveness and forgive yourself. Forget your past mistakes and move on toward the future. The Apostle Paul lived a messed up life. He participated in the persecution and arrest of many Christians. He even consented when Stephen was stoned to death. He continued to struggle with sin. In Romans 7 Paul wrote, "The things I want to do, I don't do. And the very things I don't want to do, I find myself doing." Yet Paul knew what it was to be forgiven and to move on. He wrote, "One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14)

CONCLUSION

Gas prices keep rising because the demand is outstripping the supply. One service station added the words, "Arm and a leg" on their marquee. Right now, the world isn't full of much hope, it's rare. That's why hope is extremely valuable. How much would you be willing to pay for hope? But hope is not for sale. It's free to you. Jesus has already paid the price for our hope. When He died on the cross, He provided a way for us to experience forgiveness.

Life is tough. We all mess up. Our hearts are going to be broken. But through Jesus Christ, we can hang onto hope. Last week I received an email from a single mom with two boys, ages 6 and 11. She gave me permission to share a portion of her letter with you, because I believe she is a

woman who is learning the value of hope.

Pastor Dykes,

Last Sunday I saw that the weather was bad and there were so many people that twice I almost turned around. I also thought it would be the typical Easter Service that you hear year after year. But, I felt your message in a very personal way, because I have suffered a severely broken heart...My husband died in October, so we have been trying to put the pieces of our lives together ever since. It has been a most difficult last two years. My husband was diagnosed with cancer and went on to suffer unimaginable pain, surgeries, chemo, radiation and finally total disability, before his death...To say that my heart is broken is an understatement. However, I must force a smile and go on, because I have two boys that are counting on me. Every Sunday I feel so isolated, because now there is just one where there were two. This Sunday your service helped me not feel so alone...There are some days that you can imagine that it is a great struggle to put one foot in front of the other. I lost my best friend, my soul mate, and the father of my children. He did not live to see his boys grow to be young men or any future grandchildren. The losses are endless. I used to look down the road and see our future. Now I look and see a big blank...I needed your sermon and those that will follow. I look forward to them and wanted to thank you for "The Hope." Sometimes these days that is all I have to hang onto!! Thanks again, Karen T.

Karen is learning that Jesus is her only source of hope. Life is full of unpleasant situations. Waling with Jesus is the only way you can live Having Only Positive Expectations.

If you build your life on the shifting sands of the world's philosophy, you'll be in trouble. But if turn your life over to Jesus you can find hope—and a solid place to stand when the storms of life come crashing around you. Edward Mote said it well in his song, "The Solid Rock." "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; / I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. / On Christ the solid rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand; / All other ground is sinking sand!"

Even if you've messed up, there is hope for you. Jesus knows your failures, yet He still loves you. He is offering you forgiveness and a fresh start if you'll confess your sin, repent, and accept His forgiveness.

OUTLINE

Having
Only
Positive
Expectations

1. JESUS KNOWS ABOUT YOUR FAILURES
2. JESUS LOVES YOU IN SPITE OF YOUR FAILURES
3. JESUS OFFERS FORGIVENESS FOR YOUR FAILURES

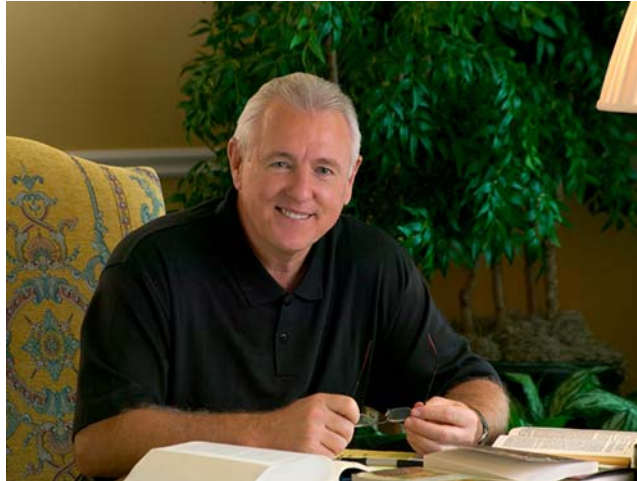
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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes