

Fail Safe

Learning Limits From Spiritual Spotters

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Today we're learning how pursuing *failure* can lead us toward *spiritual success*! Cuz the Christian life *isn't* about *pretending* we're *invincible* – it's about *learning* where we're *vulnerable*! Cuz our *walk* with Jesus *begins* when He *steps in* after *our* strength gives out. So, **do you know your limits?**



I hope so – cuz in case you *didn't* know, **you're weaker than you think!** Sure, you have the *potential* strength of God's supernatural Spirit *in* you,



But we have this treasure in [fragile human bodies, AKA] jars of *clay* to *show* that this all-surpassing power is *from* God and *not* from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but *not* crushed; perplexed, but *not* in despair; persecuted, but *not* abandoned; struck down, but *not* destroyed. We always carry around in *our* body the *death* of Jesus, so that the *life* of Jesus may also be *revealed* in *our* body. – 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 NIV



You ever see any of the *nine* Rocky movies? *Why?* Well, we *love* stories where the *protagonist* is brought to the very *brink* of death cuz when *all* the *physical* or *emotional* strength is *beaten* out of a human *body*, we get to see the *higher* power of the human *spirit* that *remains*. So, in the *same* way we're *inspired* and *empowered* by Rocky's indomitable spirit – Paul's says the best way for Christ's *Holy* Spirit to *fire* us up – is by *picking* us up after *this* world nearly *beats* us to death. Cuz,



You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. – Romans 5:6 NIV



Get it? Our big problem that constantly needs *correcting* has *always* been overconfidence in our *capacity* – cuz when we think we're all we *need*, **it can be fatal when our strength fails.** But if we admit some battles are *beyond* our *ability* **we can be saved when our strength fails.**

Cuz **flirting with failure forces us to find trustworthy faith.** When life is *steady*, we're *able* to *pretend* we're *self-sufficient* – but when the ground *gives* way, we're suddenly *aware* of the *help* we *need*. *Remember?* It's like standing on a cliff right when it *crumbles*; the second you start *falling* your *own* strength is *irrelevant* – and if you see a branch, you don't stop mid-air to research the *species*, wood *density*, and strength of *its* root system – you just *grab* it! And when it *holds* the whole time you *climb* back to safety, you learn **the strength to save isn't in your hands, it's in what you grab!** And Paul reminds us **we're always flirting with failure – so we gotta grab for whatever God provides:**

So, if you think you are standing *firm*, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted *beyond* what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can *endure* it. Therefore, my dear friends, *flee* from idolatry. – 1 Corinthians 10:12-14 NIV

But *hang on*, God provides *escape*... so we can *endure*? Isn't that a *contradiction*? Is it *fight* or *flight*? Well... yes. Cuz **sometimes endurance means persistent fighting** and **sometimes it means preventing failure**. After all, you *can't* live to fight *another day* if trying to *tough* it out *kills* you dead.

And that's exactly what *Joseph* showed us last week – he didn't survive Mrs. Potiphar's *honey-pot cougar-trap* by *pretending* he had the capacity to *stand strong* when the ground *gave way* – instead, the second *she* snagged *his skirt*, *he* grabbed *God's* nearest *exit* to flee before *his strength failed*. Cuz *escape* isn't always the *opposite* of endurance; **sometimes escape is part of endurance**.



Which is why *weightlifting* makes such a great *analogy*. Cuz every *bodybuilder* already *knows* **the key to growth is resistance training**. But you ever think about what that really *means*? *Lifting* weights is just putting *yourself* in the *path* of *gravity's crushing power* and *training* yourself to *resist* increasingly *dangerous* situations. And here's the sick part: **the greatest growth happens just before failure!** So, the whole *strategy* is to really *push* yourself to the absolute *limit* of your ability – but *quit* right before all your *bones snap* and your *muscles explode*. Cuz if you go just *one rep too far*, your *strength* will *give out*, *gravity* will *show up*, and your *head* will get *caved in!* So, **how on earth do we safely ride the line between growth and death?** Well, *smart* lifters use spotters.

Cuz **spotters aren't there to lighten the load, they're there to prevent a fatality!** They're the *trusted* hands that are *watching* intently as we push *our capacity* for *resistance* to the *limit* – and they only *jump in* when we're *about to collapse* and need a way out of *harm's way*. **Spotters are the fail-safe we need when endurance requires escape.** And they *press* us to *resist* until we're *completely* depleted cuz they know **the brink of failure is the pinnacle of progress!**

Well, like it or not, **so does God!** So, like a good *spotter*, He encourages *us* to *struggle* until we have a need for *rescue!* That's what *Paul's* getting at in all these *Scriptures*; God *allows* us to be **"hard pressed... but not crushed"** and *tempted*, but not **"beyond what you can bear"** cuz He **wants us to lose confidence in our strength to find faith in His**. He wants us to live our lives to *edge* of our abilities, so when they *fall short*, He can *show* us *His Spirit* has the power to rack *whatever* worldly *weight* is about to crush us.



Cuz we're *all* battling to resist the *death* and *decay* of this world – and until we *admit* our weakness and *ask* for *Jesus* to *spot* our *struggle*, we'll turn to *something* insufficient when we start to *slip*. Which is why *Paul* *implores* us to **"flee from idolatry"** right *after* promising *God* will provide an *escape* from *our immanent failure* – cuz one way or another, we're *gonna* fall short and *need help*, but **idolatry is putting faith in untrustworthy strength**. And *Paul's* *screaming* there's only *one branch* that can *hold* us and only *one arm* that *lift* us – to *save* us from learning **"God is faithful"** the *hard* way. Cuz **reaching out for any other spotter when we're about to fail means the weight is coming down. Hard!**

But even *then*, **the real question is whether we recognize His faithfulness when it shows up.** Cuz it can be *hard* to tell if God's faithfulness is the *strength to endure* or an *exit to escape*. So, we need a way to *discern* when it's time to *push* the limit and when it's time to *let* the Spotter *rack the weight*.



And *here's* a great place to start: Ask, **"Is my confidence growing stronger or is my integrity getting weaker?"** That will help you *diagnose* how *close* you are to *failure*. Cuz we start *justifying* and flat-out *lying* to try and save *ourselves* right *before* our strength *fails*. And the *same thing* happens right before strength *runs out* when *lifting weights* – you start *compromising* your *form* when you should've *stopped* the set; making every moment after *that* – increasingly *unsafe!* So, *spiritually* speaking, **when your faith feels tested, endure** – but **when your character feels compromised, escape!** Cuz like James says, it's *good* to *feel the burn*,

Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. [But just 10 verses later, he reminds us] – James 1:2-4 NIV

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire – James 1:13 NIV

So, don't blame the *Spotter* – it's *going at it alone* that leads to *failure*.

Cuz **God uses struggle to form us; sin uses struggle to deform us.** And a lot of our *struggles* start off giving us growth – the way difficult *relationships*, patient *waiting*, and disciplined *self-control* all build the strength we need to *withstand* more and more *earthly* adversity. But if we don't let the Spotter *rack the weight* from time to time, our *fatigue* can start to *undermine* that same *humility*, *patience*, and *discipline* our *endurance* was *building*. Cuz **resisting when you need rescue can lead to resenting, fantasizing, or rationalizing.** And that's when sin *compromises* our *form*, *corrupts* our *character*, and *transforms* the *trial* of a *workout* into the *temptation* of a *trap!*



And *that's* why Mrs. Potiphar made her advances *day after day* – hopefully, Joseph's relentlessly *resisting* would wear *down* his *strength* and eventually, he'd *compromise* his *character*. But, thanks to his *faith*, when Joe's *situation* got *shaky* and his *trial* became a *trap*, His *Spotter* had him *rack the weight*; cuz **you don't endure traps, you escape 'em!**

[So,] One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. – Genesis 39:11-12 NIV

Run Joe, run! Escape to endure! He didn't just say no to the sin; he said no to the setup. Cuz when a struggle grows *beyond* our strength – **often the only way to win is stopping a battle before it begins!** Joe *survived* cuz he got his heart out of harm's way – and like Bruce said, Joseph was *able* to escape cuz he *already* had a habit of taking his deepest *thoughts* and *desires* to *God*. So, when things got *heavy*, he put his *heart* in the Spotter's *hands* and *fled* before he *failed!* And while *escape* is a strategy for *success* that *some* of us *still* need to *learn* – **we could all be better at leaving sooner!**

And I've seen this in real life. Cuz, like a lot of us late-20th-century *teens*, my wife grew up in the *People Magazine, Us Weekly* era — so she developed what we might call a *refined* cultural appreciation for gossip. And as the world's *appetite* for more and more **"hot goss,"** has got everyone wanting to **"spill the tea,"** — I've been incredibly *impressed* watching my wife train her *resistance* by *escaping* the temptation *before* it crushes her. And *here's* how: when a conversation *starts* drifting toward gossip, she'll *literally* say, **"Y'all need to quit, or you're gonna make me sin!"** *That's wisdom!* And *that's* asking the Spotter *grab* the weight *before* your *conscience* gets caved in.



Cuz, as the *often-quoted* theologian *Kenny Rogers* once said, **"You gotta know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em; Know when to walk away and know when to run."** Ain't that the truth! Sometimes *folding* is how you *stay* in the tournament; and *running* is how you *win* — cuz **playing a losing hand isn't endurance, it's foolishness.** It's setting yourself up for a *future failure* that gets more *costly* every *minute* you *pretend* you could *win*.

So even when you *feel* like some *struggle* has you *in over your head* — remember, **the longer you wait, the shakier you'll get** — but you *won't* get completely *crushed* if you *surrender* your struggle to your Spotter when *He* offers *escape*. So *surrender* that *late-night scroll* *before* it crushes *tomorrow's goals*; *surrender* that *second drink* *before* you're *beaten-down* by DUI. *Surrender* that *secret fantasy* *before* it compromises *reality*. In every temptation from *gossip* to *infidelity* — ask the Lord to show you *a way out* the *second* you feel your strength *slipping*. Cuz **strategic escape is part of endurance; excuses aren't.** They're the *bad form* we see *before failure*. So, **do you know your limits?** Make sure you *do* — *not* so you can *live scared* or *feel weak* — but so the *warning* of *failing* can keep you *safely growing*.

Cuz our *biggest gains* may happen under our *heaviest weights*, but **when you trust God to spot you, you'll never be without a way out.** And although *Joe* was a great example of the power to *physically endure*, when you have a *trustworthy* lifting partner — *Jesus* took it *further*. *He* showed us how even *after* the full weight of *sin* *falls* on our *physical* lives — our *supernatural* Spotter is strong enough to *rescue* our *spirit* from *death* *itself*. Cuz **He made a way by getting in harm's way;**

He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed. — Isaiah 53:5 NIV

He put Himself permanently between the full weight of sin and the weak will of humanity — so that we *always* have an *escape* from every battle *beyond* our ability. All we have to do, is ask *for a spot*:

[Which is why Jesus said,] Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. [And so temptation doesn't fall on you!] The *spirit* is willing, but the flesh is weak. — Matthew 26:41 NIV

That's not an insult — that's a diagnosis. The *spirit* is *willing* but the *flesh* is *weak*. And because God *knows* that, *Jesus* *didn't* come to make us *fail-proof*; **Jesus came to give us a fail-safe.** So, don't *wait* for the weight to *fall* before you *call*. **Watch and pray.** Watch for the *slightest sign* of your strength starting to get *shaky* and then *pray* for *a way out*, *before* your *resistance* training crosses from *growth* to *death!* Cuz our struggles *can* be *good* for us — but, **"Y'll need to quit before they make you sin!"**

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.