

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



Experiencing a Faith Failure

KEY PASSAGE: Numbers 13-14 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Psalm 23:4; 27:1 | Philippians 4:13
2 Timothy 1:7 | Hebrews 13:5

► SUMMARY

Faith is one of God's most important gifts because we are saved through faith, and we are also called to live by faith every day.

Yet there are circumstances that may cause our faith to falter. If we yield to these doubts, negative consequences will inevitably follow. The Bible includes examples of people who walked by faith and those who failed to believe Him. In these stories we see how our focus determines whether our faith fails or grows stronger.

► SERMON POINTS

A faith failure can be defined as a failure to express faith or trust God when confronted by a challenge, trial, or temptation. One of the most obvious examples of this is found in Numbers 13 and 14. The Lord had rescued the children of Israel from Egypt, divided the waters of the Red Sea so they could escape, and guided them through the wilderness. At this point in their journey, they were near the land of Canaan, which God had promised to give them.

Spies were sent into the land.

Moses chose 12 men from each of the tribes of Israel to spy out the land of Canaan. "See what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many ... And how are the cities in which they live, are they like open camps or with fortification? How is the land, is it fat or lean? Are there trees in it or not? Make an effort then to get some of the fruit of the land" (vv. 18-20).

When the spies returned, they gave an account of what they had seen: "We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey ... Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendant of Anak there" (vv. 27-28).

The spies came to differing conclusions.

Although all the spies saw the same things, their recommendations were different. Caleb told the people, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it" (v. 30). But some of the others said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us ... all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size ... and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight" (vv. 30-33).

Moses had sent the 12 spies in order to determine what was the best strategy for conquering the land, but 10 of them gave a bad report that discouraged the people from even trying to enter Canaan. Only Caleb and Joshua believed God would enable them to take the land that He had promised them.

The 10 spies' faith failure spread to the people.

The congregation chose to believe the bad report, and they grumbled against Moses and Aaron saying, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" (14:2-3).

The prospect of difficulty caused the people to forget all the ways God had blessed them and proved Himself faithful. He had miraculously rescued them from Egypt and guided them through the wilderness to the land He'd promised them. But instead of trusting the Lord to continue to fulfill His promises to them, they were ready to go back to Egyptian slavery.

Joshua and Caleb tried to reassure the people, saying, "If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they shall be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us" (vv. 8-9).

But the congregation chose to listen to the wrong voices rather than trust the word of almighty God. Their unfaithfulness cost them the Promised Land. Instead of possessing Canaan, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years until they all died. Only their children, along with Caleb and Joshua, were allowed to enter the land.

What causes a faith failure?

There are valuable lessons in this story to help us understand why faith may falter.

- **Fear of failure.** "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). The Lord doesn't want us to yield to our fears but to cling to His promises. Like the Israelites, we have every reason to believe God because we have experienced His faithfulness.
- **False information.** Although all 10 spies saw the same things in Canaan, only Caleb and Joshua trusted God because they remembered His faithfulness in delivering them from Egypt. The other 10 men gave the congregation false information by predicting that they could not overcome the people of the land. Foolishly, the

people listened to the wrong voices and believed the dire prediction.

- **Failure to recall the Lord's past power.** The congregation's response to the situation was not based on the proven capability of God but on themselves and their inability to conquer the land He had promised them. Although the Lord had demonstrated His power through their miraculous deliverance from Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea, all this was forgotten in the face of what they perceived as an insurmountable obstacle. Only two of the spies believed that the Lord would empower them to conquer the land. If God had overpowered Egypt, surely He could overcome the people of Canaan.
- **Failure to see circumstances from God's perspective.** The Israelites looked at the giants and fortified cities through human eyes, but Joshua and Caleb saw them through the Lord's eyes. He is almighty God and will accomplish whatever He promises.
- **Focusing on the obstacles rather than on the Lord.** The people could only see defeat and death ahead because they saw their problem as bigger than God. Instead of looking ahead to all that God had promised them, they looked back to Egypt. What they failed to recognize was that the Lord was bigger than giants and stronger than walled cities.

► RESPONSE

- Where is your focus when you are afraid or have a big problem? What part does God play in your thoughts? Have you discovered that prayer makes every problem smaller?
- How has listening to the wrong voices caused you to doubt the Lord?
- Have you focused on your own limited resources when an obstacle seems insurmountable? What does God say about you and your situation in Philippians 4:13 and Hebrews 13:5?

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