

11. Setbacks (2Q 2026 Growing in a Relationship with God)

Biblical material: Mark 4:35–41; Mark 5:21–34; Rom. 5:3–5; Job 19:23–27; Job 23:8–12; Luke 24:13–27; Rom. 8:18, 28.

Quotes

- It's not the winning that teaches you how to be resilient. It's the setback. It's the loss. *Beth Brooke*
- Ask God to change your setback into a comeback. He is waiting to be invited to divinely intervene. None of us look forward to going through any time of trial. But I encourage you, take time to ask God to show you any way in which you are being deceived by holding onto bitterness, hurt, or anger. And when He does, you can permit Him to have His way to remove the toxic emotions. You will find joy and peace of the truth in Galatians 5:1, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” What are you waiting for? *Sheryl Giesbrecht Turner*
- Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted. *Randy Pausch*
- Remember that setbacks are only challenges in disguise. Look at them as lessons; don't waste time beating yourself up. Just get back on track and focus on what you want. It's up to you, and you will do it! *Jorge Cruise*
- [The Bible] is the history of God's disappointments. *Martin Buber*
- Sometimes what appears to be a setback is God's mode of elevation. *Roderick L. Evans*
- When you look back at your life, look forward, have no regrets and know, that through all the mistakes and setbacks you've experienced, God isn't finished with you yet. *Carniel Dunlop*
- In all the setbacks of your life as a believer, God is plotting for your joy. *John Piper*

Questions

Why do setbacks in our Christian experience feel so terribly disappointing? How do we define success in our relationship with God anyway? Are we tempted to blame God when things don't go our way, and how do we deal with this? How would you have reacted if you had experienced what Job went through? What does this teach us about how the great controversy is working out?

Bible summary

Mark 4:35–41 is the story of Jesus calming the storm. In Mark 5:21–34 the woman is healed from her problem with bleeding. We remain confident when problems come (see Romans 5:3–5). Job despite his troubles still hopes to see God (see Job 19:23–27). He remains confident (see Job 23:8–12). The disciples despair is turned to joy when they meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13–27). “Yet I'm convinced that what we suffer in the present is nothing compared to the future glory that will be revealed to us... We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, those whom he has called to be part of his plan.” Romans 8:18, 28 .

Comment

As the Biblical material for this study makes clear, setbacks and disappointments are very much part of life. Add to this the widespread idea that we should always be happy and satisfied; that anything other than what we aspire to should be dismissed as negative.

But is this reality? The US Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

What about “the pursuit of Happiness”? It’s interesting that for something everyone wants, how few think they’ve found it... In fact all the surveys done on the “state of happiness” reveal that the happy are very much in the minority. Most pursue happiness, a few create it!

One ancient ruler, who clearly was a careful observer, kept a close watch on himself. Abd Er-Rahman III, a Moorish king ruling in what is now Spain in about 960 AD, wrote this about his own experience:

“I have now reigned about 50 years in victory or peace, beloved by my subjects, dreaded by my enemies, and respected by my allies. Riches and honors, power and pleasure, have waited on my call, nor does any earthly blessing appear to have been wanting to my felicity. In this situation, I have diligently numbered the days of pure and genuine happiness which have fallen to my lot. They amount to fourteen.”

So out of his roughly 18,250 days up until then as king he reckoned that fourteen had been happy ones for him—or about 0.08%. That’s a pretty low percentage by any measure, and one that reveals our unhappy lot... And as he points out, as king he could have just about whatever he wanted, and even so he was 99.92% unhappy! Just a negative personality? Or reflective of our more general characteristic of societal unhappiness and the inability to deal with disappointments?

Another king also considered happiness and meaning in life. Solomon concluded:

“But when I thought about what I had worked so hard to achieve, everything I’d done, it was so short-lived—as significant as someone trying to catch the wind. There really is no enduring benefit here on earth... So I ended up feeling disgusted with life because everything that happens here on earth is so distressing. It’s so incomprehensible, like trying to control the wind. I even ended up hating what I had achieved here on earth because I have to hand it over to whoever comes after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? Yet he will rule over everything I accomplished through my wisdom here on earth. This is just so frustrating, so hard to understand! I decided to give up, my mind in despair over the significance of all my life’s achievements.” Ecclesiastes 2:11, 17-20.

We all have to deal with setbacks. But what do you do when you feel you’re whole life is a setback?

The answer has to be God. For only there is there permanence and confidence and meaning in our lives. The setbacks we experience, all the bitter disappointments, fade away in the knowledge that like Job our Redeemer lives, and that we will see him with our own eyes!

Ellen White Comments

We are not to allow our perplexities and to eat into our souls and make us fretful and impatient. {CCh 175}

Shall we not brace ourselves against disappointments and temptations to be discouraged? God is merciful, and with the truth rejoicing, purifying, ennobling the life, we can do a sound and solid work for God. Prayer and faith will do wonderful things. The Word must be our weapon of warfare. Miracles can be wrought through the Word; for it is profitable for all things.—Letter 75, 1896. {Ev 489}

There are trials and perplexities for us all to encounter; for we are in a world of cares, anxieties, and disappointments. But these continual annoyances must be met in the spirit of Christ. Through grace we may rise superior to our surroundings, and keep our spirits calm and unruffled amid the frets and worries of everyday life. We shall thus represent Christ to the World. {AG 227}

This life at best is but the Christian’s winter; and the bleak winds of winter—disappointments, losses, pain, and anguish—are our lot here; but our hopes are reaching forward to the Christian’s summer, when we shall change climate, leave all the wintry blasts and fierce tempests behind, and be taken to those mansions Jesus has gone to prepare for those that love Him. {LS 239-40}