



The apostle Paul writes: "I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in disbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 1:12-14)

Sue Enquist spent 27 years as the head softball coach at UCLA where her teams won eleven national championships. Her eye-popping winning percentage of .835 is the best ever of any college coach with over 800 victories. So she knows something about the game.

Coach Enquist likes to talk about the importance of something she calls **failure recovery**. One day during a game she noticed that her players were being "too careful." That is, they were afraid to make mistakes, and this caution was keeping them from reaching their full potential. She discovered that because the team had reached an unbelievably high level of success the players were putting too much pressure on themselves to execute every situation perfectly. So she set up a drill station in practice that was so hard that eventually every player failed to perform the activity successfully. What happened as a result is the players learned it was okay to make a mistake, and the mistake didn't define them. It was a hard but necessary lesson, especially for the perfectionists in the group.

That resonated with me because I'm the type of person who, if there are ten people and nine of them compliment me and one of them criticizes me, guess where my focus is directed? To the one, of course. I'll set all of those affirmations aside and rethink what I could have done differently to avoid the error that led to the criticism. It's really crazy, dysfunctional behavior that's rooted somewhere in the messages I received in my life that I wasn't good enough. It's only possible to change that mindset with years of intentional work.

I wonder how many of us struggle with **failure recovery**. How hard is it for us to see our failures for what they are, compartmentalize them as things we can't change, and move on? How long do we beat ourselves up, wishing we could take words back or change an action or reverse a decision? Do we truly recover from our failures, or do they linger like a cancer slowly eating away at our self-worth?

Paul recognized that he, too, was susceptible to slow failure recovery. In his first letter to Timothy, a younger partner in ministry, Paul remembers that he was formerly “*a blasphemer, a persecutor (of Christians), and a man of violence.*” In other places in scripture Paul goes into greater detail about this time in his life. But Paul also says to Timothy that he received mercy, “*and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*” Paul recovered from the failures of his deplorable past by embracing God’s grace and trusting in God’s mercy.

Maybe that’s a good thing for us to remember, too. We are constantly being covered by God’s grace and mercy. Even in the midst of our greatest failures God continues to forgive us. We are in relationship with a God who promotes quick failure recovery, a God who welcomes our confession, the owning of our sins, and then pushes us back out into the world with God’s assurance that we are reconciled and being made whole again.

I have to intentionally and continually remind myself that my **failure recovery** can be accelerated by a higher level of trust in God’s promise of forgiveness. Maybe you do as well. May you be blessed in knowing that God loves you unconditionally, and is always ready to affirm who you are as a forgiven child of God.

Pastor Chuck

Let us pray. Gracious God, sometimes we get stuck in recovering from our failures because it’s so hard to believe that we aren’t defined by them. Help us to rest in the assurance of your mercy, and to remember that we are your children, always and forever loved and forgiven. Amen

