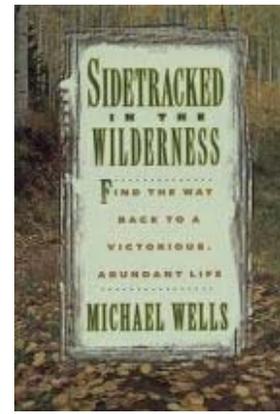


Freedom to Fail

Excerpt from *Sidetracked in the Wilderness*, Chapter 9
By Michael Wells



The only way out of failure is faith. We do not wallow in self-pity and guilt, but we allow failure to bring us to a place of true dependence, which will bring maximum productivity as Christ lives His life through us. Regrets are for unbelievers, not for those who walk in Christ's righteousness.

When we fail we must understand the character of God which causes all things to work together for good. In comprehending His character, there is one secret that all who serves Him should learn: His very nature is compassion. The repentant man, no matter how far he has fallen, can count on God's hearing him and being overcome by his own compassion!

Israel was warned that if she forgot the Lord and worshipped other idols she would be destroyed, but if when in distress from that behavior she would seek the Lord, then God would hear her. "For the Lord your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you not destroy you..." (Deuteronomy 4:31). In the Book of Hosea, God presents His charges against Israel: They are unfaithful, unrepentant, wicked, rebellious, idolatrous, deceived, and defiled. Therefore, they must come under His judgment and be broken, oppressed, cut off, childless, enslaved, devastated, and rejected. But listen to what God says: "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my *compassion* is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. *For I am God, and not man*—the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath" (Hosea 11:8-9, NIV, italics added). We are free to fail because God is a God of compassion; over sixty times in the Old Testament is He described thus.

It was the compassion of God that so upset the prophet Jonah; he knew that God would not destroy Nineveh if they repented. Jonah believed that Nineveh should be annihilated even if they did repent; their wrongs should not be overlooked! "Oh God, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jonah 4:2 NIV). Our father cannot overlook a repentant heart, no matter how severe the sin.

One thing that we see over and over again is what I call God's compassion Cycle. That is, whenever we are punished by God, our resulting sufferings stir His compassion, so He brings us back again to Himself. "For the Lord will not reject forever, for if He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness" (Lamentations 3:31-32).

What is your excuse for wallowing? To what end or benefit do you continue to punish yourself because of unbelief after you sinned? God is compassionate, whether you believe it or not. His character is not dependant upon what you believe or feel, but on what He says. King David himself, when given the choice between having God or man mete out his punishment, chose God, from whom he knew he would find compassion. Have you learned to lean on the

compassion of God, or do your lying emotions tell you God does not hear and show compassion.

God continued to forgive and restore Israel even though He knew that they would continue to fail and not keep their promises to Him. It is the compassion of God that has brought all of us thus far. There have been countless times when we have told God we would do better, and although we fully intended to, we simply did not. We cannot continue to believe that God wants to hear us say we will improve, before He restores us to His presence; He actually wants us to come to Him in weakness and humility, not in the feigned strength of what we think we can accomplish.

For those of us who have experienced the compassion of God, is it any wonder that He commands us, "And so, as those who have been chosen by God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; bearing with one another and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Colossians 3:12-13). We who know the compassion of the Lord must show the same to others. No matter how often someone has failed, we must show mercy, understand the weakness of the person we are dealing with, and realize that if our lives had gone as his has we might not even be faring as well as he is. Compassion readily forgives.

There are great promises for those who show love and mercy in snatching someone from defeat. "...love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). "...mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13), and "he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20). When we walk in compassion, we are free to fail, our love covers a multitude of our sins, and our mercy delivers us from judgment. God has truly done everything possible to make this life of ours abundant.