

MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH
A WINNING MINDSET

STUDY SIX

What to Do After You've Blown It

Joshua 8:1–7

Failure is never final. It's never too late to acknowledge the wrong, get up, and start doing what is right. The goal in life is to press on.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE natural response to making a mistake is to cover it up. Most people would rather sweep the broken pieces of a failure under the rug than face the consequences. And yet, the pieces never stay hidden for long. As the Scriptures wisely warn, “You may be sure that your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23).

When a failure comes to light, the consequences can be hard to bear. A foul-up on the job may result in being fired. A botched project may forfeit future business. A broken promise may lead to a break-up. An embarrassing sin may drive a person into shunned isolation. So, what do we do after we've blown it? How do we recover?

The Israelites suffered a humiliating defeat at Ai because of Achan's sin, and they thought their dream of a homeland was over. The Canaanites “will wipe our name off the face of the earth,” Joshua moaned (Joshua 7:9). Through the Israelites' “Valley of Trouble” (Joshua 7:26), however, God provided a way of hope—a second chance. Their failure wasn't terminal, and neither is ours.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study is about second chances. God can redeem our failures—no matter how far we fell, how wrong we were, or how badly we blew it. It's never too late to step back onto God's right path and begin again.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Ask the Lord to light a way of hope for you as you study His Word.

Father, like the defeated Israelites, after I fail, I can feel paralyzed with fear. Draw me out of my isolation into the hiding place of Your caring, protective presence. Restore my confidence in Your plan and teach me the way of faith beyond failure. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Briefly review the tragic events in Joshua 7.

The defeat at Ai—[Joshua 7:1–5](#)

Joshua's lament—[7:6–9](#)

The Lord's answer and instructions—[7:10–15](#)

The discovery of Achan and his confession—[7:16–21](#)

The purging of Achan's sin—[7:22–26](#)

Achan's sin derailed the Israelites' fast-track to the promised land, but only temporarily. Joshua 8 opens with a hopeful, forward-looking message: "Then the LORD said to Joshua, 'Do not be afraid or discouraged. . . . I have given you the king of Ai'" (Joshua 8:1).



Observation: Victory at Ai

Observation is the starting point for discovering scriptural treasures. Look for key phrases and action words. Group the main ideas into subjects and note concepts that repeat for emphasis.

As you read the opening verses of Joshua 8, put yourself in the place of Joshua, who was still licking his wounds from the humiliating defeat at Ai. Remember the context. The confidence of the nation had melted away, and Joshua genuinely feared that the Canaanites would attack and chase the Israelites back into the wilderness.



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Dwell on each of the phrases in *Joshua 8:1-2*. What would it have been like for Joshua to hear these words from the Lord? Write your observations in the chart below.

Phrases	Observations
<i>Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid or discouraged."</i>	
<i>"Take all your fighting men and attack Ai."</i>	
<i>". . . for I have given you the king of Ai, his people, his town, and his land. You will destroy them as you destroyed Jericho and its king."</i>	
<i>"But this time you may keep the plunder and the livestock for yourselves."</i>	

Then the Lord gave Joshua a new battle plan: "Set an ambush behind the town" (8:2). Read Joshua's orders to the people in 8:3-8. Write down what you observe about this new strategy that was so different than the Lord's strategy at Jericho.



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The Israelites perfectly executed the ambush in *Joshua 8:9–29*. The fall of Ai opened up the hill country and gave access to the north-south ridge route that ran from Shechem to Hebron—the same route Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob traveled.

According to *Joshua 8:30–35*, Joshua built an altar at Mount Ebal and led the nation in reciting the law of Moses. Half the nation stood on Mount Ebal and the other half on Mount Gerazim. With the priests and the ark of the covenant in between the two mountains, Joshua read the blessings and curses of the law.

Interestingly, this same spot was where, centuries earlier, Abraham first entered Canaan, built an altar, and heard the Lord promise, “I will give this land to your descendants” (Genesis 12:7). What was the significance of the Israelites renewing their commitment to God at this historic and sacred site?

You'll never learn to walk in victory if you lie there in defeat—which the enemy wants you to do. Joshua 8 is a chapter about a group of people who learned how to get back up.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Truths about Recovery after Failure

A primary task in interpretation is to look for the meaning the biblical author intended to convey to his original audience. How would future Israelites reading about the second battle of Ai have interpreted the account? What truths would they have gleaned that are still true?

Reflect on your observations of Joshua 8 to answer the following questions.



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After we fail, what truth about God emerges from the Lord's encouragement, "Do not be afraid or discouraged" (Joshua 8:1)?

What truth about recovery can you gather from the Lord's instructions, "Take *all* your fighting men" (8:1, emphasis added)?

Considering Joshua's humiliation at the hand of Ai's king, what truth do we find in the Lord's promise, "I have given you the king of Ai" (8:1)?



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What truth about God's grace do you find in His gift, "This time you may keep the plunder and the livestock for yourselves" (Joshua 8:2)?

Finally, God gave Joshua a new approach to the Ai problem—"Set an ambush" (8:2). What truth do you glean about how to move forward in a different way after a failure?

Discouragement always looks back and reminds you of what went wrong. Hope always looks ahead. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Power of Forgiveness

Few people in Scripture felt as humiliated and defeated as the woman in *John 8:1–11*. After hauling her in front of a crowd at the temple, the Pharisees megaphoned her scandalous sin: "This woman was caught in the act of adultery" (8:4).

Imagine this shamed woman slumping to the ground, her face flushed with guilt, her head hung in shame, her eyes burning with tears. Turning to Jesus, the Pharisees said, "The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" (8:5). *Stone her?* Now, a bolt of panic shot through the woman's soul, making her tremble in fear.



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How did Jesus defuse the situation, according to *John 8:6–9*?

What healing words did Jesus say to the woman in *8:10–11*?

Whether this woman or the Israelites centuries earlier, those who receive forgiveness are never the same. Forgiveness has great power to restore us, raise us up, and set us on the right path. It's truly transforming. How has God's forgiveness transformed you?

You are a valuable human being who has an eternal soul. The Lord wants to use you, develop you, and cultivate you. The scars you have gained from your failures will give you wisdom to be involved in others' lives far more effectively. You're fallen but forgiven, and God is faithful to take you from where you are to where He wants you to be.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: Five Steps to Recovery from Failure

Let's build a strategy for what to do after we've blown it based on the truths from Joshua 8 and the woman's second chance before Jesus.

Listen to the Lord's counsel, not your guilty conscience. How is guilt accusing you? What message of forgiveness is the Lord telling you in Romans 8:1: "So now there is there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus"?

Include others as you return to your responsibilities. Whom can you "enlist" in the fight to get you get back on your feet?

Draw strength from what the Lord promises you. What promise from Scripture can you claim? Your identity in Christ? The indwelling power of the Spirit? The security of your Father's love?



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Be willing and ready to receive even more than you had before you failed. What gift of grace can you wholeheartedly receive? Forgiveness? Mercy? Restoration? A blessing you didn't expect?

Be open and flexible as you recover from failure. What door may the Lord be opening for you?

Failure doesn't have to be a dead-end street. Through God's forgiveness and restoration, failure can lead to a better path you might have never seen before. Redeeming failures into triumphs is God's way, and when He does it, He gets all the glory.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, remove my fear of failure and replace it with confidence in Your redeeming grace. Empower each step of my recovery journey with the assurance of forgiveness in Christ and the promise of grace that is greater than my sin. Keep my eyes on You, not my past, and help me take the next step in following You. In Jesus' name, amen.

