

After Failure, Finding a Way Forward

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 August 2018

Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

[0 : 00] Good morning, church. All right.

Turn with me in your Bible to Exodus chapter 33, page 73, if you are looking in the Pew Bible.

We're going to be looking at a long section, starting at chapter 33, verse 1, and going through chapter 34, verse 28, but I'm going to start by just reading the first six verses of chapter 33.

The Lord said to Moses, depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, to your offspring I will give it.

I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey, but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.

[1 : 25] When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. For the Lord had said to Moses, say to the people of Israel, you are a stiff-necked people.

If for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments that I may know what to do with you.

Therefore, the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward. How do we go forward after we've blown it?

How do we move on after we've failed? Last week, Pastor Nick looked at the incident of the golden calf in chapter 32 about the nature of sin, how sin is rooted in idolatry and our response to sin, and how only Christ can atone for our sin.

But this week, the focus of the passage is not just how to deal with sin in the moment, when it's first exposed and brought to light. It's about how do we go forward in the weeks and months and years to come.

[2 : 34] For some of you, you can think back to a time and place where you know you really messed up. Maybe you told off your boss and got fired.

Or you broke the law, and now you have a criminal record. Or you mistreated a friend and lost a close friendship. Or you started using drugs, and then you got addicted, and things went downhill from there.

Or you knew that someone vulnerable was being taken advantage of, and you did nothing. Maybe you publicly denied Christ like Peter did. Maybe you violated your marriage covenant by committing adultery.

Or maybe you didn't physically commit adultery, but you did something deeply wrong that broke the trust between you and your spouse. And ever since then, you've been living in the aftermath of your own failure and sin.

Maybe you dwell on it and get depressed. Maybe you try to forget about it and just live in the present. Maybe you try to fix it and make up for it. But deep down, you know that the course of your life and maybe others has been marked by your failure.

[3 : 50] Now, for others of you, the course of your life might not be marked by prominent, obvious failures. At least not yet. But every one of us have sinned.

In thought, word, and deed, and in what we have left undone. And whether or not the consequences seem life-altering, we all live in the aftermath of our own failure and sin. Whether it's large or small.

And how do we go forward? That's this question that this text deals with. The Israelites were at the beginning of chapter 33. God says to Moses, depart.

Go up. Time to leave. You're not going to stay here at Mount Sinai forever. You need to keep going toward the promised land. And for those of us who are Christians, we're not heading toward the land of Canaan, but we are on a journey to the heavenly city, to the place where we will see God's face.

And Hebrews 12 urges us to lay aside every weight, everything that weighs us down, and the sin that clings so closely, that is, that trips us up and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

[5 : 01] So today we're going to look at the Israelites' process of finding a way forward after one of their greatest failures, after they had veered completely off course and fallen on their face. And we'll also see how in Jesus Christ God makes a way forward for everyone who looks to Him, however you may have failed in the past.

Now we're looking at a long section of Exodus today. I want to look at it in three parts. First, verses 1 to 6 that we've just read, we'll see the way not to go forward. And then in the middle section, 33.7 to 34.9, we'll see the search for a better way forward.

And then in 34.10 to 28, we'll see that God makes a way forward. The way not to go forward, the search for a better way forward, God makes a way. So let's jump in.

First, the way not to go forward, verses 1 to 6, the section we just read. There are two things that we learn in this section. And the first thing that we learn in this section is that moving on with life, but staying distant from the Lord is never a good option.

God says, go up from here. I'll send an angel before you to fight your battles and clear the land for you. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. And you know what?

[6 : 17] All that sounds pretty good. Right? Protection from enemies, victory in battles, prosperity in the land sounds like many of the things that we want.

But then, verse 3, God says, but I won't go up among you, lest I consume you on the way. See, God is a just God.

He's a consuming fire of holiness. And a consuming fire of holiness cannot dwell in the midst of a sinful, corrupt, idol-worshiping people. A consuming fire and pure gold can coexist forever.

But a consuming fire and a pile of trash will coexist for less than a minute. And then it will be a pile of ashes. Idolatry corrupts.

And a holy God cannot dwell in the midst of corruption. And so, in one sense, we see God's mercy here in not distancing himself from the people in order to not immediately destroy them.

[7 : 22] Verse 5, God says, if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. But notice the people's response to this proposal, to this word.

Note at verse 4, when the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned. And no one put on his ornaments. And this is the right response.

God had said, I'll give you everything you could want in this world, but you won't have me among you anymore. You'll have all kinds of blessings, but you won't have closeness and intimacy with me.

And the people mourned. Because why had God brought them out of Egypt in the first place? Not just so they could be prominent and prosperous, but so they might worship him and belong to him and be his people forever.

And anything less than that would be a disaster. It's actually a very good sign that the people won't be satisfied with anything less than the presence of God himself among them. John Piper asked this probing question.

[8 : 31] He said, if you could have heaven with no sickness, with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven if Jesus Christ were not there?

Now, some of us would have trouble answering that question. Because in our heart, we love all kinds of things in this world, as much as or even more than Jesus Christ himself.

But brothers and sisters, I hope that you can say in response to that question, absolutely not. Everything else in the world minus Jesus is emptiness.

Even the promised land is not a paradise apart from the Lord. Moving on with life but staying distant from the Lord is not a good option. But the second thing we learn from this first section is that in order to get close with God again, we need to mourn over our sin like the people did here.

You see, the people mourned because their sin had created this massive gap between them and God. And we too need to recognize how massively sin disrupts our communion with God.

[10 : 06] Even as Christians. Now, under the new covenant, the covenant of Jesus Christ, the blood of Christ atones for all sin. So, God's children are still God's children even when they sin.

But you know what? When we sin, especially when we sin willfully and repeatedly and without repenting, our fellowship with our heavenly Father becomes obstructed.

Our joy in the Holy Spirit can sometimes be removed. Our prayers can be hindered. One example of this is 1 Peter 3, 7. It says, Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to them, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Husbands, neglecting your wife or treating her harshly may stop your prayers from being answered until you repent. The effects of sin, whatever it is, are serious.

See, sometimes Christians who have really messed up try to move on too quickly. Without examining and confessing and mourning over their sin and its consequences.

[11 : 24] Without digging below the surface of their heart to expose those deep idols that Pastor Nick talked about last week. Jesus said, Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

That is not primarily talking about people who are grieving the loss of a loved one. Jesus was talking about life in God's kingdom and how it begins with being humble, being poor in spirit, and mourning over our sin and its consequences.

Jesus said, Jesus said, Close with the Lord again after our sin and failure.

We need to begin by mourning over our sin. But that's not the end of the story. In these verses, we see the way not to go forward, but then in the next section, we see the search for a better way forward.

Chapter 33, verse 7. Now, Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp.

[13 : 24] Now, in this section, we see God's mercy in drawing one step closer to the people. Moses pitches a tent outside the camp. Verse 11 tells us that there, God spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend.

Now, the people didn't go into the tent with Moses, but they watched him from a distance. And those who wanted to could go out to the tent and presumably could inquire of Moses.

Moses would then go into the Lord and come back with the word of the Lord with guidance for them. So, we see God's mercy in that God is one step closer, but we also see God's justice in that the people's sin still hinders their fellowship with the Lord.

When God instructed Moses to build the tabernacle, he said, put it right in the middle of the camp. Everything else is around it. In other words, God's presence is right in the midst of the people, dwelling among them, flowing over into everything that they do.

But here, the tent of meeting is outside the camp, far off from the camp. God is present with Moses, but not in the midst of the people. And further, the function of this tent of meeting was much more limited than the tabernacle.

[14 : 38] There were no sacrifices. There was no role for the Levites and priests. It was much smaller and more stripped down. In other words, compared to God not going up among the people at all, this was a step in the right direction.

But it still wasn't a great way forward. Moses recognized this. And starting in verse 12, we see Moses interceding on behalf of the people.

So, let's look down at verse 12. Moses said to the Lord, See, you say to me, bring up this people, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me.

Yet you have said, I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight. Now, therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight.

Consider, too, that this nation is your people. And he said, the Lord said, My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.

[15 : 37] And Moses said to him, If your presence will not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?

And the Lord said to Moses, This very thing that you have spoken, I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name. Moses said, Please show me your glory. So there are three requests.

Verses 12 to 13, Moses says, Please show me your ways. Verses 15 and 16, he basically says, Go with us. And then verse 18, he says, Please show me your glory.

And then if you look at 34 verse 9, Moses makes another request, Please let the Lord go in the midst of us. And pardon our iniquity and sin, And take us for your inheritance. Now you might ask, What's going on in this conversation between Moses and the Lord?

With Moses' four requests. Is Moses asking for four different things? Or is he just asking for one thing? And if he's just asking for one thing, Why doesn't he come out and say it in the beginning?

[16 : 44] And why this back and forth and back and forth? Well, let me give a bit of cultural context, which might help us here. In the majority culture in America, the expectation is that if you approach someone in authority with a request, you should ask them directly and straightforwardly for exactly what you want.

Don't beat around the bush. Get right to the point. But that's not the way it works in many other cultures, including many minority cultures within the United States. And so sometimes this presents challenges in a workplace or in a family or in a church like ours where we have people from a lot of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Some of us who tend to communicate more directly and up front, and some of us who tend to communicate more indirectly and slowly. And so sometimes we need to work hard at listening well and at communicating clearly because communication doesn't naturally happen in a cross-cultural setting.

In the ancient Near Eastern culture, the expectation was that you don't ask someone in authority directly and up front for exactly what you want. Instead, you start by politely and respectfully asking for something that the person in authority is likely to agree with.

And then little by little, you might ask for more and more until you finally get to the point that you were really hoping for. But you take it slowly, one step at a time.

[18 : 14] And that seems to be how Moses approaches God here. It's a long conversation, but Moses is really getting at one thing. Lord, don't just go with me.

Go with us. That's what he's getting at in this whole long conversation. So let me show you that a bit. Back in chapter 32, verse 10, the Lord had said to Moses, Let me alone that I may destroy this people and start a new people with you alone.

And Moses says, Lord, please no. Please don't destroy the people that you brought out of Egypt. Don't leave them now. And here in verses, chapter 33, verse 12, Moses says a similar thing.

He says, Lord, you told me to bring up this people. And you've told me that you're pleased with me. So Moses reminds God of what God has already said.

And then he asks God on that basis, please show me your ways. In other words, please show me the way forward. And then at the end, he hints at what he's really getting at.

[19 : 22] Consider, too, that this nation is your people. See, he's really asking on behalf of the people, even though he doesn't come out and say it directly from the start. And in verse 14, we see God's initial answer.

God's initial answer is, Now, the you there is singular. So I think most likely it's actually referring to Moses himself.

God is saying to Moses, I will go with you, Moses. I'll take care of you. You'll be all right. I'll give you rest. Rest most likely refers to the promised land. You're good.

In other words, Moses, I'll take care of you. And Moses isn't satisfied with that. He says, no, Lord. If your presence, verse 15, Now, the ESV in verse 15 says, If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.

But the words with me are not actually in the Hebrew text. Literally, it says, If your presence will not go, don't bring us up from here. So most other English translations say something like, If your presence won't go with us, interpreting it that way, or if you won't go yourself, which seems to make better sense in the context.

[20 : 36] You see, Moses is not worried that God isn't going to go with him. Moses' concern is that God is not going to go with all the people.

And we see this very clearly in verse 16, where Moses links his destiny with that of the people. He said, He says, Is it not in your going with us?

Sorry. How shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight? I and your people. Is it not in your going with us so that we are distinct? I and your people. Moses is pleading with God on behalf of the people.

He's standing with the people and saying, God, don't leave them and take me. Take us. Have mercy on us. And in verse 17, God says, Request granted.

And then in verse 18, Moses asks for further assurance. Please show me your glory. I don't think Moses is just asking for a deeper personal experience of God, valuable as that may be. I think Moses is asking for a sign, a confirmation, an assurance that, yes, God will do what He just said He would.

[21 : 46] And that's what Moses gets. Verse 19, God says, I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord. And that's what God does in chapter 34.

God tells Moses, go up to the top of Mount Sinai. And if you look down at chapter 34, verse 5, God does exactly what He promised back in 33, 19. It says, The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with Him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

And verse 8, Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. And then he says, If now I have found favor in your sight, please go in the midst of us. Forgive our sin.

Take us for your inheritance. You see, that's what Moses is getting at all along. Now, what do we take away from this long back-and-forth dialogue between Moses and the Lord?

The search for a better way forward. Now, in one sense, this is not a simple question to answer because the point of this story is not that we imitate Moses in all of the details of his interactions with the Lord.

[22 : 56] We can appreciate what Moses did on behalf of the Israelites, but our situation is not identical to his, and so we can't just take everything and directly map it onto our own lives.

But I think there are at least two broad takeaways from this section. First, the importance of a mediator. The people can't find a good way forward by themselves.

See, the people had really messed up. They had failed. They had sinned. And sin always distorts our perspective. Our perspective is already limited as finite creatures, and sin further blinds and distorts our view of ourselves and of God and of the world.

And so all by themselves, the people of Israel could not, were not capable of discerning a good way forward in the aftermath of their sin. They needed Moses to stand in the gap for them.

They needed someone to intercede for them with God. And similarly, if you have fallen into serious sin, if you've really messed up, you can't just figure out how to go forward all by yourself.

[24 : 07] This is not a DIY job. Do it yourself. There are some things around my house that if they break, I can fix them. But there are plenty of things that if they break, I'm calling the plumber, or I'm calling the electrician, or I'm calling the roofer.

Because otherwise, I will make even more of a mess trying to fix something that I don't know how to fix by myself. And spiritually speaking, there's a parallel. Some things in our spiritual house, we can learn to fix on our own by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit and with the help of the Word of God and our personal prayer.

But when the problem is serious, or when it's chronic, or when it gets really complex, you need to call a professional for help. And I don't just mean a pastor, but somebody else who's spiritually mature, someone who will tell you what you need to hear and not just what you want to hear, someone who can help you see things that you can't or won't see on your own, someone who can pray through it along with you.

James 5 says, confess your sins to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

That doesn't mean that everyone in the church needs to know all the details of your past sins and failures. But it does mean that we better be open with somebody in the body of Christ who can know the truth and who can be praying for us and with us.

[25 : 41] You see, the sad thing is some Christians rarely or never ask for help in this kind of way. They say things like, my marriage has been terrible for the last 10 years, but I know what I need to do.

I've messed up in the past. Don't worry, I'll fix it. Really? Or they say, I don't have a problem. I'm just fine. Well, why does your wife think you have a problem?

Or your roommate? Or your best friend? You see, we need other people who can help us, who can shed light on what we can't see on our own.

But you know, there's one mediator that we need more than any other person because there's only one person who can save us, and that is Jesus Christ.

The Bible says He is the one mediator between God and humanity. If you've been trying to get yourself right with God by your own efforts, or if you're looking for someone else to save you and to rescue you and to justify you and to make it all right, it's never going to work.

[26 : 54] Jesus Christ is the only one who can reconcile sinful human beings to a holy and righteous God. Are you trusting Him as your mediator? Second, we also see in this section not just the importance of a mediator, but also the importance of prayer.

There are many places in the Bible that show us and tell us about the sovereignty of God, that God knows the end from the beginning, and because of that, we should praise Him and rest in Him.

But at the same time, right here in this story, which is part of the holy Word of God, we see that God is portrayed as changing His mind, relenting from His righteous wrath and granting mercy to His people in response to Moses' bold and persistent prayer.

And this too is an important part of the biblical picture of God, which we ought not to quickly neglect or dismiss or explain away in a zeal to protect the sovereignty of God.

Yes, this story is told from a human perspective. It's not showing us God's mind from all eternity. It doesn't contradict the other parts of Scripture that affirm the sovereignty and all-knowingness of God.

[28 : 12] But still, this is an important part of how God has chosen to reveal Himself to us, that in the story of our lives, He wants us to approach Him with boldness and persistence, that God is personal, He hears and responds to our prayers.

God is not just a force. He's not just an idea. He's not just a feeling. He's not just a list of attributes. He's a personal God, and prayer matters. So, brothers and sisters, if we want to see God move in mercy in our city, if we want to see God renew and grow our church, if we've messed up and we're looking for a way forward, we need to pray.

Amen. So, we've seen the way not to go forward. We've seen the search for a better way forward. And finally, we see in 34, 10 to 28, God makes a way forward.

34, verse 10, God says, Behold, I am making a covenant. And then in verse 27, He concludes, I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.

You see, in making the golden calf, the Israelites had broken God's covenant. Spiritually speaking, it's as if they had committed adultery after vowing faithfulness to God just a few weeks prior. But here we see God restores the covenant that was broken by the people's sin.

[29 : 34] God takes them back. He claims them as His own, and He promises, I will go forward with you as my covenant people. But we also see that God doesn't change or relax any of the demands of the agreement that He had previously made with them.

If you scan down at verse 11 to 26, most of that is a restatement of what we've already seen in the Ten Commandments in chapter 20 and in the covenant laws of chapter 23.

And specifically, this section emphasizes what the people forgot and disobeyed in the course of building, of worshiping the golden calf. So, it emphasizes worshiping God alone and not any idols.

That's the main idea of verse 11 to 17. And it emphasizes celebrating their feasts unto the Lord and not unto anyone else or anything else.

That's the emphasis of verse 18 to 26. So, again, we see here God is merciful. He takes His people back. He restores the covenant that they broke. But God is also just.

[30 : 37] He will not tolerate ongoing faithlessness and disobedience in the lives of His people. His call is always for us to be holy. And that's what we've seen throughout this section, that the God who makes a way forward for us is the God of mercy and justice.

He's the God of mercy. We've seen in verse 1 to 6, He's the God of second chances. He doesn't immediately destroy His people. He's the God who hears and answers prayer in the middle section when Moses stands in the gap for the people.

And here we see He's the God who restores broken covenants. And takes His people back. But again, we also see He's the God of justice. God doesn't just sweep things under the rug.

He doesn't just pretend it never happened. That's why at first He said He wouldn't go up among the people. He wanted them to realize the gravity of their sin. And that's why He didn't immediately come back in the center of the camp, but provided a way for Moses and others to seek Him outside the camp.

And that's why God reminded His people once again in verse 11 to 26 what He expected of them. You see, when we've blown it and when we're looking for a way forward, we need the God of mercy and justice.

[31 : 56] If we've messed up, justice without mercy does us no good because it leaves us either hopeless in the face of our sin or it leaves us in denial about the extent of it.

And if you're on the other side, if you've been wronged, justice without mercy is not the answer either. Because in the hands of human beings, a desire for justice without mercy almost never ends in justice.

It almost always turns into revenge or bitterness or cynicism, becoming hardened to the humanity of the offender, closed to any possibility that God could be working to change them.

Miroslav Volf wrote, Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners.

In other words, seeking justice without mercy is not the way forward. But mercy without justice isn't any better. Showing mercy without accountability and without truth in the face of destructive sin is just enabling.

[33 : 08] It's not actually mercy. Mercy without justice isn't mercy. But the God of the Bible is a God of mercy and justice. That's what we need and that's who we need to go forward.

That's exactly how God reveals Himself back in chapter 34, verses 6 and 7. I skipped over these verses earlier, but they're some of the most important verses in the whole Bible. Because they're echoed 40 times in the rest of the Old Testament, probably more than any other single statement in the Old Testament.

These verses are quoted many times and echoed in many other places throughout the history of Israel about who God is. The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful, cares about us in our misery, a God gracious.

He loves us despite our sin, a God slow to anger, patient and forbearing, abounding, that is overflowing in steadfast love and faithfulness. That word translated steadfast love is a rich word.

Hesed, meaning covenant loyalty, loving kindness. God is constant and loyal. He keeps steadfast love for thousands or even for a thousand generations that might be translated or as it is, that's explicitly said for a thousand generations in Deuteronomy 7, 9.

- [34 : 25] Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, all kinds of failures. God forgives. When God forgives, He doesn't forgive reluctantly or against His nature, right?

He's not just showing outward politeness but on the inside holding resentment against us. That's how sometimes we pretend to forgive. God doesn't pretend to forgive. God's character is merciful and forgiving.

But He's also the God of justice. He will by no means clear the guilty. God doesn't just let us off the hook. He doesn't just dispense with justice. He doesn't say sin doesn't matter or it's okay.

In fact, God will punish sin over and over for as long as it takes, even for three or four successive generations. Says the rest of verse 7.

Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation. What does that mean? Sinful patterns tend to be passed down from one generation to another. And children who continue in the sins of their parents are not off the hook just because they learn to sin from their parents.

- [35 : 33] But notice the contrast. God will punish sin to the third or fourth generation for as long as it takes, for as long as He must, but He will keep steadfast love for a thousand generations.

God's desire is not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He's the God of mercy and He's the God of justice. That's what we see in that reading with Peter, with Jesus and Peter that we read earlier in the service.

See the same pattern, right? Jesus, Peter had denied Jesus three times and Jesus came to him and asked him three painful questions. Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Three times, reminding Peter of the three times that Peter had failed. Jesus didn't pretend that nothing went wrong. Jesus didn't make excuses for Peter. He didn't say, ah, no big deal, don't worry about it, we'll just let the past be the past and look on to the future.

No, He took Peter right back to the place of His greatest failure and sin. He even built a charcoal fire. There's only two places where a charcoal fire appears in the Gospel of John.

- [36 : 44] It's when Peter was standing outside and warming himself by the charcoal fire and he denied Jesus and it's when Jesus built the charcoal fire on the beach and cooked breakfast for him and then had this conversation with Peter.

Jesus took him right back but He took him back in order to show him that He had a way forward for him. He said, feed my sheep.

Follow me. And by the way, don't worry about John. What am I going to do with him? Don't compare yourself to somebody else. Some of you have been in ministry or in Christian leadership positions and you've failed.

And maybe you think you're done with meaningful service in the kingdom of God. That's not true. You might need to deal with some painful questions.

You might need to mourn over your sin more deeply. You might need to confess more openly. You might need to make amends to those whom you have hurt.

- [37 : 51] That process will probably take longer than you want it to but there's a way forward for you to find renewed joy in your salvation and even to be restored to a place of meaningful service in the kingdom of God.

Whatever your sin or failure is that you're looking back on, the way forward always begins at the cross of Christ.

Because at the cross we see God's justice. We see that Jesus had to die in order for us to be saved. There was no other way to pay for our sin and yet we see His mercy that He was willing in His love to die for sinners like us.

We see God's justice that our sin was condemned in the flesh of Jesus and we see God's mercy that because of Christ we are justified and we are free. Whatever the nature of your failure, the path forward always begins at the cross and at the empty tomb because that's how Jesus made a way forward for us.

Let's pray. Father, we pray that you would help us to see you as the God of mercy and justice and to grapple with you.

[39 : 14] We thank you that you are a God who makes a way. You are a God who makes a way forward. Lord, not a way for us to be blessed in earthly terms but to be distant from you and not even that you would continue to hang around the outskirts of our lives and that we can go to you periodically but that you can come that our fellowship with you, our communion with you can be restored.

That we can know that you are our God and we are your people because of your son Jesus Christ, because he is our mediator, because he has paid the cost for our sin on the cross, because he has triumphed over the grave in his resurrection.

God, we pray that you would give us both help us to mourn in the face of our sin but give us joy in our salvation. Give us hope for the future.

Lord, help us not to get stuck in a place of sin and shame but that we would go forward looking to Jesus and run the race that you have set before us with endurance.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[40 : 45] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.