

Coach House Church BEACONS

FREEDOM TO TRY AGAIN

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Today I want to encourage you to try again. I like attempting to play games that take skill and effort and one of my favourites is called 'Dark Souls' and it's famously difficult. Every move has to be timed perfectly and the mechanics of the game mean that every battle is difficult and unforgiving, even with the easiest enemies. You can never let your guard down, and your character can die easily at any time to the most trivial things. Sometimes I've let months go by before re-visiting a particular boss fight and trying to win again, and most of the time, eventually, I've succeeded (even if it took a couple of years to do!)

One thing that's beautiful about games is the ability to try and try again. While Dark Souls is hard, you can always restart. You can die and die again, but as long as you don't put down the controller and physically stop playing it – you are free to try again. Unless the disk breaks or the console is broken, the nature of the game means that you can always have another attempt.

In the letter to the Hebrews we are told this in chapter 4:14-16: 14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,[f] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

In different ways, the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the only one worthy of our faith, and we should not expect anyone better, because he is completely sufficient for us in every situation. In this passage, we see that because he came to earth as a human being, he is able to sympathise with our weaknesses – he understands that we do not live perfectly. Secondly, in verse 16 the resulting

command is to approach him and pray to him because we will find grace and mercy there.

Think about that for a minute. We are not told to cower in shame or that our failures have defined us. Instead, we are called to come to him because he understands us and desires to show us mercy and grace. The way that we try again when we fail is to place our faith in Jesus and approach him. If we think our failure means we cannot come to him, that is utterly wrong. Think you've gone too far? Think again, God calls you, yes you, and me and all people to come to him as the source of grace and mercy in the face of our failures. This applies to us whether it is the first time we have done so, or the millionth.

It's all the more scandalous when we realise that there's no limit to this. We like to impose limits and say this or that person has gone too far, or I'm beyond God's grace this time. You're not, you never are. God's command to come to him to find mercy and grace in our time of need extends to everyone. There is no limit to the grace and love of God because Jesus' sacrifice dealt with all our sin for all time on the cross. As Hebrews 10:14 puts it "14 For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."

As Christians, we are being 'made holy' which means that God is shaping us and our lives into the way he wants us to be. It is clear from this verse stated above that this is a process. However, as we are in this process of change, succeeding and failing in our faith, our correct response is always to approach God in faith because he loves us and desires to help us. The fact that his sacrifice has dealt with our sin for all time means that we have the freedom to acknowledge and move beyond any and all failures with his help. God has the power and desire to change us. There is no need to live off past glories or dwell upon past failures – there is a point when learning from the past and being encouraged by past achievements should end. We needn't be stuck in a moment.

Indeed the apostle Paul, one of the greats of the Christian faith, recognises that he is in a process of change ('being made holy'), but he because of who Jesus is and what he has done, he knows he can leave the past in the past and become the person God wants him to be. I like the way The Message translation puts Paul's words in Philippians 3:12-14:

"I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've

got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back."

That's the beauty of it. Like the mechanics of the videogame which lets you try and try again, it is built in to the way God chooses to relate to us.



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