

Sermon Transcript from April 17th, 2016 Failing, Not Failure Pastor Gerald Griffin, Bridgetown Church

Hey, like I said, we're in this kind of mini-series about Israel, and tonight we're going to look at one character, one specific person, in the story of Israel. A couple weeks ago we were talking about how when you're reading through the story of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, there is only a few heroes; a few men and women that didn't blow it big time. The majority of the characters we identify with in the Scriptures are guys like Abraham or David who actually did amazing things in faith, but then also made amazing mistakes.

What's cool about this, if we're honest, is that's a lot more like you and I. I mean, life isn't like the movies that most of us pay to go see that Hollywood produces where there's a little bit of struggle, but it ends with the hero prevailing and everything's great and the guy gets the girl or whatever. Right? That's the romantic comedy version of the hero. Not that I would know.

Point being that the stories of the Bible quite often have good and evil. The stuff of earth – tangible, dirty, gritty – and the stuff of heaven colliding and coinciding into a story that actually looks more like you and more like me. So, tonight we're going to look at a character from Israel's history, and it's their first king. King Saul. So, if you would, turn with me to 1 Samuel 9. If you don't know where that is, look at the table of contents. If you don't want any of that, just flip around at the front of the Bible until you find 1 or 2 Samuel, and then go to 1 Samuel 9.

While you're flipping, a little bit of background. This story takes place right after the time of the Judges, and Israel wants a king like their other neighboring nations around them. So, Israel has been brought into the promised land, they're looking around and they're like, "Oh, wow. We're in Canaan, but look at all these others. The Philistines. Look at them. They all have a king. We don't have one. We want a human king."

The irony of this is that Israel did have a king. Their king was supposed to be God Himself. But, at this point in the story, they reject God as their king and they say, "We want a human king like everyone else."

And God says, "Okay."

They basically rejected God as their king, demanded a human one, and this is where the story of Saul begins. So, 1 Samuel 9:1-2: **"There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bekorath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin. Kish had a son named Saul, as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else."**

Now, pause for a second and look up. If we're honest, Saul probably looked something like this I'm thinking. Right? You know what I mean? Handsome guy, good family, kind of tall and look at that grin. You know what I'm saying? So, the first thing we learn about this guy, Saul, is how he looks and his pedigree. And I think what's happening here is the narrator is actually showing us this is the kind of king that people would want. Tall, handsome, great family. But, as the story goes on, you realize the guy has serious flaws. Actually, his name means "the one asked for," because the people asked for him. And God's like, "Okay."

I think when God said that, it was probably with sarcasm. He's like, "Alright. You want it, you got it. Here's your guy."

And as the story unfolds, you'll see why. So, Saul is anointed by Samuel the prophet as the new king over Israel. Now, skip to chapter 10. Keep your Bible open and just flip over one more page and let's see the very next thing that happens.

1 Samuel 10:9-10. And, again, real quick. I've got to introduce this character because you're about to meet him. Samuel is the prophet. And just, real quick, sidebar: the way that this is supposed to work with Israel is there's a prophet that hears from God. Then the prophet, in this case Samuel, goes to the king, Saul, and communicates, "Hey, here's what God said. Here's what you're supposed to do."

Right? God to prophet. Prophet to king. Got it? Okay. You'll need that later. Trust me.

1 Samuel 10:9-11: "As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying. When all those who had formerly known Saul saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, 'What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?'"

So, check this out. This is really profound. Saul is chosen as the new king of Israel, he meets up with the prophet Samuel and the Spirit of God comes on him in a powerful way. So much so that people that knew Saul before that moment then saw him prophesying with all these prophets and they were like, "Wait a minute. Isn't this the son of Kish? And now look at him."

It was a profound change that had happened. And, if we're honest, this is kind of like what you would want in a leader, right? Clearly God is with him. In the very next chapter, Saul goes straight to work just like the people had hoped. He leads them into victory over one of their oppressors. He rescues this city. And it's interesting that just like David, the king that comes after Saul, Saul is off to a really good start. He's tall, he's handsome, he's filled with the Spirit, he's freeing them from oppressors and doing everything that Israel wanted and looking good while he does it.

But, the story goes on. Turn a couple of more pages. 1 Samuel 13. Here's what we're going to do, by the way. We're going to hit a couple quick stops and then the next one, chapter 15, is where we're going to land. Okay? You got it? Is that cool? Okay. I'm in charge. So, yeah. It's going to be good. Don't worry. It's cool.

So, 1 Samuel 13:8, but let me set this one up as well. Fast forward in the life of Paul to this next episode, and this is the first hint that this guy Saul actually might not be the best leader to Israel. The setting is this epic battle between Israel's neighbor, the Philistines, who actually Saul has been commissioned, he's supposed to take care of these guys and create peace between them. And now he's facing off with them. Now, here's the deal. I don't know what your picture of Israel and their army is – not modern day Israel, ancient Israel – but the deal is Israel was always supposed to be a very very weak. They were never a military state. They were supposed to be extremely weak. Their military was a joke. They went to battle with broomsticks and rubber band guns, right? And they went against these gnarly nations and the point of that was, if Israel was ever going to win in a military victory, it was not because of their might or strength, it was only because of their God.

So, point in case, here they stand up to the Philistines and the Philistines gathered with 30,000 chariots and 6,000 men on horses ready for battle. I mean, picture one of those epic battle scenes from Lord of the Rings where there's like a sea of people; an army coming in and filling in this valley for war. That's what this is like. And, as you can imagine, Saul is standing there with his little army – which is much much smaller – with their little broomsticks or their homemade swords and, needless to say, the Israelites were totally afraid. They were so afraid that the soldiers were literally hiding behind rocks and in caves and some just went full AWOL and took off running.

Now, before we read this, one more thing: Saul had been told specifically by Samuel the prophet from God to face off for battle and then wait seven days. And they would kind of do this. You know? They would have a distance between them and they would taunt each other and they would get ready and it was like this whole procession. So, Saul's like, "Okay. I'm supposed to wait seven days and then Samuel the prophet would arrive on the battlefield and he would offer a sacrifice to God and then, at that moment, Israel would win."

That's the plan. Okay? Here's where the story picks up. 1 Samuel 13:9: "Saul waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. So he said, 'Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings.' And Saul himself offered up the burnt offering."

Was that the plan? No. That wasn't the plan.

1 Samuel 13:10: "Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived," – talk about timing – "and Saul went out to greet him.

"What have you done?" asked Samuel.

"Saul replied, 'When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time,' – pause. The set time was the seventh day, right? And it was still the seventh day when Samuel arrived. So, actually, that's not true, Saul. Shame on you.

He continues, "So, when I see that you did not arrive at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikdash," – you do not want to see the Philistines at Mikdash. You don't want to be there for that. – "I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering."

Samuel's response: "You have done a foolish thing," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him as ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."

Saul's men start to scatter, he gets nervous and he makes the sacrifice himself. He didn't obey. Remember? God speaks to the prophet, the prophet speaks to the king and the king's supposed to obey. Saul didn't do what the king of Israel, Yahweh, had told him to do. This was a massive failure of leadership on Saul in two parts. First of all, he just doesn't obey. He decides on his own like, "Hey, man. I guess Samuel's not coming and I'm getting nervous so I'm just going to do this."

That was mistake number one. And then mistake number two: when he's confronted by Samuel and Samuel's like, "What have you done," what does he do? Does he say, "You know what, man? I totally blew it. I'm sorry?" No. He's like, "Well, you know. Uhh... the guys were getting nervous. You weren't here at the appointed time." – Lie – "And so I just took matters into my own hand and I just needed to do it myself."

Does he accept responsibility for his mistake? No. He makes excuses and he shifts the blame. And remember: the king of Israel was, at all times, to obey the word of God's prophet. So, in refusing to wait, Saul rejected not only the authority of the prophet Samuel, but, more importantly, he rejected the authority of the Lord, the true King over Israel. And then, instead of acknowledging it was his sin, he begins this blame-shifting and covering it up in half truths. So, as a result of this, we now learn about Saul that his line, his kingdom, is not going to last. There's going to be one to come who's going to replace him and that one's going to have this heart after God.

And what's interesting if you fast forward in the story and you remember David and Bathsheba – do you guys remember that story? David messes up big time, takes this woman who's not his wife, kills her husband. It's a mess. But, when David is confronted, what does he do? He immediately says, "I have sinned," and quickly God speaks through His prophet Nathan and says, "But, you won't die. God forgives you. Is there going to be consequence? Yes. But, you are right with me now."

All God wanted out of Saul in this moment was that immediate, honest, humble confession. "Dude, you didn't wait."

All Saul needed to do was say right then, "I'm sorry. I blew it. You're right."

But, he doesn't. And after this point, Saul's leadership trajectory has taken a sharp downward turn. Turn with me. We're moving on to the next passage. This is the last place we're going to stop. 1 Samuel 15. You guys okay? Alright. We're moving quickly.

1 Samuel 15. Here we go. Now we come to this key episode that defines Saul for who he is and who he will be moving forward. Now, just to warn you, this is one of those passages in the Old Testament and the Hebrew Scriptures where God is basically telling Saul to wipe out an evil nation. The exact wording is to kill all the men, women, children and cattle. And I don't know about you, but you read that and you're like, "Whoa. This is the God that, in Jesus, said, 'Love your enemies? Turn the other cheek?' That does not sound like God."

And there's a couple things to unpack here, and for a full teaching on this, our friend Joshua Ryan Butler came and did a Midweek Lecture. The podcast is on our website and he basically tackles the question: "Does God command genocide?" Or "How are we supposed to understand this?" He does a fantastic job. Please, if you have not listened

to that podcast, go on our website and listen to it. And, if you have any questions, just ask John Mark. He'll be back next week.

But, for tonight, a couple things – that was a joke, but a funny one, apparently. A couple things to think about for tonight. First, this is a very rare time – there's only a couple of these – when God actually brings His judgment on an evil people right then, and He does not wait. And what I mean by that is He had had so many, literally, centuries of dealing with the Amalekites. Centuries of their violence, their wickedness and their unrepentance. And after, literally, hundreds and hundreds of years, God is finally like, "These people need to be judged now."

Now, if you think about it, where we sit right now, if you look to the end of the story to Revelation, you see Jesus coming back and bringing judgment against those that are wicked, violent and unrepentant. But, what's happening here is God is bringing that because these people are so violent, so wicked, so against God and He's waited as long as He possibly can and, in this instance, He's like, "Enough is enough."

Evil does exist, you guys, and God will deal with it. But, the second thing is this: when He says, "Completely destroy all the Amalekites, men, women, children and their livestock," what we think this actually is is like trash talking. Like, you know, the Blazers are going to play tonight and their opponents are going to say stuff. I can't really – I don't want to make examples, because this is kind of – you know, about their moms or something, right? They're like, "Yeah. We're gonna..." – whatever, right? But, what they mean is basically we're going to have more points than you and we're going to win the game. Right? But, they say it in like – you guys know what I'm talking about? You guys look sporty. I can tell.

This is like this ancient wartime trash talk. So, in other words, a conqueror or a nation would be like, "Yeah. We destroyed the Amalekites. We destroyed all the men, women, children and all their livestock. We utterly annihilated them."

But, what's interesting is the Bible says that about the Amalekites or other people groups, but later, like for the Amalekites in this example right here, several chapters later, in 2 Samuel, the Amalekites are there again. In other words, this is a metaphor and a figure of speech. I do not think that the Israelites went and killed all their babies, because we know, factually, they show up later. A few narratives later, the Amalekites are there. So, what I actually think that they're talking about is the men are going to war against one another and then men in battle are wiped out.

Now, again, this is totally different than how God works in the New Testament with Jesus. This is God entering into an extremely violent culture and trying to pull them forward into what life should be like. And in the New Testament, the only place we see this kind of violence is the judgment done by King Jesus in the future. So, with that happy thought in mind, let's pick up in the story.

1 Samuel 15:7. Saul is told to go wipe out the Amalekites. **"Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed."**

Look up for a second. The deal was they were supposed to wipe that out and not bring plunder back. But what did they do? They stole everything that was good for themselves. And that's what, throughout history, an evil king does. Takes the plunders of war. They're told not to, and they do. They take it for themselves. Not only that, but they take the king of the Amalekites, who you think, in battle, you'd want to kill the king. That's kind of the point. But, they bring him back, probably to mock him for sport. So, has Saul done what he was supposed to do? No.

1 Samuel 15:10: **"Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel."**

So, Samuel's not there. He's a prophet. He's like reading the Bible and meditating somewhere and, all of a sudden, God speaks to him and says:

"I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the Lord all that night.

"Early the next morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, 'Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal.'"

So, look up for a second. Samuel and God are bummed. Samuel is sent to go after Saul. He's going after him and he's like, "Where's Saul?"

And they're like, "Oh, he was just here. He built himself a monument. He did so great last night. He was so excited he had the guys build a statue of him."

Is Saul living in reality right now? No. He totally does not get what's about to happen.

1 Samuel 15:13: "When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions!"

Wait, what? Really?

"But Samuel said, 'What then is this bleating...'" – now, "bleating" is not "bleeding." "Bleating." It's like [sheep noise]. Whatever sound that sheep make. Bah! Right? That's "bleating," okay? He doesn't hear them bleeding. Bleating. Anyways.

"What is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"

"Saul answered, 'The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.'

"Enough!" Samuel said to Saul. 'Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night.'

"Tell me,' Saul replied.

"Samuel said, 'Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.' Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?'

"But I did obey the Lord,' Saul said."

No, wait. I didn't say that right. It's got to be more whiny. He's like, "But I did obey the Lord."

"I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites..." – what? – "...and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took the sheep and the cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order that we could sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal."

So, look up for a second. When confronted like, "What the heck did you do," what does he do? He blames. He spiritualizes. He's like, "Oh, yeah. The soldiers did it. I didn't have anything to do with it. The soldiers."

He's the king and his soldiers are going to just do what they want? No. They're under his authority. "Oh, the soldiers did it." And then he's like, "Oh, yeah. And it was for you, anyways. We wanted to offer these to God."

Right.

1 Samuel 15:22: "But Samuel replied:

"Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord?"

Answer:

"To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion..." – what you just did, Saul – "...is like the sin of divination [or witchcraft], and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he

has rejected you as king.'

"Then Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord.'

"But Samuel said to him, 'I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!'"

Dang. A couple things in there that stand out for sure. The first one is that great line of "to obey is better than sacrifice." Anybody ever heard of Keith Green? You guys ever heard of Keith Green? Yeah. That was a line from Keith Green. You know Keith Green. He's got a great fro going. I had a phase in life where I loved listening to Keith Green, I read his book and I even tried to grow my hair like that. Alright. That's enough. Take it down. No, no, no. I'm still here, dude.

Point being that Keith Green makes a song about "to obey is better than sacrifice." You need to go listen to it. God wanted Saul's faithful obedience to Him, not what Saul could do for Him. Saul's like, "Yeah. You know, God, I'm not going to obey You. But, you know what I'll do? I'll bring You this awesome gift. Is that cool? Right?"

And God's like, "No."

See, Saul's story is like our story. God loves our faithful obedience. God wants our simple trust first then partnership to do great things for Him after. You see, the best metaphor for understanding God's relationship to Israel at that point – and, actually, for us today – is marriage covenant. Actually, at Mount Sinai, it was like a covenant ceremony where Yahweh, the God of Creation, the Creator of all, Israel's God, made a covenant with Israel that they would be faithful to one another.

Now, think about the concept of marriage. It would be insane for a man to be unfaithful to his wife and then, afterwards, be like, "Hey, you know. Yeah, I did. I wasn't faithful and I did. I was with that person. But, hey. You know, I got you this car. Is it cool now?"

Like, "No. That's ridiculous."

Because the core of marital faithfulness is that you respect and honor that bond to one another. That each party would be faithful. And see, God is a faithful partner in His covenant to Israel and to us. But, the question is how were we at faithful obedience back to him? And you know, sometimes, I find myself, like Saul, trying to weasel out of simple obedience. You know what? There's just things that you just know. Like, God's like, "Hey, don't do that."

And you're like, "Ah, you know. Hey, God. You know, I worked hard this week serving people and it's my day off. I can be a jerk to my wife, right?"

He's like, "No."

"Or I can give in to this sin or I can do this. I deserve it God."

And He's like, "No."

What God wants from us is that simple, faithful obedience. When He says to do it, we do it. When He says not to do it, we don't see how close to doing it we can get. We say, "Okay." To obey is better than sacrifice. And when we do mess up, what God wants and Saul does not get – remember, Saul gets caught twice and he blame-shifts, he spiritualizes, he doesn't accept responsibility. What God wants is, like David, that when we do mess up – and we will. I don't need to tell you that. When we do mess up, God wants us, like David, to quickly admit we were wrong and go back to God for cleansing for forgiveness.

Next thing we see in this story is this identity exchange. So, this is great insight into Saul's heart and where he finds his identity. Remember, when Saul violates God's command, the final excuse he gives is that he was afraid of his men, which is absolutely insane. He

is the king. I mean, there's no greater identity than to be the one the creator of the universe speaks to and says, "You are the king. I give you my Spirit. I give you wisdom. Everything you need to rule these people and the authority is straight from me."

Instead, Saul allows his men to have authority over him. Saul allows his men to become his boss, and he serves them. They wanted to bring the best – he was probably in on it, too – of the cattle and he's like, "Okay, guys. I'll do it." Rather than seeing God has authority and living his life to please God. And here's a crazy reality for us tonight: whatever we are afraid of will have power over us, and even the power to define us if we will let it. Think about that for a minute.

Whatever we're afraid of will have power over us and even the power to define us if we will let it. And this is why we're to fear God in the right way, that we should desire to please God, and when we don't and when we mess up, we go right away to Him. But, at this critical moment for Saul, he reveals his fear of man and he becomes a servant to them and to please them instead of God. And what's more, from this point forward in the life of Saul, he lives out that false identity and continues this downward spiral of failure. David gets anointed king and he's afraid of David. Then he's trying to kill David. And then, ultimately, so sadly, Saul ends up committing suicide in a battle against the Philistines; the very people that he was supposed to subdue and keep at bay.

Saul was a failure as a leader, even to the point of ending his own life, all because he wouldn't accept responsibility for what he had done. And you know, guys, oftentimes, if we're honest, we're just like Saul. We live out of the identities that have been given to us by others rather than the identity spoken over us by God Himself. I mean, most of you guys here probably know some of the things that the New Testament Scripture says are true about you. And some of us have even heard by the Spirit of God, through prophecy, specifics about who God made you to be and what He has made you to do. It's absolutely profound.

But, often we settle for the other names and identities that are not from God. We agree with them and we live out of them. Saul rejected his God given ID and lived out this false one. But tonight, we're actually going to slow down at the end of the teaching and we're going to listen to the Spirit and we're going to ask God to speak to each one of us and to speak. "Now, God, where am I agreeing with false names about me? Where am I agreeing that I'm a failure when You say that I'm not."

We're going to go through that and we're going to do some work and we're going to ask God to reveal those areas where we're listening to these lies to break those and then to have them be replaced with the true names that God speaks over us. But, one more thing before we do that.

Finally, in this Saul narrative, there's something in here that's pretty familiar to most of us, and that's failure. So, I want to talk, just for a second, about failing, but not a failure. Some of you, tonight, you're probably fresh off a recent failure. You were like, "Hey, I'm never going to do that thing again," and last night you did it. Or you just had a relationship that blew up in your face again. And whatever it is, I mean, some of us carry failures so heavily it's like a label. It's like a dog tag that goes around our neck and we look at it and go, "Oh, who am I? Oh, yeah. A failure."

But see, the key is to not allow failure to define you. Sure, you've failed. So have I. But, that doesn't mean that you are a failure. Now, the key is when you fail, that's an opportunity to come to God for transformation. There's something actually beautiful about when you're humbled and when you're broken that, in those moments if you turn to God in confession, there's a powerful ability to hear God's voice in those times. When you're winning and everything's going well, I can get to the place where I'm like, "Oh, man. I'm good. I got this. I got this."

But, when we fall on our faces, there's a beautiful ability to hear God and to have Him speak afresh about who we are, about the areas that were our false self that we were living in the decisions that were unwise and ungodly. You can see it clearly and you can turn and repent and go in a new direction. There's something so amazing about that.

After his excuses, Saul confessed he had sinned, but he never changed his ways. From this point forward in the story, Saul just went downhill all the way to his death. He failed and then he wallowed in that self-pity and became even worse than before. But tonight, this is an opportunity for you and for I, whatever level or degree of failure you're feeling or whatever happened last week or last year, tonight is an opportunity to see those

redeemed.

You know, one of the greatest failures in my life was about eight years ago before coming here to Bridgetown. Through my 20's, for basically 10 years plus, I had this dream of going overseas to do ministry. I had gone on a missions trip and I'm like, "This is it. I'm going to Bible college. Everything in my life is about getting overseas to see people who are far from God learn about God."

So, years of preparing and planning, Jenny and I are married, three kids. We did a ton of prep, fundraising, packed up our house in southeast Portland, had just our duffle bags and one surfboard bag – that's important when you're going – and we did it. We moved over to Spain to the north of Spain in the Basque region, and it was like the first six months were glorious. It was like the honeymoon. It was like new culture, new city and things are taking off. But, after the six month point, things kind of leveled off and then they started to fall apart.

Our team didn't arrive, school wasn't working for all of my kids, we were becoming super isolated and I was pushing myself so hard that even my own health was weakening. But, at that point, I didn't want to fail. So, I didn't stop. I kept pushing. My sweet wife is like, "Hey, babe. Have you noticed this isn't going so well?"

I'm like, "No, no. It'll get better. Just keep going."

Now, here's a trick. If you're on the wrong road, don't keep going down that road. You actually get off and go on another road, right? Well, I didn't know. I just thought, "Well, we'll just go faster and harder. We'll break through this."

And breakthrough never happened. Instead, it was "breakdown." So, things just kept getting worse, and my wife and others close to me were like, "Hey, you know, this might not be working. Have you considered? I know there's a lot of investment."

But, basically, for me I was like, "Man. We've done so much to get here." And there was an identity piece for me where being that person overseas doing this role was what I thought I was supposed to do or what I thought I was supposed to do and I really wanted to do. And things got worse and worse. One of the indications was my wife looking for plane tickets and we're a family of five and she was looking for four tickets. I'm like, "Hey, why four tickets?"

She's like, "Oh, well you can just stay and keep doing your thing. I'll take the kids home and, when you're done, you can come join us."

Let me just give you a hint: that's not good. Okay? So, things got worse and worse. Finally, there was an older mentor couple that came to visit us there and they had raised their kids in Spain and they'd been there and they'd worked there and they came and they spent 24 hours with us and, after 24 hours, this older mentor of mine, Jeff, said, "Hey, man. I think you guys are done. Everybody that lives overseas and does work there has to come home at some point. I think your time is now."

And, finally, I got it. Two weeks later we'd packed up and we were back home. My wife and my family were relieved, but I felt like an absolute failure. I'd stood up in front of thousands of people, raised all of this money, basically my whole identity was like "make this thing work," and it totally failed. And it wasn't even kind of like a private failure. Like, you mess something up at work and you and your boss know. No. This was very public. We like moved home. People are like, "Wait, aren't you supposed to be in Spain?"

I'm like, "Yeah. It didn't work."

You know? It was obvious. It was over. I had rushed to get us there. I'd ignored wisdom. I'd pushed my family beyond what was healthy. I compromised my own physical and emotional health and now it was over. But, from that place of brokenness, over the next year and years, through tons of counseling – I mean, we started going to counseling, my wife and I, to work through this. And they're like, "Yeah, we've got a lot more work, you know."

I'm like, "Okay, great. So, we'll be back next week."

And they're like, "No. Just you."

I'm like, "Wait, you don't need her?"

They're like, "No. She's good."

I had that happen twice. They're like, "We'll see you next week."

I'm like, "Eh. Okay."

But, through that, through my brokenness, God started to heal me and give me perspective. One of the most important things that Jesus showed me through that process was that He wasn't concerned with what I could accomplish for Him, He wanted me to be with Him. See, I was so wrapped up in my identity of what I was going to do and how everyone else was going to be part of that and see this whole thing happen that God was like, "No. Actually, that whole thing? We're not going to do that. Instead, I just want to focus on you."

And I was like, "Well, I thought we had a deal, God. The deal was we're going to go to Spain for eight to ten years of our life. It's going to be great. It's going to be hard, but we're going to see amazing things that You're going to do, God. And I'm going to do that with You, right?"

And He's like, "No. That's not the deal."

I heard God say, "If I want to, I can go do great things in Spain without you, Gerald. I don't need you to do that."

Instead, what I heard was, "The deal for you is the deal that it's always been with me. You follow me. Period."

That's it. God wanted my heart, not what I could do for Him. And through that failure, God brought Jenny and I onto the same team and He put us in the right direction for our family, which ultimately was to be part of what God was doing here at Bridgetown six years ago. He put me, interestingly enough, in the best place to live out my identity here rather than going and destroying myself in the thing that I wasn't even made to do.

So, tonight, if you're wrestling through your last great failure or not, what the Father wants today is the same as it's always been. He wants you to live out of your true identity and to give Him your faithful obedience, not just your sacrifice.

Let's pray.