



07 June 2024

Failure

Failure. Just the fleeting thought or faint whisper of this dreaded F-word brings unwanted flashbacks into the spotlight on center stage. Some of the triggering memories are familiar to all of us—after all, we all have failed, we all fail. Some are unique, and so are uniquely painful.

With this common to all of us experience, many people try to help with *inspirational* words. You could fill a book with them. How about a handful you probably have heard in one form or another.

- If you don't succeed (if you fail), try, try, try again!
- We all fail, but we are not failures.
- Failure is never final.
- Failure is the canvas on which success paints its masterpiece.
- Don't let failure define you; let it refine you.

There may be some truth in some of these words, but we need more than pithy quotes.

The most serious failure of every person is failing to meet God's perfect standards. The Bible calls that sin. One of the New Testament's words for sin has the underlying meaning of missing the target, missing the mark or standard. All of us have missed the mark, have sinned. As the apostle Paul wrote, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He went on to tell us "the wages of sin is death"—physical death and spiritual death (Romans 6:23). There is only one way to escape the full and final result of that failure,

"the wages of sin is death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

As wonderful, beyond wonderful, as this is, all of us who have received God's gracious gift of eternal life in Jesus still fail. We could fill another book with truth based on the Scriptures to help us deal with failure, and also not to fail. In these brief moments, let's check out some truth Jesus gave us about failing and not failing, and so how to avoid failure.

In chapter 25 of Matthew's gospel Jesus told a story about a man who was going on a trip who gave some money to his servants to look after, each one receiving an amount of money in line with



his abilities. Two servants invested the money they received and made a profit. A third servant kept the money safe, but did not invest it and so, while he gave it back to his master, he did not make a profit. When the man heard the report and saw the profit of the first two servants he commended them, telling them they were “good and faithful.” Not so with the third, who he condemned, telling him he was “worthless, lazy” , and then threw him out.

The central lesson Jesus teaches us in this story is about success and failure in His service. We need to remember that these stories, or parables of Jesus teach one central truth, and that is it in this one. When it comes to our salvation, Jesus makes it clear that nothing can remove us from Him (see John 10:27-29; and also Romans 8:38). Jesus’ subject here is on our faithfulness in service.

How can we avoid failure in following and serving Jesus? How can we move forward after we fail? Jesus gives us direction in this story.

- Just as with the servants, each one of us have received spiritual abilities from God for serving Him faithfully, and He Himself is with us. He has entrusted those to us, and gives us the wisdom and strength to use them. We are not to compare what we have received with others, and we certainly are not in competition with each other.
- Success comes in being faithful, being obedient to God. Failure occurs when we are not faithful and not obedient. Sometimes that comes when we are fearful of failure, as the third servant was. Since God has gifted us and gives us His power, since God does not compare us to others, we should joyfully follow and serve Him as He directs in the Bible and leads us each day.
- The third servant made excuses, basically saying that his master was too strict, asked too much from him, as he justified his trying to play it safe. God is loving and gracious. He also commissions us as His servants to serve Him. There are no excuses for failing to be faithful, to step out and serve God.
- The master invited the first two servants to enter into his joy, or as one version phrases it, “Let’s celebrate together!” God delights in His children being faithful, and calls us into His joy.

We all fail. Let’s join the two servants by not focusing on the prospect of failing, but on the challenges, opportunities and rewards of being God’s good and faithful servants now, in this moment.

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