

# Rethinking Failure

*“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John...they marveled.  
And they realized that they had been with Jesus.”*  
Acts 4:13

## If You’ve Failed, Are You A Failure?

Many people struggle with feelings of failure. At the heart of their doubts and fears is a central question: Am I a failure? People are not failures until they believe they are. We must learn the difference between failing at something and being a failure. Mistakes become failures only when we consistently respond to them incorrectly.

The following list describes six abilities that enable high achievers to fail and not take it personally, learn from the experience, and keep moving forward:

1. Achievers reject rejection. They do not base their self-worth on perfect \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Achievers see failure as \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Achievers keep \_\_\_\_\_ realistic.
4. Achievers focus on their \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Achievers risk \_\_\_\_\_ in order to try new and better ways to solve problems.
6. Achievers \_\_\_\_\_ back. They know that a failure does not make them a failure.

**Discussion:** Is there an area of your life where you repeatedly have made mistakes? Have you been thinking of yourself as a failure? What can you learn from your mistakes? How can you use your personal strengths and best skills to move beyond your mistakes?

## Biblical Case Study: Peter (Matthew 26:69-75; 1 Peter 1:1-5)

Peter was in Jesus’ inner circle of disciples. He experienced many wonderful moments with Jesus.

- He stepped out of the boat to walk on water (Matthew 14:27-30).
- He identified Jesus as the Christ (Matthew 16:13-20).
- He witnessed the transfiguration on the mountain (Matthew 17:1-8).

At the moment of truth, Peter miserably failed his Lord, denying Him three times on the night of His arrest. Peter cowered in fear when a girl accused him of being a follower of Jesus. Yet this man, in the face of incredible persecution and opposition, got up from the pit of failure to do amazing things for Christ and His Church. He preached boldly even when he knew imprisonment and beatings, maybe even death, were the likely punishment. He wrote encouraging letters to Christians who were enduring intense persecution for their faith, encouraging them to persevere through their suffering by remembering that their reward awaited them.

This is a new Peter! He is not the brash, impetuous, cowardly Peter who traveled with Jesus during His earthly ministry. What happened?

- He \_\_\_\_\_ from his failures.
- He refused to be a \_\_\_\_\_.

- He \_\_\_\_\_ in his faith.
- He was \_\_\_\_\_ with the Holy Spirit.
- He failed \_\_\_\_\_.

### Take the “You” Out of Failure

The first important step in overcoming failure is learning not to personalize it – making sure you know that your failure does not make you a failure. If you personalize failure, it will become exceedingly painful – sometimes both emotionally and physically. For many people, the pain of failure leads to the fear of failure. Fear of failure will stop all forward progress. Here are several results of enslavement to fear:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

You cannot avoid fear. No magic potion will take it away. To conquer fear, you have to feel the fear and take action anyway. George Bernard Shaw asserted, “*A life spent in making mistakes is not only more honorable but more useful than a life spent doing nothing.*” To overcome fear and its awful grip, you have to be willing to recognize that you will make many mistakes in your life. Nonetheless, you get up and take action. If you take action while still making mistakes, you can gain experience. That experience eventually brings competence, and you make fewer mistakes. Fear is no longer paralyzing because mistakes become your friends – your teachers.

**Discussion:** Do you fear failure? Are you willing to face your fear and get moving? What is the next step you need to take on the road to becoming all God wants you to be and do?

### Accepting Responsibility for Failures

Please do not forget that everyone makes mistakes. From time to time, we will mess up. Many people make mistakes but refuse to admit them. They tend to see every obstacle or error as somebody else’s fault. As a result, they generally respond in one or more of the following ways:

1. They \_\_\_\_\_ with a display of anger. (Blow up)
2. They try to \_\_\_\_\_ their failure. (Cover up)
3. They work \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, but without making changes. (Speed up)
4. They try to \_\_\_\_\_ their mistake. (Back up)
5. They \_\_\_\_\_. (Give up)

To fail forward, a person must first utter three of the most difficult words to say, “*I was wrong.*” He must admit his mistake and accept full responsibility for his current wrong actions and attitudes. He must see every failure as a fork in the road – an opportunity to take the right action, learn from the mistake, and begin again. Don’t waste energy trying to cover up failure. Learn from your failures and go on to the next challenge. It’s okay to fail. If you’re not failing, you’re not growing.

Leadership expert, Peter Drucker, wrote: *“The better a man is, the more mistakes he will make, for the more new things he will try. I would never promote to a top-level job a man who was not making mistakes... otherwise he is sure to be mediocre.”* Mistakes really do pave the road to achievement.

### **Biblical Case Study: King David (1 Chronicles 21:1-28)**

Following a major victory over the Philistines, King David made a serious mistake with devastating consequences. David decided to count the number of soldiers under his command, indicating that he placed greater confidence in his army than in the power of God.

God was very displeased with David’s actions and moved swiftly to punish Israel. David cried out to God, *“I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now, I pray, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”* (v.8) God sent a plague upon the nation and thousands died. David prayed again, *“I am the one who has sinned and done evil indeed...let Your hand be against me...but not against Your people that they should be plagued.”* (v.17)

- David refused to \_\_\_\_\_ others for his foolish decision.
- David \_\_\_\_\_ his failure.
- David accepted full \_\_\_\_\_ for his actions.
- David \_\_\_\_\_ and moved forward.
- David \_\_\_\_\_ the Lord.
- David \_\_\_\_\_ his commitment to the Lord.

David took a step that is essential to learning from mistakes and failing forward. **David accepted responsibility for his failure.** Until a person takes this step, all other steps on the pathway of achievement will be impossible.

### **Assessment and Application**

#### **Assessment:**

Take a hard look at a recent failure that you have considered not to be your fault. Search honestly for any part of the failure for which you should accept responsibility.

**Application:** Admit your role in the failure and ask God to show you how you can learn from it.

### **Review of Lessons 1 and 2: Steps to Failing Forward**

1. Realize there is one major \_\_\_\_\_ between average people and achieving people.
2. Learn a new \_\_\_\_\_ for failure.
3. Remove the “you” from \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Take action and \_\_\_\_\_ your fear of failure.
5. Change your \_\_\_\_\_ to failure by accepting responsibility.