

Make Failure Your Best Friend

“Now when he was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplications, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.”

2 Chronicles 33:12-13

The idea that you can make failure your best friend may seem odd to you. But the truth of the matter is that failure is either your friend or your enemy, and you are the one who chooses which it is. If you whine and complain every time you fail, then failure will remain your enemy. But if you learn from your failures, then you actually benefit from them and that makes failure your friend.

All of us can benefit from our wins. The important thing is to learn to profit from our losses. To turn losses into profits, you must have a teachable attitude and ask the following questions every time you face adversity:

1. What caused the failure?
2. Was what happened truly a failure?
3. What can I learn from what happened?
4. Am I grateful for the experience?
5. How can I turn this into a success?
6. Who can help me learn the most from this experience?
7. Where do I go from here?

Biblical Case Study: Jacob (Genesis 25:26-32:32)

Jacob seemed to have strong leadership potential early in life. He wielded great influence in his family. Sadly, he had some serious character flaws. He conned his brother out of his birthright and deceived his father into giving him a special blessing that rightfully belonged to his brother, Esau. Esau hated Jacob because of his deception. Jacob fled from Esau in fear of his life. Later, Jacob fled from his father-in-law, Laban. While on the run, he learned that Esau was looking for him. Jacob was at the lowest point of his life. He now honestly faced his failures.

Alone with God, Jacob admits his deception. As he wrestled with the Angel of God, he turned a crucial corner in his life. He broke physically when the Angel dislocated his hip, but he also broke emotionally and spiritually as he told the truth about his weaknesses. In the process of facing his failure and seeking God’s favor upon his life, he failed forward. Jacob the deceiver became Israel, a prince with God. He committed himself to serve God rather than himself. He was made usable through brokenness. Adversity and failure helped him prepare to serve God more effectively and lead people. From that moment on, Jacob began to fulfill his God-ordained destiny.

The Top Ten Reasons People Fail

A failure can become your best friend if you learn from it. Conversely, a weakness ignored and repeated can become your worst enemy. You must become aware of recurring issues in your life. Do not mentally minimize the amount of damage that a weakness may create. You must not ignore the following weaknesses:

1. Poor _____ skills

Leadership experts consistently list inability to relate to others as the number one reason leaders fail. As John Maxwell often states, *“If people can’t get along with you, they won’t go along with you.”*

2. A _____ attitude

Your attitude at the beginning of a task will affect the outcome more than any other factor. Your attitude always determines your altitude. You will never soar to the heights of success if you live in the pit of negative thinking.

3. Not playing to your _____

While you must first examine your attitude, sometimes you are in a situation that does not match your abilities, interests, personality and values. A change of situation may be required that will let you focus on your strengths.

4. Lack of _____

If your life is out of focus, you have problems—not because you are busy, but because your priorities are out of order. This results in wasted time and resources. If you go from task to task without making progress, or you cannot seem to reach a goal no matter how hard you work, examine your focus. No one can move forward without it.

5. A weak _____

Apathy is a deadly disease in leadership. Commitment is the remedy. If you are committed, a failure does not mean that you will never succeed. It just means the task may take longer. Commitment makes you capable of failing forward until you reach your goals.

6. An unwillingness to _____

If you are not changing, you are no longer growing as a leader. Change is a catalyst for personal growth. It gets you out of a rut, it gives you a fresh start, and it affords you an opportunity to reevaluate your direction. You don't have to love change to be effective, but you must be willing to accept it.

7. Taking a _____

Cutting corners – taking short cuts – is a sign of impatience and lack of discipline. Success always involves a commitment to excellence and a persistence to follow through until the task is completed.

8. Relying on _____ alone

Talent is overrated. Talent alone is not enough to take a person through the multiple challenges of life. The greater your talent, the more likely you are to lean heavily upon it and skip the day-to-day work of improving it. Those who rely on talent alone, without developing further, usually peak quickly and soon fade into obscurity.

9. Response to _____ information

It is crucially important that you gather reliable information to evaluate issues and make decisions.

10. No _____

Many people don't have goals because they haven't allowed themselves to dream. If that describes you, it is time for you to ask God to birth a dream in your heart. You must discover why you are on this planet. A goal is nothing more than a dream with a time limit.

Discussion: Everyone has weaknesses. Review the top ten reasons people fail and determine in which of these areas you may need improvement.

Work on the Weakness That Weakens You

We all have areas of weakness, you may even have a weakness not listed above. Here are some suggested steps you can take:

- Talk to a trusted friend and ask him to help you evaluate yourself in the area of weakness.
- Put yourself on a growth plan to turn that weakness into strength. The plan may include books, seminars, or finding a mentor.
- Put your plan into action and stick with it for at least a year.
- Ask your trusted friend to evaluate your progress from time to time.

Often we know there is a weakness, but we either fail to take corrective action, or we take the wrong action, or we fail to follow through on the growth plan. We need a trusted friend or mentor to help guide us through the process. Otherwise, we might take action that is detrimental.

Here is a humorous list of options for dealing with a dead horse. Unfortunately, none of the proposed actions will solve the problem, which illustrates the pitfall of taking action that is not beneficial.

1. Buy a stronger whip.
2. Change riders.
3. Appoint a committee to study the dead horse.
4. Appoint a team to revive the dead horse.
5. Send out a memo declaring that the horse is not really dead.
6. Hire a consultant to determine the seriousness of the problem.
7. Harness several dead horses together for increased speed and efficiency.
8. Rewrite the definition of a live horse.
9. Declare the horse to be better, faster, and cheaper when dead.
10. Promote the dead horse to a supervisory position.

There is only one effective solution: When your horse is dead, dismount!

Biblical Case Study: Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:10-20)

Manasseh reigned for 55 years as the King of Judah. The Word of God declares that he did evil in the sight of the Lord. The Assyrians captured him, bound him with chains, and carried him away to captivity in Babylon. The Bible records that in the depth of his failure, he repented of his sins against God. He cried out to God for mercy and forgiveness. In his brokenness and shame, he determined that he would faithfully obey God for the remainder of his life. He failed forward. Notice what happened:

1. God heard his cry for help.
2. God brought him back to Jerusalem.
3. God restored him as King of Judah.
4. Manasseh destroyed the foreign gods and idols.
5. He repaired the altar of the Lord.
6. He worshipped the Lord with sacrifices of thanksgiving.
7. He commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.
8. The people worshipped the Lord their God.

If there is hidden sin in your life, repentance and God's forgiveness is the only remedy. If you have other weaknesses that are hindering you on the success journey, you must be willing to take action to bring about improvement. Far too often, we wait until we are deep in the pit of failure before we come to our senses. John Maxwell gives the following insight:

People change when they...

- Hurt enough that they have to
- Learn enough that they want to
- Receive enough that they are able to

Perhaps it was *hurt* that brought the prodigal son to his senses.

Discussion: Take a moment to think upon the Luke 15 prodigal son. How did he learn from his failures? How can you make failure your best friend?

Biblical Case Study: The Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)

Luke 15 is often called the “lost” chapter. It records the stories of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son. The coin is carelessly lost, the sheep is ignorantly lost, but the boy is willfully lost.

The younger of two sons insisted that his dad give him his inheritance. Note the steps on his journey:

He wanted his _____.

He wasted his _____.

He committed _____.

He reached a point of _____.

He longed for a _____.

He made a _____ to return home.

He accepted full _____ for his wrong choices.

He asked for _____.

He failed _____.

Assessment and Application

Assessment:

Are you hurting today? Is it because you have disobeyed God? Is it because you have allowed a failure to keep you down? Is it because of a recurring mistake that you have ignored? Is it because of a weakness that you have failed to take steps to correct?

Application: What steps will you take to solve the problem? List the steps and prayerfully commit to take action.