

Failing Forward

"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

1 Peter 5:10-11

No one wants to fail, but everyone does from time to time. In fact, it seems that all great achievers have made major mistakes on their journey to success. The Bible is full of stories of successful leaders who experienced great failures. If everyone fails, then it is crucially important that we learn to fail forward. In other words, we need to learn how to turn mistakes into stepping stones to success.

Many people are eager to study lessons on how to succeed. Very few people want to train for failure, but because we all mess up occasionally, we must learn how to make failure our friend. This notebook will help you prepare to fail correctly because in life, the question is not if you will experience problems and mistakes, but how you are going to deal with them. You can stop failing backward and start failing forward!

What Is The Main Difference Between People Who Achieve And People Who Are Only Average?

Why do achievers excel? Why do some people soar to the pinnacle of success and effectiveness while others plummet into mediocrity? What makes the difference? Consider the following:

- Family background: Coming from a good family may be helpful, but huge numbers of successful people come from broken and dysfunctional families.
- Wealth: Many high achievers have come from homes with below average income, even from the depths of poverty.
- Opportunity: Opportunity is always in the eye of the beholder. We all live under the same sky, but we don't all see the same horizon.
- High morals: I wish it were true that everyone with high moral values succeeds greatly, but it's not. Many with high integrity achieve little. And we've all known wicked people who are high producers.
- The absence of hardship: For every achiever who has avoided hardships, there are scores who have overcome disabilities, tragedies, or suffering.
- Nationality or ethnicity: Men and women from all races and every nation have become high achievers and difference makers.

None of these is the key to great achievement. Only one factor separates those who consistently achieve from those who do not. *The difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to failure.*

Three wrong attitudes toward failure:

1. We _____ failure.
2. We _____ failure.
3. We are _____ for failure.

An individual can consistently succeed in life only when he or she learns how to confidently look failure and adversity in the eye and keep moving forward anyway. There are many ways to be a winner, but there are only two ways to be a loser—to not learn from your failure and to fail to move beyond it.

Biblical Case Study: Joseph (Genesis 39:1-41:16, 45:4-7)

Joseph possessed a God-given dream. He made the mistake of prematurely sharing the dream with his brothers. The Bible describes many dark and difficult times in Joseph's life. Adversity and failure seem to be his constant companions. The Bible also reveals that Joseph maintained a positive attitude in the midst of adversity. He used it to develop himself personally and to build trust with others.

Notice some of Joseph's hardships:

- Sold into _____.
- Framed as an _____.
- Forgotten in _____.
- Endured seven years of _____.
- Faced the return of his treacherous _____.

Observe that in each of these hardships he learned valuable lessons and continued faithfully to serve God. Consider the following ways Joseph failed forward:

- Developed _____ and _____ in Potiphar's palace.
- Used his _____ to solve problems.
- Displayed the _____ to interpret Pharaoh's dream.
- Prepared to _____ the country.
- Showed _____ and _____ in dealing with those who had mistreated him.

Eventually, Joseph was promoted from the prison to the palace where he was made second-in-command to the entire nation. He became a deliverer for Egypt and for his own family and people.

While forgotten in prison, Joseph very easily could have languished into bitterness and despair. He could have become angry with God and despised the dream God had given to him. Failure could have become final and fatal in Joseph's life. How did he maintain a perspective that eventually saw his dream become a reality? A careful reading of Genesis 45:4-7 will reveal the key qualities that enabled him to fail forward:

1. A strong sense of _____. (v.4)
2. A strong sense of _____. (v.4)
3. A strong sense of _____. (v.4)
4. A strong sense of _____. (v.5)
5. A strong sense of _____. (v.6, 7)

Putting a New Face on Adversity

Many people would attempt great achievements if they thought all possibility of failure could be removed. This is impossible! There is no achievement without failure. Everyone faces obstacles in life. What they are does not matter. What does matter is that we learn to overcome any problems, mistakes, adversities, and failures.

In the midst of negative experiences, average people tend to fail backward. They respond in many of the following ways:

- Blame _____.
- Repeat the same _____.
- Expect never to _____ again.
- Expect to _____ to fail.
- Accept _____ thinking blindly.
- Be _____ because of past mistakes.
- Think I am a _____.
- Decide to _____.

High achievers respond very differently. Here are some of their responses as they fail forward:

- Take _____.
- Learn from each _____.
- Know failure is a part of _____.
- Maintain a _____ attitude.
- Challenge outdated _____ and ideas.
- Take new _____.
- Think failure is never _____.
- Never _____.

Discussion: What do you consider a failure? Can you think of an example from your own life or in others' lives? What would failing forward look like in this situation?

Failure Is Not...

Changing your perspective on failure will help you persevere regardless of the circumstances. So how do you see failure? Let us begin by taking a look at several things failure is not:

1. People think failure is _____ – it is not.
2. People think failure is an _____ – it is not.

3. People think failure is the _____ – it is not.
4. People think failure is _____ – it is not.
5. People think failure is a _____ – it is not.
6. People think failure is _____ – it is not.

Adopt a new definition for failure. Regard the experience of failure as the price you pay for progress. If you will put that mindset into practice, you will position yourself to fail forward.

Discussion: Now, consider your own idea of success. What does it look like to you? To the world? To God?

Biblical Case Study: Paul (Philippians 4:11)

Most historians consider the Apostle Paul one of the most influential leaders in all of human history. His epistles in the New Testament have brought guidance, inspiration, and encouragement to multiplied millions of believers through the centuries. It was Paul who said, *“I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content”* (Philippians 4:11). And that was saying a lot, considering that Paul had been shipwrecked, whipped, beaten, stoned and imprisoned. Throughout every hardship he faced, Paul’s faith enabled him to maintain perspective. He realized that as long as he was doing what he was supposed to do, his being labeled a success or failure by others really did not matter.

Remember: Mistakes are not failures. Adversity and hardships do not mean defeat. They are merely the price of achievement on the success journey.

Assessment and Application

Assessment:

Think about a recent setback you experienced. How did you respond? What did you learn?

Application:

Realize that there is one major difference between average people and achieving people. As you approach your next big project, give yourself the freedom to make some mistakes as you are working on the project.