

Failure Is an Inside Job

*“For God has not given us a spirit of fear,
but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*
2 Timothy 1:7

When you learn to accept responsibility for your problems and your failures, you are better prepared to fail forward. But what about when you are faced with overwhelming difficulties that you did not create and you cannot control?

At no time in life are people more likely to allow failure to overcome them than when external circumstances cause extreme hardship or grief. There is a strong temptation to give up and quit. No matter whether the difficulty is self-created or comes from outward circumstances, the feeling of failure is created within them. Failure is always an inside job.

Remember: A man is not defeated by his opponents, but by himself.

No matter how daunting the circumstances of your life may be, the greatest battle you wage against failure occurs on the inside, not on the outside. How do you fight that battle? You start by cultivating the right attitude.

People Who Bounce Back Are Optimists

How do you cultivate optimism? By learning the secret of contentment. The truth is that possessing healthy contentment is essential to being able to withstand failure. First, let’s look at what contentment is NOT:

1. Contentment is not _____ your emotions.
2. Contentment is not being _____ with a bad situation.
3. Contentment is not _____ your current situation.
4. Contentment is not _____.
5. Contentment is not _____.
6. Contentment is not _____.

Contentment comes from having a positive attitude. It means:

- Expecting the _____ in everything – not the worst.
- Remaining _____ – even when you get beat up.
- Seeing _____ in every problem – not problems in every solution.
- Believing in _____ – even when others believe you are a failure.
- Holding on to _____ – even when others say the situation is hopeless.

If you think positively and do nothing, you will not be able to fail forward. **You must add positive action to a positive attitude.** Here are some principles for taking positive action:

1. Do not try to _____ things beyond your control.
2. Know the _____ between a problem and a fact of life.
 - a. A problem is something that can be _____.
 - b. A fact of life is something that must be _____.
3. Focus on solving problems that produce greatest positive _____.
4. Move into _____.

The people of Norway often experience bitterly cold weather. Nonetheless, they enjoy the outdoors even in the worst of winter. They have a saying that shows their positive attitude: *“There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.”*

If He Can Do It...You Can, Too!

Roger Crawford was born with serious physical disabilities. Various medical professionals told his parents that he would never walk, would not be able to take care of himself, and would never lead a normal life. Roger said, *“My parents never let me feel sorry for myself or allowed me to take advantage of people because of my handicap.”* Roger became successful as a consultant and public speaker. He has written two books. His attitude towards his handicaps shows the attitude everyone should have towards problems, adversities, and failures in life. He said, *“Handicaps can only disable us if we let them. This is true not only of physical challenges, but of emotional and intellectual ones as well... I believe real and lasting limitations are created in our minds, not our bodies.”* In other words, no matter what happens, failure is an inside job.

Biblical Case Study: Solomon (Ecclesiastes 2:1-11, Proverbs 23:7-19)

King Solomon mistakenly pursued many goals in a vain attempt to satisfy himself. He tried to find satisfaction in accumulating things: houses, gardens, vineyards, flocks, slaves, etc. By the time Solomon wrote the words in Ecclesiastes Chapter 2, he had reached a high level of success – but he still felt empty. Sadly, he tried to solve an inward problem with an outward solution.

Even though Solomon seemed to have everything anyone could possibly desire, he felt like a failure. Is it not strange that the person who has a life filled with problems and the person who has a life filled with pleasures and possessions can both feel empty? Both can see themselves as failures. Why? Because failure is an inside job! *“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”* (Proverbs 23:7)

Consider the timeless principles we can learn from Proverbs 23 about our minds:

1. Your thoughts _____ your actions. (v.7)
2. Avoid _____ thinking. (v.10)
3. Discipline your mind with _____. (v.12)
4. Do not let your mind drift into _____ thinking. (v.17)
5. Remain _____ in your God-given vision. (v.18)
6. Ask God to fill your mind with _____. (v.19)
7. Keep your mind steadfast on doing what is _____ (v.19)

Remember: Do not let the failure on the outside penetrate to the inside of you.

Discussion: What are the three greatest sources of frustration and failure in your life? Consider the items one at a time. Determine whether each one is a fact of life (which you need to accept and move on) or an item that requires positive action.

Is the Past Holding You Hostage?

Someone who is unable to get over previous hurts and failures is held hostage by the past. The baggage he carries around makes it very difficult for him to move forward. It is next to impossible for a person to achieve while holding on to past failures and difficulties.

A key quality in the life of an achiever is the ability to put past events behind him and move on. That quality positions a person to tackle current challenges with enthusiasm and a minimum of burdensome personal baggage.

The problems of people’s pasts impact them in one of two ways: they experience either a breakdown or a breakthrough. The following five characteristics are signs that people have not gotten over past difficulties:

1. _____: they continually talk about how much more they have endured than others.
2. _____: they make excuses for why they should not get over past difficulties.
3. _____: they withdraw from as many people as possible.
4. _____: they live with a feeling of remorse or sorrow.
5. _____: they are filled with hostility.

Every major difficulty you face in life is a fork in the road. You choose which track you will head down— toward a breakdown or a breakthrough.

If you have been badly hurt, below are some steps to follow that will help bring healing and help you move forward. The process may be difficult, but with the Lord’s help you can do it. Today may be the day to turn the hurts of your past into a breakthrough for your future. Please do not allow anything from your personal history to keep holding you hostage.

Here is the process to follow:

1. _____ the pain.
2. _____ the loss.
3. _____ the person (or persons) who were involved in hurting you.
4. Forgive _____.
5. Determine to _____ the event and move on.
6. Prayerfully _____ the matter to God in prayer.
7. Ask God to give you _____ to move forward.

Discussion: Think back upon your frustration and failure. What are the next steps you will take to bring about a positive change in these situations? Which of these steps do you think you need to work on the most?

Remember: You will not be able to be your best today until you say good-bye to yesterday.

Biblical Case Study: John Mark (Acts 13:1-13, 15:37-39; 2 Timothy 4:11)

Acts 13 provides an account of the commissioning and sending of Paul and Barnabas to serve as traveling missionaries. Verse 5 explains that John Mark traveled with them as their assistant. After ministering as a team in a couple of cities, John Mark abandoned the group. He returned to his home in Jerusalem. The Bible does not explain why he left. Bible scholars have offered many possible reasons for his departure – he was nervous about his safety, he was disgruntled that Paul had replaced his cousin Barnabas as the top leader, or maybe he resented the preaching of the Gospel to non-Jews. Whatever the reason, he quit. His abandonment of the mission later caused a major division between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:37-39). It is clear that Paul considered John Mark a failure.

What happened to John Mark after he left Paul? The Bible gives us few details, but 2 Timothy 4:11 happily suggests that John Mark’s failure was not final. He failed on the journey with Paul, but he did not become a failure. It is obvious that Paul noticed that John Mark had become faithful and effective in the Lord’s work because he told Timothy to ask John Mark to rejoin the team. John Mark failed forward.

Move Forward

In order to overcome your failures and move forward, you must be honest with yourself. You must know yourself and face your flaws. Here are some key principles to follow:

1. See _____ clearly. You must see both the good and the bad.
2. Admit your _____. We all have some.
3. Discover your _____. To excel, you must do what you do well.
4. Develop your God-given _____. Dedicate yourself to daily growth.
5. Focus every day on your God-given _____. Do not dabble in everything.

Assessment and Application

Assessment:

Make a list of your strengths and weaknesses. If a weakness is in the area of character or attitude, what steps will you take to make corrections?

Application: Think about your strengths. Develop a ministry plan that will allow you to build on your strengths and maximize your potential.