

Turn Adversity into Advantage

“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”

Genesis 50:20

Many people who struggle with chronic failure do so because they think of no one but themselves. People who desire to fail forward must turn their attention away from themselves and toward helping others. This process can be called “getting over yourself.”

A leading psychiatrist was asked what a person should do if they feel they are slipping into depression. He replied, *“Find someone in need and do something to help that person.”* If you focus all your attention on yourself, you will always feel deprived – constantly thinking that something is missing in your life. Developing a giving spirit – focusing on the needs of others – you will overcome feelings of deficiency in a positive and healthy way.

How can you turn your thinking from yourself and start adding value and blessing to others? You can begin by...

1. Putting others first in your thinking: _____ them.
2. Finding out what others need: _____ to them.
3. Meeting their need with generosity: _____ them.

You can serve others and add great value to them only if you learn to “get over yourself.” Be more concerned with what you can give rather than what you can get.

Remember: Giving truly is the highest level of living!

Determine to make meeting the needs of others a priority in your life. You can start by asking yourself the following questions at the beginning of each day:

- Whom am I pouring my life into?
- Whom am I helping that cannot help me in return?
- Whom am I serving who cannot help himself?
- Whom am I encouraging daily?

Grasp the Positive Benefits of Negative Experiences

Most people will agree that they must encounter an occasional setback in order to succeed. However, this thinking must go a step further. To achieve your dreams, you must embrace adversity and make failure a part of your life. If you are not failing, you are probably not moving forward. The person interested in success has to learn to view failure as a healthy, inevitable part of the process of getting to the top. The benefits of adversity and failure are many. Consider these reasons to embrace adversity and persevere through it:

1. Adversity creates _____.
2. Adversity develops _____.
3. Adversity pushes you to become a _____.
4. Adversity helps you discover greater _____.

5. Adversity encourages _____.
6. Adversity often precedes a _____.
7. Adversity _____ us.

It is in the difficult times that we can experience the greatest growth. We will not grow when there are no problems and challenges.

Discussion: Can you name a negative experience in your life that had positive benefits? What lessons did you learn from these hard situations?

Biblical Case Study: Moses (Exodus 3:1-4:13)

Moses grew up in Pharaoh’s palace and enjoyed all the benefits of royalty. When he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, he took matters into his own hands and killed the Egyptian. When Pharaoh heard about what Moses had done, he sought to kill him. Moses fled from Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian.

The Prince of Egypt became a shepherd in a strange land. Far from home and far from his own people, the one who once lived as the son of the emperor with servants at his beckoned call now lived in the desert with sheep as his companions. He was undoubtedly tempted to label himself as a failure. After all, his people remained in slavery, and he was helpless to do anything about it.

Alone on the back of the desert, Moses encountered God in the burning bush. In the midst of seeming failure, God was at work in his life. Let’s take a closer look at what happened to Moses in his time of prolonged adversity:

1. Moses was _____ with God. His exile provided time for reflection.
2. Moses was _____ with God. Older and wiser, he admitted his weaknesses.
3. Moses was _____ for God. Adversity had realigned his priorities.
4. Moses was _____ to God. Adversity removed self-reliance.
5. Moses _____ his fears. Adversity taught him God-reliance.
6. Moses _____ to Egypt. Adversity prepared him for a second chance to lead.

Take a Risk – There Is No Other Way to Fail Forward

Risk must be evaluated not by the fear it generates in you or even by the probability of success or failure, but by the value of the goal. Every noble goal was reached because someone dared to take a risk. The less you risk, the greater your risk of failure. Ironically, the more you risk failure – and actually fail from time to time – the greater your chances of success. Let’s contrast some traits of those who refuse to take a risk with those who are risk-takers:

Risk - Refusers

1. They resist opportunities.
2. They rationalize their responsibilities.
3. They fear impossibilities.
4. They rain on enthusiasm.
5. They dwell on their weaknesses.
6. They hate failure.
7. They fear failure.

Risk - Takers

1. They find opportunities.
2. They accept their responsibilities.
3. They are fueled by impossibilities.
4. They fan the flames of enthusiasm.
5. They face their weaknesses.
6. They learn from failure.
7. They fear futility.

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| 8. They resist leadership. | 8. They follow leaders. |
| 9. They remain unchanged. | 9. They embrace change. |
| 10. They focus on problems. | 10. They focus on solutions. |
| 11. They dislike goals. | 11. They find pleasure in the goal. |
| 12. They question their commitments. | 12. They fulfill their commitments. |

Remember: It is better to try something great and fail than to try nothing great and succeed.

If risk-taking can produce great potential results, why don't people embrace it as a friend? They resist because of one or more of the following traps:

1. The _____ Trap: they don't want to look bad.
2. The _____ Trap: they second-guess everything.
3. The _____ Trap: they don't like the price tag.
4. The _____ Trap: they whine that their load is too heavy.
5. The _____ Trap: they wait for the perfect time.
6. The _____ Trap: they wait until they feel like taking action.

If you are succeeding at everything you do, then you are probably not pushing yourself hard enough. In other words, you are not taking enough risks.

Remember: You risk because you have something of great value you want to achieve.

Discussion: Think of an example from your own life of a risk that paid off. Now, ask yourself if there was ever a time in your life you did not take a risk for fear of failure. Into what traps (above) have you fallen?

Biblical Case Study: The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

In Matthew 25, Jesus shares the story of the man who gave his goods to three of his servants before he departed on a journey to a far country. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one. After a long time away, the man returned and met with the servants to settle accounts.

The servant who received five talents, as well as the one given two talents, reported to the master that they had been able to double the amount originally placed in their care. The master was overjoyed and praised them for the wise investment of resources entrusted to them.

The servant who received one talent reported no gain on what was given to him. Even though the servant acknowledged that he knew his master would expect an increase, he reported that he hid the talent in the ground. The owner sharply rebuked him. The punishment was severe. What was his mistake? He tried to play it safe! Because the servant refused to be a risk-taker, he forfeited everything. God has not called us to play it safe.

If at First You Do Succeed, Try Something Harder

The willingness to take risks is a major key to significant accomplishment. If you are reaching all your goals, you may need bigger goals that will require you to take risks. The road to the next level is always uphill; you won't coast there. Conversely, if you never seem to achieve your goals, you may be playing it safe. Once again, you must be willing to take greater risks.

Review the Steps for Failing Forward

1. Realize there is one major _____ between average people and achieving people.
2. Learn a new _____ of failure.
3. Remove the “you” from _____.
4. Take _____ and reduce your fear.
5. Change your _____ to failure by accepting responsibility.
6. Don’t let the failure on the _____ penetrate to the inside of you.
7. Say good-bye to _____.
8. Change _____, and your world changes.
9. Get over yourself and start _____ yourself to others.
10. Find the _____ in every bad experience.
11. If at first you do _____, try something harder.

Assessment and Application

Assessment:

Think about the next big goal or challenge before you. Write down your plan for reaching the goal.

Application: Review your plan to see if you have included enough risks. Where and how could you stretch yourself in order to reach the next level?