

The Power of Persistence

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Hebrews 12:1-3

Most people believe there is a huge gap between them and success. Frankly, there is not much difference between success and failure, but that little difference makes a big difference! Persistence is the little difference that makes the big difference when it comes to failing forward. It separates those who achieve success from those who only dream about it.

Remember: There is no failure except when we stop trying. There is no defeat except on the inside. Only a weakness of persistence can keep us from success.

The only way to fail forward and achieve your dreams is to cultivate tenacity and persistence. More than anything else, what keeps a person going in the midst of adversity is having a sense of purpose. Purpose is the fuel that powers persistence. These qualities can be learned partly by developing the habit of following through on your commitments when you don't feel like it. You need a strategy to cultivate these qualities. Here is a four-point plan:

1. Purpose: _____ one.

- Get close to people who have a great desire to make a difference.
- Develop discontent with the status quo.
- Ask God to give you a dream.
- Search for a goal that excites you.
- Invest your resources into achieving that goal.

2. Excuses: _____ them.

Most every failure comes from people who have the habit of making excuses. No matter how many opportunities you have missed or mistakes you have made, don't ever make excuses. You cannot possibly learn from mistakes if you are making excuses for them. Take complete responsibility for yourself and keep trying.

3. Incentives: _____ some.

Give yourself rewards as you reach short-term goals on the road to the ultimate goal. *“Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races, one after another”* (Walter Elliot). Give yourself worthwhile incentives to win the short races.

4. Determination: _____ it.

Learn to become a determined individual. Inspire yourself with stories of men and women who tried, failed, and kept going. To develop persistence over the long journey, cultivate inward determination on a daily basis.

Hebrews Chapter 12

Hebrews 12 develops the theme of endurance. The first three verses teach us that the key to persistence is passion. All the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11 made it successfully to the finish line because of their passionate commitment to the cause. The verses remind us that we must run the race

of life with endurance if we plan to finish well. The text also indicates that if the key to persistence is passion, then the key to passion is purpose. We must run with purpose, not aimlessly.

The key to purpose is perspective. The writer of Hebrews admonishes us to consider three things that will help our perspective and our ability to finish well:

1. Consider _____ (v.1). A great cloud of witnesses has run the race before us.
2. Consider _____ (v.1). We must avoid pitfalls and encumbrances.
3. Consider _____ (vv. 2, 3). We must keep our eyes on Jesus, our perfect example.

Biblical Case Study: Adam and Eve (Genesis 4:1-5:5)

Adam and Eve were the crowning masterpieces of God’s creative genius. Like a master potter, He fashioned them from the dust of the ground, left His fingerprints upon them, and breathed His own life into them. But they willfully disobeyed him. Their disobedience brought devastating consequences that continue to plague us today. Their failure brought the curse of sin and death upon the entire human family. Did anyone ever fail so miserably with such far-reaching negative results?

They exchanged a life without pain for a hostile and brutal environment. They became the parents of a murderer and were the first parents to endure the heartache of a murdered child. There is every reason to label them as the worst of failures. However, they did not use their pain as an excuse to continue to reject God. They did not allow a root of bitterness to consume them. When God gave them their son Seth, they expressed gratitude to God for this new life. They came to represent those willing to accept the consequences of their choices and to learn from their mistakes.

Discussion: In what current or future situation can you begin to apply the lessons you have learned from past mistakes? What is your plan to succeed in these situations?

Plan for After You Get Back Up

We have all failed and some of us have developed the persistence to keep getting up after being knocked down. But aren’t you getting weary of getting up only to be knocked down again without making any forward progress? What you need is a plan for what to do after you have gotten back up. Try using these steps:

1. Reaffirm your _____.
2. Stay on _____.
3. Move forward with your _____.
4. Take _____.
5. Don’t let _____ stop you.
6. Reevaluate your _____.
7. Develop new _____ to succeed.
8. Determine to _____ well.

Every time you plan, risk, fail, reevaluate and adjust, you have another opportunity to begin again, only better than the last time. As the famous inventor, Thomas Edison, said as his laboratory burned to the ground, *“Thank goodness all our mistakes were burned up. Now we can start again fresh.”*

If you are willing to stay determined, work according to your plan, and keep getting up when you get knocked down, you will be able to achieve your goals – and someday your dreams.

You Are Ready to Fail Forward

Let's review all the steps it takes to fail forward.

1. Realize there is one major difference between average and achieving people.
2. Learn a new definition for failure.
3. Remove the "you" from failure.
4. Take action and reduce your fear.
5. Change your response to failure by accepting responsibility.
6. Don't let the failure from outside get inside you.
7. Say good-bye to yesterday.
8. Change yourself, and your world changes.
9. Get over yourself and start giving yourself.
10. Find the benefit in every bad experience.
11. If at first you do succeed, try something harder.
12. Learn from a bad experience and make it a good experience.
13. Work on the weakness that weakens you.
14. Understand that there is not much difference between success and failure.
15. Get up, get over it, and get going.

You don't become a great sailor by sailing calm seas. Most people run from problems. Instead of running from problems, you should go after them. You get ahead by solving problems. Highly successful people have made more mistakes, suffered more adversities, overcome more problems, and experienced more failures than most all the other people you will ever meet. If you want to achieve your dreams, get out there and fail. Fail early, fail often, but always fail forward!

Discussion: What views of failure have changed for you during these lessons? What views of success have changed?

Biblical Case Study: Abraham (Genesis: 12:1-25:11)

Is there anyone in the Bible who is more loved and respected than Abraham? While there may be many reasons for this great admiration afforded Abraham, most scholars would argue that it is because he stayed the course, went the distance, and finished well. He is highly honored in the spiritual "Hall of Fame" in Hebrews 11. The writer of Hebrews repeatedly commends Abraham for his obedience and his steadfast faithfulness in the midst of testing.

Abraham's journey is not without mistakes and failures. He lied to Pharaoh about his marital relationship with Sarah. When his wife could not conceive a child, he fathered a child with Hagar, Sarah's maidservant.

While Abraham made leadership errors and other mistakes, he remained faithful and obedient to God's calling upon his life. Through all the highs and lows of life, he kept moving forward. Whatever his other failures, he seemed to always follow through on his commitments to God. There is no wonder that God called Abraham "My friend" (Isaiah 41:8)!

Assessment and Application

Assessment:

Write down your God-given dream and the reasons why you want to fulfill it.

Application: Write down the risks you are willing to take to make it happen. Try to think of everything that could go wrong. Now, renew your commitment to move forward regardless of the risks. Ask God for wisdom, strength, and courage for the journey.