

It's Never Too Late To Start Again

How do we deal with defeats, failures?

We all will face failures or defeats in our lives at some time; life is not an unbroken series of successes.

No-one is perfect: we all make mistakes.

How do we prevent a defeat from overwhelming us?

A failure that may or may not be the result of our decisions or actions.

Job 17:11 [NIV] *“My days have passed, my plans are shattered, and so are the desires of my heart.”*

More than a mid-life crisis. Youth has passed, all I planned to accomplish in my life is only partly fulfilled and the desire to put out the effort to accomplish what I planned is just not there now.

We may fail many times in life but we are never a failure until we give up trying.

What are the possible causes of failure?

We fail when we don't plan

Proverbs 27:12 [Living Bible] *“A sensible man watches for problems ahead and prepares to meet them. The simpleton never looks, and suffers the consequences.”*

We fail if we don't plan ahead.

Old saying, *“if we fail to plan we are planning to fail.”*

We all have a tendency to be impulsive.

Proverbs 16:9 [Living Bible] *“We should make our plans counting on God to direct us.”*

Why? Because God can see what the future will bring with it.

Was it raining when Noah built the Ark? Noah, prompted by God, planned for the future. Long range planning for what was going to happen in 120 years time!

Luke 14:28-29 [Living Bible] *“Don't begin until you count the cost for who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if he has enough money to pay the bills? Otherwise he might complete only the foundation before running out of funds. And then how everyone would laugh!”*

We fail when we think we have “made it in life”

Proverbs 16:18 [Living Bible] *“Pride goes before destruction and haughtiness before a fall.”*

An old saying, *“A person who gets too big for his trousers will be exposed in the end.”*

When we think we have *“got it all together”* watch out!

1 Corinthians 10:12 [NIV] *“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”*

Pride causes us to fail.

One of the symptoms of pride is that we feel we don’t need advice.

Proverbs 15:22 [NIV] *“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”*

Success comes with seeking expert advice.

You cannot be a *“lone ranger”* Christian. We all need counsel from God’s Word and His Servants.

Remember the lesson of the whale. When you get to the top and are about to blow out air is the time when you are harpooned.

We fail when we are afraid to take risks

Proverbs 29:25 [Living Bible] *“Fear of man is a dangerous trap, but to trust in God means safety.”*

The moment we start to worry about what other people think we are doomed to fail.

Having taken counsel from God’s Word we should ignore any fear of failure that our human nature will generate in us.

Ecclesiastes 11:4, 6 [Living Bible] *“If you wait for perfect conditions you will never get anything done” ... “Keep on sowing your seed, for you never know which will grow, perhaps it all will.”*

The greatest failure is the failure to try!

I would like my epitaph to read *“at least he tried”*.

An old saying, *“don’t be afraid to go out on a limb that is where the fruit is.”*

We fail because we give up too soon

Proverbs 15:9-10 [Living Bible] *“The Lord ... loves those who try to be good. If they stop trying, the Lord will correct them...”*

Proverbs 12:24 [Living Bible] *“Work hard and become a leader; be lazy and never succeed.”*

Proverbs 13:4 [Living Bible] *“Lazy people want much but get little, while the diligent are prospering.”*

Too often during trying times we stop trying.

Old saying, *“Failure is the path of least persistence.”*

Galatians 6:9 [NIV] *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”*

Success will come in time if we don’t give up, we will reap a harvest.

Very often success is just around the corner.

Thomas Edison tried 200 different elements before he found the right one for an electrical light bulb. He looked on it as an education not a failure, for he knew 200 ways that didn't work.

The value of a postage stamp is that it sticks to one thing until it gets there.

An oak tree is a little nut that refused to give up its piece of ground and overcame all the opposition.

We fail because we don't listen to God

Proverbs 14:12 [Living Bible] *“Before every man there lies a wide and pleasant road that seems right but ends in death.”*

God's Word is filled with guidelines and principles to make our lives all that God wants us to be and we want to be; but most of the time we would rather listen to our feelings.

“I feel this is the right thing to do even if God's Word says differently.”

God's Word is usually the exact opposite to our natural inclinations !!

God says, *“the way to get is to give”* [**Luke 6:38**]

God says, *“the way to be honoured is to be humble”* [**1 Peter 5:6**]

God says, *“the way to be great is to become a servant”* [**Mark 10:43**]

God says, *“His ways are far higher than man's ways”* [**Isaiah 55:8-9**]

Lack of prayer and study of God's Word causes a lot of failures.

What do we do when we fail?

How do we make a fresh start?

Admit we made a mistake

Proverbs 28:13 [Living Bible] *“A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them, he gets another chance.”*

Accept responsibility for our own failure.

Most of us are experts at *“passing the buck”*. It is part of our human nature. We like to blame others for our failures, from our parents to the weather.

Stop regretting and start repenting

Repenting means a change of mind. To start to look at things from a different perspective – from God's viewpoint – and do something about errors.

2 Corinthians 7:10 [Good News Bible] *“For the sadness that is used by God brings a change in heart that leads to salvation, and there is no regret in that! ... But worldly sadness leads to death.”*

There are two kinds of sadness – Godly and worldly.

Godly sorrow motivates us to change, to do something about the problem. A desire to be different. To learn from the lesson of failure and seek to not make the same mistake again.

Worldly sorrow is just demoralising and depressing. It is the “*woe is me – pity-party*” attitude without the desire to change or do anything about the problem.

Self-pity is one of the most devastating things in life. You never learn anything by having a “*pity-party*”.

The fact is that almost every success in life is built on a failure that is used as a learning experience.

Many things are only learnt by the personal experience of failure.

Regretting is looking only at the past which is no motivation to change.

Repenting is looking to the future and motivates us to action.

Slam the door on self-pity.

Forget the former and focus on future

Philippians 3:13-14 [Living Bible] “...*forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead. I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us...*”

Don't let our defeats defeat us. Pause and consider what memory of the past are we allowing to manipulate us at the moment? Every time the incident comes into our mind we wish we hadn't reacted as we did at the time!

This is allowing our past to control our future, which is a big mistake. Our past is past – that is the good news of the message that Christ brought.

We cannot change the past by worrying about it, so “*let it go*” as water under the bridge.

God is far more interested in the direction our lives are taking now, than what we did in the past.

Our past can be covered by the Blood of Christ, but our future depends on what choices we make now!

A good example of this in God's Word is the different ways Peter and Judas reacted to failure. Both Peter and Judas were disciples of Christ; both Peter and Judas denied Christ; both Peter and Judas were devastated by what they had done, their failure.

But they reacted to this failure in totally different ways.

Matthew 26:75 [NIV] “*Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: ‘Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.*”

Peter wept bitterly. Here was a man who had lived with Jesus for three and a half years, but didn't have enough courage to stand up for Christ when confronted with being associated with Him. Peter must have felt a complete failure, and didn't feel that God could ever use him after such a “*let down*”.

Judas simply had “*worldly sorrow*”.

Matthew 27:3-5 [NIV] “*When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ‘I have sinned,’ he said, ‘for I have betrayed innocent blood.’ ‘What is that to us?’ they replied. ‘That's your*

responsibility.’ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.”

No repentance, only self-pity that led to death.

Peter must have considered that Christ wouldn't be able to use him in the future but notice what happened after the resurrection of Christ when the women were looking for the body of Christ to anoint it; the angels told them especially to tell Peter of the resurrection.

Mark 16:7 [NIV] *“But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’ ”*

I think Peter was mentioned personally as among the disciples because Christ knew just how Peter was feeling at that time – totally unworthy to be counted among the disciples any longer because of his denial of Christ and needing a special word of encouragement. This reinstatement of Peter was completed later by Christ personally.

John 21:15-19 [NIV] *“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he said, ‘you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs.’ Again Jesus said, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me?’ He answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Take care of my sheep.’ The third time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ He said, ‘Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.’ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, ‘**Follow me!**’”*

Peter did follow Christ and when filled with the Holy Spirit after Christ's ascension it was Peter's new courage and conviction that caused 3,000 people to accept Christ as their Messiah [Saviour] in one day.

Acts 2:14, 41 [NIV] *“Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.” ... “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”*

God turned Peter's personal failure into a wonderful success because Peter responded to his failure with Godly sorrow that led to repentance and Peter forgetting the former and focusing on the future.

Trust God to work it out

Romans 8:28 [Phillips] *“We know that to those who love God, who are called according to His Plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good.”*

Very often in our lives we only see the immediate part of our life and it seems to be a mess, but God sees our life from a different perspective.

God sees the end product that He is working towards, piece by piece until the total “*pattern*” is complete.

This can be likened to our looking at the under-side of a piece of embroidery; it looks a mess of different threads, but once completed and we see the top-side, it becomes a beautiful pattern.

When we fail we may look at our life and think “*how can anything good come out of this?*” but God sees the top-side of the finished product that this particular failure will be just one thread of our life, used by God to create something beautiful.

Read the accounts of God's heroes listed in Hebrews chapter eleven and you will find they were all "losers", weak willed, liars, adulterers, murderers, cheats, swindlers; yet God used these imperfect people.

If God only used perfect people how much would get done? Not much!

God uses us in spite of our weaknesses, problems, faults, hang-ups and even our mixed motives.

God wants to take our greatest failure and fear that we want to keep secret and turn it into our greatest strength. He wants to make a life message, a testimony out of it.

Moses' weakness was anger – yet God made him "*the meekest man on the earth*".

Abraham lacked faith in his early life yet God made him the "*father of the faithful*".

David the adulterer and murderer, the man of blood who in God's hands became a "*man after God's own heart*".

God has taken the greatest weaknesses in my life and is turning them into strengths [see, I still want to keep those weaknesses secret ! !]

Whatever is our greatest weakness is exactly what God wants to work on in our life to create a new person.

2 Corinthians 5:17 [Phillips] "*For if a man is in Christ he becomes a new person altogether – the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new!*"

Jonah 3:1 [NIV] "*Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:*"

God is the god of a second chance. Don't let a failure cause us to give up.

- a) Admit our mistake to God;
- b) Stop regretting and start repenting;
- c) Forget the former and focus on the future
- d) Trust God to work it out, watch God turn our weaknesses that cause our failure into our strengths.

God specialises in new beginnings.

It is never too late to start again. It's called being "*born again*".

How does God take a negative and turn it into a positive?

Take a minus and make it a plus?

He makes a cross out of the minus. Accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ makes us a new person.

Romans 6:3-4 [NIV] "*Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*"

A new life, a new person, when we make Jesus Christ the Lord of our lives. If we feel we have wasted so much of our life God will make up for it.

Joel 2:25 [NIV] "*I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten-- the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm-- my great army that I sent among you.*"

Isaiah 61:3 [Living Bible] *“To all those who mourn in Israel He will give beauty for ashes, joy instead of mourning, praise instead of heaviness. For God has planted them like strong and graceful oaks for His own glory.”*

God is a god of new beginnings.