

Coping with Failure (Anonymous author, bridgetothebible.com)

One thing which is common to all mankind is that we all fail. There isn't one out there who hasn't failed – some perhaps more than others.

The Bible recognizes that humans do fail:

We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. James Ch.3:2

But the most important thing is how we handle failure. The Canadian actress Mary Pickford reportedly said "To fall is not to fail, unless you fail to get up again". The Bible also has something to say about this – these are the words of the wise man Solomon:

For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, Proverbs Ch.24:16

The people who rarely fail are usually the ones who never do anything. A young girl practicing figure skating to compete in the Olympics was told by her teacher, "If you don't fail while practicing then you are not learning enough to be a true champion". People who do things will fall but if they are true champions then they will get up again, for to fall is not to fail, unless you fail to get up again.

The Bible says:

The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.
Psalm 145:14

God will help us when we fall.

Does failure mean no contact with God?

In the Old Testament, we are told that the nation of Israel turned from God many times. In God's eyes, this was an unmitigated failure. Yet despite this God was not prepared to give up on them:

God did not reject his people Romans Ch.11:2

For he knew that many Jews would through tribulation rise to be faithful people before him. This was evident in individual Jews such as Paul and the other disciples, who were prepared to acknowledge Jesus Christ.

If we follow the ways of God but fail in some part of our life God will be there to assist us back on our feet:

If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand. Psalm 37:23-24

When does failure happen?

Failure is not limited to just a few, all men and women fail in their lives, and God is aware of their inherent weaknesses. Men of strong faith are just as liable to fail as their weaker companions, and often they fail in a most appalling way. We shouldn't get over-confident that we won't fail, as this is probably the time when we will!

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 1
Corinthians Ch.10:12

So often failure arises from selfishness, from a losing of the vision of their goals, from men distancing themselves from God and relying on their own strength. When men and women stray from the God's way they must return to the place where they were at the beginning, and say:

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, Luke Ch.15:18

The assurance is that if you go to God you will find all the fullness of love awaiting you there. Even the hindrance of failure can be turned into stepping stones of glory. The great man of faith Abraham failed in parts of his life (Genesis Ch.12-13) and yet this is what the Bible says in the New Testament:

"You shall see Abraham... in the kingdom" Luke. 13:28

How to avoid failure - training

The athlete without a trainer has a hopeless disadvantage, and if someone ignores the instruction, advice, and encouragement of the trainer then he is foolish. The same can be said for the man or woman without God – they are without hope for they have no trainer or teacher in the things of life. Those who ignore God's wise advice in the Bible are doomed to failure.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" Proverbs 1:7

Are we wise or foolish in this respect? Is our training in the things of God well balanced? Are there aspects we ignore because they involve too much effort?

Training must be engaged in regularly for maximum benefit. For the athlete, particular attention must be paid to it in a well devised plan as a contest draws near. For the believer, sporadic training is very ineffectual. It must be constantly and continuously attended to.

Always remember that even our mistakes and their consequences will be shaped by God to our benefit.

It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. Psalm 119:77

Forgetting past failures

The worst thing we can do is worry about past failures for this will just compound into yet more failures in the future. The apostle Paul in the New Testament of the Bible gave this advice:

one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead

Philippians Ch.3:13

This was Paul's secret of success. It can be ours as well - forget about past mistakes and think about how we can do better in the future.

To concentrate always on present problems and to always think about the possibility of failure is self-destructive and is not what is taught in the Bible. The victory gained by Christ himself of overcoming sin —the greatest victory ever achieved—would never have been gained if he had thought only of the struggle and the possibility of failure. Christ set his mind firmly on the future and what would be achieved and this helped him to overcome failure.

Never give up!

Jesus and his disciples were not always successful in getting people to follow him as they traveled across the countryside. There was one particular time as they headed towards the next village where he sent out his disciples two by two and he said:

if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them. Mark Ch.6:11

Jesus seems to be saying, "Don't be sidetracked by your detractors, your failures. Don't allow defeat to stop you. Don't let failure be the final word."

And that's why you should never give up on yourself (or anybody else). Whatever your failure - in marriage, business, school, church, personal life - you can believe that God is still at work, moving you out of the hardship to a new place. All you need to do is pray to Him and ask for help.

Freedom and restoration is God's way. You can believe that failure is never the final word.

I'm not sure that all of us can learn to say, "I love to make mistakes." But what we hope we are saying is that we are all human beings. Sometimes I have my shining moments, and sometimes I goof. I may not listen. I may say hurtful words. I may make a bad decision. I may blunder. I may mess up. But our mistakes, our failures, don't have the final word.

Don't let failure discourage you:

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua Ch.1:9

You may have failed this time but next time you can succeed!

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians Ch.4:13

The lessons we learn from failures should make us better able to handle the situation the second time around. Because God is eager to give us forgiveness and strength, the only way to lose is to give up. We can tell what kind of people we are by what we do on the second and third attempts.

When others fail - look at how you can help

How conscious are we of the needs of others? Do we offer them help and encouragement when they fail? Don't forget the needs of others when they experience failure. The wise man Solomon offered this advice:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Ecclesiastes Ch.4:9-10

Conclusion

At the start of this article we read this verse:

The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.
Psalm 145:14

The lesson we need to remember is that we all fail but only failures stay down. Keep on trying and also keep on looking to help others when they fall down.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. James Ch.4:10

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