

Failure Pt. 1 2023

Pastor James Foley – Shared on Sunday, October 29, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us. Whether you are here in person or joining via the livestream you are most welcome! Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take notes as you like. We have much to cover in a rather short space of time.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

KEY – Today I want to begin a new two-or-three-part series on the topic of failure (i.e., and the benefits thereof).

FYI – From the outset I admit I am indebted to a number of authors on this topic, first and foremost of which is David Murray of Crossway. His writings in particular have spoken to me, and I want to pay them forward to you! Thus said, let us wade into the waters this morning with the following series of Q's (i.e., beginning with this Q):

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

Q. How many here have failed?

NOTE 1 – We all fail in myriad ways. We could speak at length addressing failures in the realms of education, employment, finances, marriage, parenting, morality and spirituality. Also, we all fail to varying degrees in living. Some failures may be minor (e.g., failing to complete an assigned task or remembering where you parked). Others are far more impacting (i.e., a failed marriage). However, we all know what it means to fail and fail often!

Q. How many know what it *feels* like to fail?

NOTE 2 – We have all contended with the emotions that accompany moments of failure (i.e., great and small). I am sure that you, like your pastor, have contended with feelings of shame, guilt, regret, anger, disappointment, discouragement, disillusionment, disbelief, doubt, despair, hopelessness, and more. Do any of these ring a bell?

Q. Yet how many realize that failure has its benefit(s)?

NOTE 3 – To those who have failed I posit that failure can prove an invaluable teacher, thus proving beneficial. Clearly I am not wishing you failure or offering permission to fail, that you might benefit from its instruction. Rather, I am offering much needed perspective for Christian life and living. You and I do well to consider this Q:

Q. What lesson(s) does failure teach?

ANSWER #1

A1. Failure Can Teach Us Humility Before God (i.e., Vertical Dimensionality)

NOTE 1 – A great many of our failures are the result of prideful self-confidence. How often do we place far too much confidence in ourselves versus trusting the Lord, causing us to inevitably and invariably stumble and fall?

Proverbs 16:18 (NIV, Emphasis Mine)

18 Pride goes **before** destruction,
a haughty spirit **before** a fall.

NOTE 2 – However, failure can lead us unto humility, that our confidence might be in the Lord and in Him alone!

NOTE 3 – Consider that Simon Peter learned humility from failure (i.e., the turning point in his life and ministry):

Matthew 26:31–35 (The PRIDE of Simon Peter)

31 Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

“‘I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

33 Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

34 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

35 But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”

Matthew 26:69–75 (The FAILING of Simon Peter)

69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. “You also were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said.

70 But he denied it before them all. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said.

71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

72 He denied it again, with an oath: “I don’t know the man!”

73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.”

74 Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!”

Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 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 [**i.e., MOMENT OF HUMILITY**].

John 21:15–17 (The EXPRESSION of His Humility)

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love [unconditional] me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love [brotherly or familial] you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

16 Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love [unconditional] me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love [brotherly or familial] you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

17 The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love [brotherly or familial] 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.

NOTE 4 – This man who cowered before few in his pride would be used to preach to the masses in his humility. Consider, however, that the mechanism God used to break Peter of his pride was a moment of personal failure!

Q1. To what degree can we learn humility amidst failure (i.e., letting go of our pride)?

Q2. To what degree can God use such failings as the impetus for our sp. transformation?

ANSWER #2

A2. Failure Can Teach Us the Need to Pray.

NOTE – The outflow of our last point, failure has a way of driving us to our knees in prayer. As one writer posits, “Success tends to shrink and swallow prayer, whereas failure tends to expand and deepen it.” Don’t believe me? Consider this classic psalm penned by David following a season of utter failure as king over the nation of Israel:

Psalm 51 (For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba).

1 Have mercy on me, O God,
 according to your unfailing love;
 according to your great compassion
 blot out my transgressions.
 2 Wash away all my iniquity
 and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

5 Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.

14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

15 Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.

18 May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Q. What did David take the time to do following his failures?

A. He took the time to pray (i.e., confessing his sin and seeking pardon)

Q. To what degree can failure in life and living be a powerful catalyst of prayer?

ANSWER #3

A3. Failure Can Teach Us Humility Among Men (i.e., Horizontal Dimensionality)

NOTE 1 – Not only can failure catalyze humility before God (cf. point 1); it can also foster humility among men. Those who are acutely aware of their personal shortcomings are far less likely to judge or look down upon others.

Q. How can we look down upon others for failings we are also guilty of?

NOTE 2 – Consider that Scripture clearly warns against this activity:

Matthew 7:1–5

1 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Romans 2:1–3

1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. 2 Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. 3 So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?

KEY – Let us resist the example of the Pharisee who deemed himself better than his peers! Consider this caution:

Luke 18:9–14

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

14 “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

NOTE 3 – If only the Pharisee had taken the time to see his failings, he never would have treated a peer so harshly! Sadly, only one of these men went home justified before God, and it was not the one who acted arrogantly before God and among men! May you have the wherewithal to consider your failures, treating others with the mercy you would wish to receive yourself! Such is the way of the truly humble, and such will be truly exalted!

THUS SAID...

ANSWER #4

A4. Failure Can Teach Us Sympathy and Compassion.

NOTE 1 – Those who have failed are far more likely to both feel for and come to the aid of those who are failing. You and I are far more likely to empathize with and come alongside one who is struggling where we have failed. Thus, your “greatest ministry” may well be connected to an area of past personal failure. Consider this example:

Q. Are you aware of the relationship between the apostle Peter and John Mark?

NOTE 2 – A great many are unaware that a connection likely exists between the apostle Peter and John Mark. In fact, tradition tells us that Peter was a significant spiritual mentor in the life of this younger disciple of Christ. The Second Century figure Papias tells us that the Gospel of John Mark (i.e., simply called the Gospel of Mark) is actually the remembrances and recollections of Simon Peter. Thus, the Gospel of Mark is actually that of Peter!

Q. What did these two figures (i.e., Peter and Mark) have in common?

A. They both knew what it meant to fail in critical moments in life and ministry.

NOTE 3 – I have already spelled out the failings of Simon Peter in previous points (i.e., three-fold denial of Christ).

Q. What was the failing of John Mark?

A. Let us consider the following information:

QUOTE – “John Mark was a helper on Paul and Barnabas’ first missionary journey (Acts 13:5). However, he did not stay through the whole trip. John Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas in Pamphylia and left the work (Acts 15:38). The Bible does not say why Mark deserted, but his departure came right after a mostly fruitless time in Cyprus (Acts 13:4–12). Only one conversion is recorded in Cyprus, but there had been strong demonic opposition. It’s likely that the young John Mark was discouraged at the hardness of the way and decided to return to the comforts of home.

Some time later, after Paul and Barnabas had returned from their first journey, Paul expressed a desire to go back to the brothers in the cities they had previously visited to see how everyone was doing (Acts 15:36). Barnabas agreed, apparently upon the provision that they take John Mark with them. Paul refused to have Mark on the trip, however, citing Mark’s previous desertion. Paul thought it best not to have a quitter with them; they needed someone more dependable. Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement about John Mark (verse 39) and wound up separating from each other and going on separate journeys. Barnabas took John Mark with him to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas with him through Syria and Cilicia to encourage the believers in the churches in those areas (Acts 15:39–41).”

NOTE 4 – Clearly, Simon Peter and John Mark had moments of crippling failure amidst their service to Christ. One can only wonder the degree to which Peter gravitated to Mark at a latter point because he knew the sting of failure and the way home thereafter. Though I cannot fault Paul for resisting the missionary aid of John Mark, I am more than grateful for figures like Barnabas and, in this case, Peter for helping bring someone back home!

Q1. Have you, like Peter, had moments of failure?

Q2. Might there be a John Mark in your life who needs your aid?

Q3. To what degree might God use you to help one who has similarly failed?

ANSWER #5

A5. Failure Can Teach Us Concerning Our Gifts and Callings.

NOTE 1 – Simply stated, failures can help us to discern where we are genuinely gifted and where we are not. Though there may be many things you would love to do, failure(s) might bring much needed clarity to your call. It is best to focus on what God has genuinely enabled you to do versus participate in unhelpful wishful thinking.

NOTE 2 – I recall years back watching American Idol. There were a great many singers who were convinced of their call, only to fail miserably (i.e., facing the reality that they were not as gifted as they were led to believe)! Though the remarks of the judges were harsh and rather difficult, some needed that wake up call to shift course! In fact, the judges who created the context for their failure were likely doing many a service by sharing the truth.

NOTE 2 – There is nothing wrong with discovering your gift(s) and flourishing within that role. Know your lane! Everyone is called to do something in the kingdom and is uniquely gifted in kind. Please hear the following truth: No one person is called to do or be everything, and sometimes we need to fail to genuinely learn this key lesson.

Romans 12:3b–8 (Emphasis Mine)

3 . . . Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members **do not all have the same function**, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have **different gifts**, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Q. How might areas of failing reveal your true gifts and talents?

ANSWER #6

A6. Failure Can Teach Us to Esteem the Gifts of Others.

NOTE 1 – When you know your lane, you are free to esteem those who traffic in another (v. trafficking in envy). When I see men and women thrive in areas of personal failing and lack (e.g., plumbing, carpentry, mechanics), I cannot help but admire them. Trying and failing in these arenas has made me more grateful for those who are truly gifted! This helps me to recognize the “wisdom” of the apostle Paul’s teaching re: the Body of Jesus Christ:

1 Corinthians 12:12–13a, 14–20, 27

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body . . . 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. . . . 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

ANSWER #7

A7. Failure Can Teach Us to Worship Christ.

NOTE 1 – Consider how often we fail per day, week, year, decade, and/or lifetime. Now contrast this with Christ:

Hebrews 4:15–16 (Emphasis Mine)

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—**yet he did not sin**. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

NOTE 2 – This alone should drive us to worship the Lord, knowing that He succeeded wherein we failed and fail.

NOTE 3 – Can I add that those who are broken (i.e., recognize their spiritual poverty) know how to esteem Him:

Luke 7:36–50

36 When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. 37 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. 38 As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. 39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”

40 Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”

“Tell me, teacher,” he said.

41 “Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii,[c] and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

43 Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.”

“You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

48 Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” 49 The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” 50 Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Q1. Do you recognize your brokenness?

Q2. Can you perceive the reality of His perfection?

Q3. How can this “move and motivate” you unto worship?

ANSWER #8

A8. Failure Can Teach Us the Cost of Our Sinfulness

NOTE 1 – Failure has a way of making us feel the cost of prioritizing our will and desires over those of the Lord. When we hit rock bottom after foolishly persisting in a direction contrary to the way(s) of our heavenly Father, we come to understand the dead end which is sin and rebellion. In such moments, failure teaches us a key reality:

Romans 6:23a (Emphasis Mine)

23 . . . the wages of sin is **death** [i.e., separation, alienation and ruination]

Q. Do you want to see a classic example of this principle born out in the pages of Scripture?

Luke 15:11:11–17

11 Jesus [taught]: “There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

13 Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’”

NOTE 2 – Consider the experience of this prodigal son due to his own decisions (i.e., hungry and sitting in filth):

Q. Did his choices bring about the life he desired or was this a moment of much-needed, painful realization?

THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY OR THE END OF THE LESSON, HOWEVER...

ANSWER #9

A9. Failure Can Teach Us the Wonder(s) of His Amazing Grace

NOTE 1 – Failure, properly navigated, can awaken our senses and compel us back to the One we abandoned! When we hit rock bottom and find the sense to come home to the Father, we discover afresh and anew His willingness to show that which is most amazing: not just mercy, but grace. Let us consider such elements herein:

Luke 15:17–23

17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ 20 So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

NOTE 2 – I wonder the effect such grace had upon this young man. I wonder the effect it should have upon us!

ANSWER #10

A10. Failure Can Teach Us to Long for Heaven.

QUOTE – “Failure keeps us looking toward heaven, the place where failures will never be known again. Will we remember our failures there? Probably, but not with any pain, only as covered by Christ’s pardon, and only to turn up the volume of our praise. In heaven, we will also see our failures from a whole new perspective, not just our moral and spiritual failures but also our relational and vocational disappointments. We will see God’s wise providence in allowing that relationship breakup, that interview disaster, that lost job, that failed test. Will we experience any failures there? No, never. We will not fail, and neither will anyone else. The tears of disappointment will be part of the deluge wiped out of our eyes (Rev. 21:4). Heaven will be one great and long success story: moral success, spiritual success, intellectual success, physical success, relational success, vocational success, and many other successes we cannot even dream about here.”

Q. How many long for such a place?

KEY – Failing in the moment can make us yearn for eternity!

Revelation 21:1–4

1 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

SUMMATIONS

Q. What are the lessons failure can teach us?

- A1. Failure Can Teach Us Humility Before God.
- A2. Failure Can Teach Us the Need to Pray.
- A3. Failure Can Teach Us Humility Among Men.
- A4. Failure Can Teach Us Sympathy and Compassion.
- A5. Failure Can Teach Us Concerning Our Gifts and Callings.
- A6. Failure Can Teach Us to Esteem the Gifts of Others.
- A7. Failure Can Teach Us to Worship Christ.
- A8. Failure Can Teach Us the Cost of Our Sinfulness
- A9. Failure Can Teach Us the Wonders of His Divine Grace
- A10. Failure Can Teach Us to Long for Heaven.

CONCLUSION

NOTE 1 – Feel free to give either in person or online at www.NewLifeBarre.org.

NOTE 2 – Check out our website for any of our beyond Sunday ministries (MM, WM & C.Y.C.).

NOTE 3 – It is that time of year again to run our background checks. All Children's Workers see Pastor.

NOTE 4 – Potluck Supper taking place immediately after this service. Thus said, you all are dismissed at this time!