

Why This Painful Lesson Is One of the Most Valuable Parts of Your Spiritual Growth

One of the great human freedoms is the freedom to fail and to get back up and try again! I have heard it said that before Abraham Lincoln became president of the United States, he went bankrupt and lost several local and national elections. To unleash potential, we must be willing to allow people to fail forward. Controlling others does not unleash their potential; trusting them to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes does.

Jesus was able to release potential better than anybody else, even though He had to work with people who were crude, unpolished, inexperienced leaders who often made mistakes. This was because Jesus allowed people to fail as part of their discipleship process. If Jesus were a micromanaging control freak who expected perfection from His followers, He would have failed in His mission of starting a global movement. We can see from reading the Gospels how all of His key people were entrusted with leadership even though they had a lot of rough edges and failed when it came to some decision-making. For example, Jesus had to correct the apostles James and John for wanting to call fire down from heaven to destroy the city of Samaria because its inhabitants didn't want to receive Jesus (Luke 9:51–56).

The apostle Peter was initially so unpredictable that within a span of minutes, he went from being the first person to receive the revelation from God the Father that Jesus was the promised Messiah to attempting to talk this Messiah out of fulfilling His main mission of dying on the cross for the sins

of the world. Jesus actually addressed Peter as Satan because he was under the influence of the evil one (Matt. 16:13–23). In one episode, Peter went from being influenced by God to being a spokesperson for the devil!

Most of us probably would have given up on a person so unpredictable. But Jesus hung in there with Peter. After His ascension, Jesus used Peter as the spokesperson of His church even after Peter gave in to temptation and denied that he ever knew Jesus (Matt. 26:69–75). Consequently, Jesus restored Peter back to ministry after He rose from the dead (John 21:15–17) and was proven correct, because in just a few short weeks, Peter became the leader of the newly formed church and preached that great message on the day of Pentecost that led to 3,000 people committing themselves to following Christ.

I remember when I first started our ministry in 1980. We had a young man fresh out of Bible school who had an incredible heart for God and felt a call to preach the gospel. He had a lack of confidence, which manifested through excessive stuttering. Even though he could hardly get a sentence out of his mouth without stuttering, I allowed him to preach on occasion and kept encouraging him despite his obvious limitations. I never told him that he stuttered, and despite how painful it was in those beginning days to hear him preach, the Lord kept showing me to have him preach. He began to transform right before my eyes, and within a few years, he rarely stuttered. He eventually moved to another country with his family and did such powerful missionary work that a whole nation was greatly impacted by his ministry to the leaders of the church in that island nation!

To this day, he has a strong and viable ministry that would have been in jeopardy if I had corrected him for his excessive stuttering and told him he couldn't preach unless he overcame his speech impediment. Most people forget that Michael Jordan, arguably the greatest basketball player of all time, was cut from his high school team and didn't win his first (of six)

championships with the Chicago Bulls until he was 28 years old and in the league for about seven years! The Bulls became so dominant that most people thought winning a championship was automatic for them, but they had to suffer many years of failure in the playoffs before they reached their potential.

Failure can actually lead to success and to the release of our potential when we can learn from our past and become wiser for the future. When we learn from our experiences, those experiences become tools to help us grow. If we refuse to honestly assess our life and learn from our failures, we are doomed to keep repeating the same mistakes over and over and will waste years.

We need to view failure the same way scientists view it. Though our American culture glorifies success and loves its winners, as illustrated in the way we worship our sports heroes, the greatest advances in science and technology came about in Western history because scientists viewed failure in an experiment as just another process in the journey of proving their hypothesis. Thus, every failure was a continuum to build upon because it narrowed down the possibilities and got closer to finding the true hypothesis. If we would only view failure as scientists do instead of how it's viewed in sports (with a winner-take-all approach), we would continually advance in our quest toward releasing our potential in life.

Another way of viewing failure in a positive light is by realizing that sometimes we fail because we are taking on new and greater responsibilities that challenge our mental, spiritual and physical abilities. For example, power lifters will attempt to lift a weight they have never successfully lifted before in order to increase their capacity for muscle strength and resistance. In doing this, they will often fail to lift it by themselves, but they will have a person spotting them who will aid them by placing a finger on the weight to help them complete a full repetition. If they only lifted weights they were comfortable with and didn't push their

muscles to failure, they would never go to the next level.

When I first learned how to ride a bike, I fell continually for three days before I was able to successfully keep my balance and ride. A baby has to fall numerous times before he or she learns to walk and has to master walking before he or she can ever begin to run.

I was encouraging a man who was discouraged because he thought he was losing ground in his faith and backsliding because he was failing in some of the tests and temptations coming his way. I told him he wasn't losing ground spiritually because now he had more responsibility than ever before and was failing merely because the tests were getting harder and harder and revealing weaknesses in his character that he had to overcome by continuing to mature. We have to remember that when we come to a new level, there will be a new and greater devil to meet us and test us!

Amazingly enough, as I finished writing this chapter, I came across an interview with Nick Foles, the quarterback of the Philadelphia Eagles. He said things in the article that line up with the principles in this chapter. I want to quote some excerpts from his interview:

"I think the big thing is don't be afraid to fail," Foles said. "I think in our society today, Instagram, Twitter, it's a highlight reel. It's all the good things. And then when you look at it, when you think like, wow, when you have a rough day, 'My life's not as good as that,' (you think) you're failing.

"Failure is a part of life. It's a part of building character and growing. Without failure, who would you be? I wouldn't be up here if I hadn't fallen thousands of times. Made mistakes.

"We all are human; we all have weaknesses; and I think throughout this, (it's been important) to be able to share that and be transparent. I know when I listen to people speak

and they share their weaknesses, I'm listening. Because (it) resonates.

"So I'm not perfect. I'm not Superman. I might be in the NFL, I might have just won a Super Bowl, but, hey, we still have daily struggles, I still have daily struggles. And that's where my faith comes in; that's where my family comes in.

"I think when you look at a struggle in your life, just know that's just an opportunity for your character to grow. And that's just been the message. Simple. If something's going on in your life and you're struggling? Embrace it. Because you're growing."

To summarize what I have learned about failure in life, the following are 12 principles I want to leave with you. ... These principles are essential if we are going to have the attitude necessary to both teach and release people to unleash their potential and walk in their divine destiny. Why? Because everybody will be tested by failure—some more than others. How people react and respond to personal failure will determine whether they will be ordinary or extraordinary in life. {eo}

This article is an excerpt of chapter 8 from The Jesus Principles, Bishop Mattera's latest book. For more like this, you can purchase your copy on Amazon [here](#).

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