



When we read scripture, we discover people, who despite their failures, were great men and women of God. For instance, Abraham lied about his wife and almost lost her to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Isaac followed his father's example and did exactly the same thing. Jacob deceived his brother out of his birthright, and his father into blessing him as the first born. Moses killed the Egyptian taskmaster and had to flee for his life. Joshua failed to mentor a successor and died with the philistines still occupying the promised land. And this is just the start! So be encouraged, if you have failed you are in good company!

Read the stories of scientists and innovative businessmen through the centuries and you find very quickly that they had an important attitude toward failure. As an inventor, Edison made 1,000 unsuccessful attempts at inventing the light bulb. When a reporter asked, "How did it feel to fail 1,000 times?" Edison replied, "I didn't fail 1,000 times. The light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps." They kept experimenting and trying new things even when nothing worked. They learned to see failure in a positive way. Every failure was more knowledge acquired and one more possibility to be crossed off the list. They learned from their failures. Then one day the breakthrough came. Are you a successful failure?

In contrast, many of us can 'play it safe.' We don't want to step out in new ways and take the risk of failure or the embarrassment of being wrong. Perhaps we have tried before and it hasn't worked, gone against the flow only to be crushed by the one way current or tried to bring about change only to be met by the F word. Perhaps we find it all too discouraging and so we stick with the status quo.

The first failure I remember well was back in my youth, when I was studying for a music exam. It was my fourth year music academy exam. Until then, I had sailed through my practical and theory exams with some ease and so it came as a total shock when I received the fail notice. I was devastated. I felt ashamed and humiliated and found it difficult to share the result with my parents who were paying for my lessons. What was I to do? The first option was to say, "I'm obviously not cut out for this, the best thing I can do is give up!" My second option was to say, "This is a wake up call that I need to work a little harder, practise a little longer, persevere and take the exam again." My Mum's response was to encourage me and assure me that I would do just fine on the next exam. So I worked harder and passed without any problem. I never failed another music exam. In fact, the following year I made a breakthrough in launching out in playing by ear and started writing songs. Oh how thankful I am for a mother who believed in me and for a motivation to press in and keep moving forward.

All these years later, I still don't like failing in anything but have come to recognise that I need to embrace it in my life. Failure is a part of our human lives and the challenge is to grow through it in every way we can. Reverend failure

really can minister into our lives. I have learned so much through my failures in leadership. The first lesson along the road is to simply acknowledge that “I will fail.” I am not saying we are to have a poor self image and put ourselves down but to be real and say, “I have weaknesses, inadequacies, limitations, areas I need help and I will fail sometimes.” What can I do about it? Well the first thing we can do is develop self awareness and be open about failure. Don't try to cover it up but be transparent and real. Then we can work hard to develop and grow in the area of our failure as much as is possible and staff our weaknesses to minimise the negative affect. If our failure has had negative consequences on others then take the humble approach and apologise quickly.

The extremes in avoidance of acknowledging failure are dangerous. We either see ourselves as failures or we delete the word from our dictionary. Many years ago we had a lady living with us who had lived through many difficulties. She had lived through several failed marriages and failed business ventures and had now come to a point of seeing her life as a failure. All she had left was a daughter and she felt she wasn't doing a good job in raising her. One day she came to us and said, “if anything happens to me, will you take care of my daughter?” We were wise enough to realise that in her depressed state she wanted to take her life and make sure someone was there for her daughter. Her daughter was the only thing keeping her alive. We took the next months to speak life into her and pray her out of her failure mentality. Failure in a project or a relationship is very different from failure in life. That self fulfilling prophesy and lie that she was a failure, needed to be replaced with the truth of her precious identity in Christ.

I remember another person some years ago who was given the responsibility of organising and printing a 3 monthly newsletter. I took time to explain what was needed and what the expectations were for the finished outcome. She would nod her head and go back to her office. Unfortunately she didn't follow the guidelines and when she came into difficulties she didn't ask for help. The consequence was that the outcome was a different product from what we asked for and lacked inspiration and quality. On numerous occasions after this we spent time talking in order to help correct her wrong understanding and clarify our desire but to no avail. In her view we were the ones failing to know what was best. She couldn't admit failure. Like some artists on talent shows, she was blind to her lack of ability and was believing in herself falsely. This unteachableness and pride is ugly and can be damaging.

If we are more aware of ourselves, we will be open to the fact that there have been events where we failed and ongoing habits where failures have occurred with regularity. Mine include the following:

- a. expecting to accomplish more than is humanly possible, resulting in disappointing others who have been promised things, disappointing myself and causing undue stress.
- b. lacking in emotional intelligence and sometimes not understanding how people are feeling and struggling to know how to help and encourage them.
- c. not communicating clearly enough or repeating myself enough to make sure that people have heard and understood.

d. delegating too little at times in order to show I am pulling my weight, or due to a fear that others will be too pressured or not do it well enough.

e. having difficulty in saying 'no' or not creating clear enough boundaries with time, relationships, vision, values, etc.

f. struggling to learn a language due partly to the fact that its possible to get by without it

g. getting stuck in certain habits and not having the motivation or energy to break them or change them.

I could go on. As Romans 3 tells us – we have all fallen short of the glory of God. For some, the problem is that we don't own up or recognise our failure in lack of relational skills, visionary skills, organisational skills, reflection and meditational skills or you-name-it-skills! For others the problem is we read failure into everything we do and get into a downward cycle of negative thoughts that can destroy any hope of a positive future and destiny.

The Clinton 'time line' from 'the making of a leader' is all about passing certain tests that the Lord allows us to go through and of course learning from our failures along the way. If only we could learn from others failures life would be so much easier but it seems we have to make our own. Reverend failure does keep us humble. So we can count it all joy when we encounter trials and failures, knowing that they produce perseverance and enable us to become more like Jesus.

Two stories come to mind. One of David's greatest failures was to commit adultery with Bathsheba and to follow it up with the murder of her husband. It all ended in disaster with the death of Bathsheba's child. However, David repented, and God was merciful in giving Bathsheba another son, who became King after David. The second story is of Peter meeting Jesus on the beach in John 21. Having failed Jesus in the courtyard and denying him three times, Jesus now asked him if he loved him. Three times he asked and three times Peter replied in the positive. Jesus was merciful but Peter needed to forgive himself and come out from his shame of failure. He went on to preach with boldness and 3,000 were saved. There is hope for those who fail.

So what are we to do in order to fail successfully?

- Reflect and acknowledge where there has been failure in your life.
- Don't allow yourself to believe lies. Speak the truth that 'failure in a project isn't failure in life!'
- Apologise, make restitution, forgive yourself and do whatever is necessary and appropriate to lessen any damage caused.
- Allow God to develop humility in your life through the failure.
- Learn from the experience.
- Create boundaries and develop strategies, get help so you don't fail in the same way again.
- If you do, give yourself grace – change takes time and patience.