

Forward After Failing
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We're in a sermon series called Forward and my message today is entitled Forward after Failure.

You need to understand this: Everybody without exception fails. Raise your hand if you've ever failed a test or a grade or in a job or relationship or anything else. See? We all fall down in this race called life! But we don't have to stay down! Proverbs 24:16 says:

Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again.

Falling down does not make you a failure – staying down does!

Success requires a lot of things, but here's the main thing I want you to see about success: to succeed in life, you must learn to fail successfully. In other words, to succeed, you must learn from failing. To move forward, you must learn to get back up when you fall.

You see, the question is not IF you will fail; you will! We all do. The question is: what do you do with your failures?

Success is not the absence of failure. Success is determined by how you respond to your failures. Do you learn from failure - or do you keep repeating the same failures over and over - or do you just give up?

Leadership expert John Maxwell says - The difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to failure.

Failure can make you bitter or better, depending on how you respond to it.
 Failure can make you wrong or strong, depending on how you respond...
 Failure can make you a martyr or smarter, depending on how you respond...
 Failure can make you grow up or give up, depending on how you respond...
 Are you getting what I'm saying?

Just because you failed at something does not make you a failure. No! A person is not a failure if they tried and failed. You are not a failure unless you refuse to learn from it. You are not a failure if you get back up when you fall.

So put away that misbelief that says you can never make mistakes or fail. That will keep you from risking anything and accomplishing anything. Successful people make a lot of mistakes, but they learn from their mistakes, grow from their mistakes, then they go out and take new risks.

Michael Jordan said, "I can accept failure, everyone fails at something. But I cannot accept not trying."

The only real failures are those who choose not to learn from mistakes or those who choose to give up. As long as you are learning and growing from mistakes, you are not a failure. With God's help, you can turn failure into success.

Hopefully, you get the point - There's a huge difference between saying, "I failed at this particular task," and saying, "I am a failure."

Successful people fail, but they learn from it so they don't keep repeating it. How can we turn our failure into success? By learning from failure. What can failure teach us? How can we fail forward so we don't get stuck?

John Maxwell says, "To learn from failures, you've got to be big enough to admit them, smart enough to learn from them, and strong enough to correct them."

A couple of months ago – our prayer minister, Kim Tatum, asked me and Pastor Anthony and Minister Selwyn Robins to teach at Ignite. She gave us a scripture passage about how to move forward after a halt and we all spoke on that passage. I want to use that passage as my text today. It's found in 2 Kings 6. Verses 1-4 say:

And the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "See now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us. Please, let us go to the Jordan, and let every man take a beam from there, and let us make there a place where we may dwell." So he answered, "Go." Then one said, "Please consent to go with your servants." And he answered, "I will go." So he went with them.

The prophet Elisha had a school where he trained prophets. The school was growing and became too small to house them. So the students got the vision to build a bigger dwelling and they took the initiative to come up with a plan. There weren't a lot of trees where they lived – so they got Elisha's permission to go to the Jordan River to cut down trees to make beams.

I see some keys to success here:

First, they thought big and they had a plan to get bigger. Sometimes we think too small! Successful people are always looking to grow!

Successful people have vision – but vision without a plan is just a dream. So, they got a plan together and then they got permission from Elisha. Many times we fail to plan – and failing to plan is planning to fail!

But we need more than a plan – we need a word from God about it. We need God's yes! We need God's permission. Without that we are doomed to fail.

But they didn't stop with having a plan and permission – they also asked Elisha to go with them. They needed his presence! And we need more than a plan and permission – we need God's presence wherever we go and whatever we do.

We cannot accomplish God's plan without God's presence!

We cannot accomplish God's plan without God's power!

2 Kings 6:4-5 says:

And when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. But as one was cutting down a tree, the iron ax head fell into the water; and he cried out and said, "Alas, master! For it was borrowed."

So – the work was proceeding well until the ax head fell off the ax handle and into the water. Now – I don't know who this ax belonged to – but this man was very concerned about getting it back to them in good shape.

Please understand this: your anointing is on loan from God! And if you drop it – you lose your edge!

Losing the ax head was the moment of failure. It's when the whole project came to a halt. That's what 2020 was like for us – the ax head fell and life seemed to come to a screeching halt. All of us have moments in our lives when things came to a halt. Moving forward after failing depends on what we do in those times!

Remember, to move forward after failing, we must be big enough to admit it, smart enough to learn from it, and strong enough to correct it.

1- To move forward after failing, you must admit your failure

Don't blame others. Don't make excuses. Take responsibility. The man who lost the ax in his story had to admit he lost it. He didn't blame someone else for making a faulty ax. He didn't say it was the ax owner's fault. He took responsibility.

And the Bible says we should take responsibility for our failures and confess them. In fact, confession is the only way to deal with sinful failures.

1 John 1:9 says

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The best thing to do when we fail is to honestly face up to it. I've seen this hold many people back in life. They are unwilling to face their own issues – they are too insecure to admit their weaknesses – and that makes them unteachable. As a result – they do not move forward. So – be big enough to admit it when you fail.

2- To move forward after failing you must learn from your failures.

Philippians 4:9 says, *“Whatever you have learned...put into practice.”*

only thing worse than failing is failing to learn from failing - and failing to learn from failing leads to even more failing.

If you keep going from relationship to relationship, from marriage to marriage and they never work out, chances are the problem is not with every other man or woman in the world. You should learn something from failed relationships and not repeat the same mistakes.

you keep going from job to job, you keep quitting or getting fired, chances are the problem is not with every employer in the world. You need to learn from your mistakes, grow and improve.

One definition of insanity is continually doing the same thing expecting different results. If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.

So, don’t waste your failures! Learn from them. Every failure has something to teach us if we’ll look for what we can learn from it. Find the gift contained in the failure.

You can learn from failed relationships so you don’t keep breaking relationships.
 You can learn from job failures so you don’t keep losing jobs.
 You can learn from failing a test so you don’t keep failing tests.
 You can learn from bankruptcy so you don’t keep mishandling money.

Don’t keep repeating the same mistakes over and over. With God’s help, you can turn failure into success. Doing that requires knowing that in all our interactions with God – there is God’s part and there is our part. God will not do our part and we cannot do God’s part. 2 Kings 6:6-7 says:

So the man of God said, “Where did it fall?” And he showed him the place. So he cut off a stick, and threw it in there; and he made the iron float. Therefore he said, “Pick it up for yourself.” So he reached out his hand and took it.

Notice that the prophet required something from the man. It’s the same way with God – He does some things for us – but He requires us to do some things for ourselves!

When Jesus healed people – many times He asked them to do something. And that something was something they usually could not do. To the man with the withered hand He said stretch out your hand.

To the lame man He said rise up and walk.

In this passage from 2 Kings - The prophet represents God. He asked the man a question – Where did the ax head fall? Now – when God asks a question – He already knows the answer! So, He’s not asking for His benefit! He’s asking for our benefit!

It’s like when Adam and Eve sinned and God came down to walk with them in the cool of the garden. They were hiding and God called out, “Where are you?” God knew where they were! He wanted them to know where they were.

He wanted them to realize the change in their relationship with God from walking with Him to hiding from Him! That question was for their benefit!

In this story – the question is “Where did it fall?” I believe that question represents what God wants to ask us when we fail and come to a halt. Where did you stop? Why did you stop? Identifying where and why we stopped is important because that is where God wants us to start again! He takes us back to the place of falling – of failing - of dropping the ball. That place is the place of starting over.

That place is not somewhere else with someone else! But God is saying - go back to where things got off track. So - If you feel at a halt in life – where did it happen? What caused it? Identifying the place and the cause are keys to moving forward. Once that place was identified – a miracle happened.

What if God is waiting on you to stop hiding from Him before He does a miracle? What if He’s waiting on you to press through your denial before He sets you free? Remember – Jesus usually asked people – what do you want Me to do for you? To answer that question requires you to admit what happened and what you lost. When that happened - the prophet made the axe head float. That represents God bringing to the surface those hidden heavy things that have caused loss in your life. The things that have brought you to a halt.

And when God brings it to the surface – then we have a responsibility. The prophet made the axe head float – but He made the man pick it up. God’s part and our part.

1 Corinthians 3:9 says: *We are God's co-workers.*

We have a role to play in moving forward after a halt. We must:
 Identify the place we came to a halt.
 Identify the reasons we came to a halt.
 Cry out to God for help.
 Expect Him to do His part. Then do our part!
 Stop expecting God to do your part!

Yes – expect Him to empower you to move forward - but you still have to pick it up and walk it out! And the first steps might seem like you're going backwards as you identify where the halt happened.

But I believe as you go – it will be like the ten lepers who came to Jesus for healing. He told them Go show yourself to the priest. And as they went – they were healed. And I believe that as you go through this process to deal with the halt in your life – as you go – you will be healed in Jesus name!

You may not be able to undo the damage or reverse the consequences of your failure, but you can make a new start—wiser, stronger, renewed by the Holy Spirit, and more determined to do right the next time. And believe me – there will be a next time!

Abraham Lincoln failed in business twice and was defeated for public office 8 times, yet he persevered until he was elected President! No one considers Lincoln a failure, even though he failed many times. He failed, but he learned from it. He failed, but he did not quit.

Too many people give up too soon. Did you give up because you failed or did you fail because you gave up? Giving up will lead to failure. A negative, “I can't” attitude will lead to failure. Unwillingness to change, learn, grow will lead to failure.

As long as you are learning and growing from mistakes, you are not a failure. You can turn failings into success. To move forward after failing we must admit our failure, learn from it and

3- To move forward after failing you must put your failures behind you.

The Apostle Paul put it this way in Philippians 3:13-14

Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me.

Put failure behind you – never, ever let failure keep you from trying again. Once you admit your failure and learn from your failure, you must put it behind you. That means you do not let failure define you!

The Bible records many failures because the Bible, thankfully, records life as it is. The Bible is about real people living real life like you and me. Some of those who failed in the Bible are remembered for their successes, but before there was success, there was failure.

Moses – killed an Egyptian

Abraham – had a child with Hagar – a woman who was not his wife
 David – committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed

Yet how are these men known?
 Moses is called the friend of God
 Abraham is called the father of faith
 David is called a man after God's own heart.

Evidently, failure is not final. Each of these men failed miserably. Yet each of them went on to become powerful men of God whom God restored and used in an even greater way after their failures.

If great people in the Bible could fail, why should we be surprised when we fail?
 Failure is a part of living and we should be prepared for it.

I'm not excusing failure today. I'm saying we must fail forward. We must learn from our failures and become whom God called us to be.

What I want you to understand is that failure is not final! Some of you here this morning have been looked at as a failure, or feel like a failure. Hear the Good News: through faith we fail forward!

So, no matter what your parents, friends, boss, coach, or spouse may have told you. No matter how much time you've spent in detention, in prison, or in the principal's office.

No matter how many times you've been fired, punished, penalized, rebuked, reprovved, disciplined, admonished, spanked, chewed out, cussed out or kicked out... understand this one very important fact:

With God's help, you can move forward after failing.

So, I encourage you to fail forward. Whatever mistakes you've made - however you've failed... thank God you can start over this morning.

So - if you've fallen down, fail forward by getting back up!
 If you've quit, fail forward by starting over!
 If someone's rejected you – fail forward by making some new friends!
 If you got fired – fail forward by getting a new job!
 If you've fallen into sin – fail forward by repenting and receiving God's forgiveness!

The only failure that is final is the failure to come to Christ – to receive Him as your Savior - and begin following him as Lord of your life.