

Failure is the Road to Success

By Santiago Lange



Failure is hard to accept. Our materialistic western culture is hopelessly success oriented. We look up to people who attain fame, power, and wealth. But, if we are brutally honest we would have to admit that our communities of faith are also very success oriented. Mega churches are glorified and we idolize gifted “superpastors” who later end up deeply disappointing the trust placed in them. This is not an isolated phenomenon. In reality, we can and do fail, but don't know frequently how to handle our defeats. Christians can have a specially disturbing problem with failure. Once „we are saved“, we are not supposed to have problems or sin, so one popular urban myth seems to go. Faith, we have been told repeatedly, can conquer any situation. By living right, we will get right results. That sounds logical, but is that always the case? And, what should our appropriate approach to life challenges be?

A good start would be simply admitting that failures aren't unusual. The apostle Paul reminds us that we “all fall short of God's glory” (Romans 3:23). Be consoled, most great Christian personalities in history have tasted painful defeats and still were able to leave behind a valuable legacy. In fact, true success often requires reverses. When we encounter defeats, we ought not hide but honestly analyze the reasons for it. Have we really failed, or have we merely fallen short of certain expectations? Do we perhaps describe ourselves as failures because we are comparing ourselves to others? This perceived “failure syndrome” is woven into our sin-stained world. We even fail innocently because of the sins of others. Yes, life is not always “fair.”

Many Old Testament passages illustrate how the sins of the fathers are visited on their children. It's the old cause and effect argument. The New Testament makes no bones about describing the current weaknesses of our perishable bodies (2. Corinthians 4:7). Even when the flesh is willing, the spirit is frequently weak. Unfortunately, we like to measure ourselves by worldly standards instead of the divine will and nature. God is not impressed or hindered by our bank balances and He is not overwhelmed by material achievements. Humans look at outward appearances but God's standards are different. In the gospel of Luke, we read that “what is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight” (Luke 16:15). We can read about God's standard in the Old Testament, in the Book of Micah. There we read about God: “He has showed, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with him your God” (6:8).

We do need to learn from our reverses and remember the imparted lessons as stepping stones to further growth. Someone once said that “nothing succeeds like failure, because it is the best teacher”. While one may not fully agree with the statement, there is certainly some truth to the claim. Sometimes our stumblings should lead us to repentance. A healthy and prayerful self-examination can be helpful. God desires to forgive us and so we ought also be willing to

forgive. People can change. The apostle Paul called himself the worst of sinners, yet guided by the Spirit he ended up powerfully serving the Lord. We can break negative patterns. Failures can teach us proper humility. They can remind us that we are finite creatures, not the infinite Creator.

In all our circumstances we need to keep faith in God. But, even if we are faithless, He remains faithful (2. Timothy 2:11-13). Our Father in Heaven's desire is that we avoid ultimate defeat. Jesus told the apostle Peter at a time when he was suffering a severe trial: "I have prayed for you, Simon that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:32). Despite temporary failures, don't give up. Don't allow memories of perceived failure to defeat you permanently. We may be hard-pressed, but not crushed or destroyed (2. Corinthians 4:8-9). God is in the process of renewing us from the inside out. Accept His loving embrace. Our eyes need to be fixed on Jesus and on eternity. Let's keep on interceding for one another and for the work of the Gospel. □