

Facing Our Failures - Matthew 26:31-35

Introduction: In our study of the book of Matthew, we've met many characters. One was Peter. We saw him called to be a disciple in chapter 4. We've seen him and the other disciples all throughout this book following Christ and learning of Him, asking Him questions and not really understanding what He was about. We saw him in chapter 14 exercising his faith one minute by walking on the water, and then the next minute almost drowning in the sea. We saw Him making that grand confession of Christ as the Son of the living God in chapter 16. We saw him after witnessing Jesus' transfiguration in chapter 17; asking Jesus if they could stay on the mountain when there was work to do down in the valley. We saw him wondering about how many times he should forgive his brother in chapter 18. We saw him shooing children away from Jesus in chapter 19, and having Jesus reprimand him. And now we see Peter making an overconfident declaration of loyalty to Jesus just before Jesus' death, saying, "*Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.*"

In John 21, there is a story of Peter and the other disciples going fishing following Jesus resurrection. In verse 3, it says "*that night they caught nothing.*" Apparently it was not a good night for fishing. It was a night of failure. Can you imagine the feelings brewing in that boat that night? "*I thought Peter knew how to fish. Has he lost his touch? I am not sure he deserves to be our leader any longer. One thing after another goes wrong.*" It was a long night of failure. What we find is that even the greatest of saints faced times of failure in their lives.

Sooner or later we all will fail at something. Some seem to have more failures than successes, and that seems to be the case with Peter. Failure is a universal experience, and if that's so, then it's important for us to know how to deal with it when it comes.

Part of our problem is we live in a success driven culture. Everyone wants to be successful, but it's impossible all the time. We're OK as long as we feel we are successful; but our problems come when we fail. We don't know how to handle failure. That is why we need to know what the Bible tells us about failure. We need to know that God does not abandon us when we fail Him. In fact, that's when God can really bless us. Many times it is only after we fail that we realize that we need God's help to succeed. Our failures are not final! And just because we may fail at something does not make us failures!

But there will be times in our lives when we will feel like failures. So the question is how can we face our failures and work through them? If we are going to face our failures and overcome them then there are some things we should realize. First:

1. God is not Surprised when We Fail

We see in vs. 34 that Jesus knew that Peter would deny Him. But in vs. 35, Peter said, "*Even if I have to die with you I will never disown you.*" Peter was so confident in himself, but not in God's strength and ability to keep him. Peter thought that he was ready for the test. But when the pressure was on, he failed because he was relying on his own abilities.

But look at what happened to Peter. He went from failure to success. Peter the failure was made into a success by the grace of God. On the day of Pentecost, God poured down the Holy Spirit on Peter and the other disciples. They received great power, boldness that day. And throughout the book of Acts we read about Peter boldly standing up for God and preaching powerful sermons where thousands of people came to know Christ. Tradition tells us that Peter eventually was martyred for his Lord.

Yes, Peter and all the other disciples failed often as they first began to follow Jesus. Yet Peter did not remain a failure. God enabled him to persevere. He was restored and made a success. He became wheat, not chaff. He became the rock. Jesus said that upon his confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, that He would build His church upon. As Jesus had predicted, he began to strengthen others after his conversion.

And Peter is strengthening the church even now. In **2 Peter 1:10 (NIV)** we read, *"Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall."* And in **1 Peter 5:6 & 8 (NIV)** he says, *"Humble yourselves....Be self-controlled and alert"*

What is he telling us? Peter is saying, *"Please, humble yourselves; be self-controlled and alert because early on, I wasn't. It was all about me. I was arrogant and proud. I told Jesus that I loved him more than anybody else. I told him to count on me. I told him to forget about the other disciples. I told Jesus they may fail you but I won't. But I did not know what I was talking about."*

If we are going to succeed in our service for God we must not trust in our own strength and ability. We must look to God for His strength and ability. As Paul said in **Romans 7:18 (NIV)**, *"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."*

Secondly, if we are going to face our failures and overcome them, then we should realize.

2. Failure Doesn't Have to Devastate Us.

Why do we allow our failures to devastate us? Well, first of all, it's because when we fail, it points out our imperfections. We don't like to appear imperfect. We want to put on an air of knowing what we're doing – an air of strength and confidence and success. We don't like to show any of our weaknesses.

But I've learned that there are no *"know-it-alls."* There are some who think they are, but they are not. There are times when God has to teach us a lesson. Even the great Apostle Paul had to admit this. He said in **Philippians 3:12 (NIV)** *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."* Paul said that he keeps working toward becoming all that Christ intended him to be and failure is part of the process. So, have the courage to be imperfect.

Secondly, we let failures devastate us because we mistake failing with being a failure. How many failings does it take to be a failure? You see. I may fail a lot but that does not make me a failure. The only time that I become a failure is when I give up or quit. That is when we become failures.

Walt Disney was fired in his early career from a newspaper because he did not have any creative ideas. But he didn't give up.

Thomas A. Edison failed more than 1000 times in an attempt to invent a light bulb before he was actually successful.

Abraham Lincoln failed in many attempts to be elected to office before he was elected President. We all may fail from time to time, but failing does not make one a failure. You only become a failure when you quit trying.

Finally, if we are going to face our failures and overcome them, then we should realize:

3. The Purpose of Failure.

One of the first purposes we need to discover about failure is that we need to make God a part of it. Now, I'm not implying that God causes us to fail. But when we have those times of failure in our lives, we need to bring God into the experience. Paul said in **Philippians 3:8 (NIV)** “...*I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.*” When we involve God in our lives, we can keep everything in proper perspective. When you put your failings in proper perspective, when you compare them to eternity, then failure is not always failure. In God's economy there is no such thing as failure. There is only the potential for growth.

In my life I have experienced a few failures. Right out of high school, I went to college, but only stayed for two quarters. After that, I went to a trade school, but only lasted for a year and a half. I didn't complete my college until 1998!

What was it that finally helped me complete my college education after so many tries? It was the encouragement from godly people in my life. With their help, I realized that right out of high school, I was in the wrong field of study. I was listening to my head instead of the Lord. And when it became clear that the Lord was leading me into ministry, that's when I found the determination and will to stick it out in college and seminary.

Now, was I a failure? No, I just had a few failings, but God continued to work in my life. He nudged me. He encouraged me. He brought me into contact with some people who helped me. He helped me find myself. When I brought God into my failings, He helped me see that I was not a failure.

The second purpose of failure is to learn and grow from them. Failures are for growing. In **Philippians 3:10 (NIV)** Paul says, “*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*” Our failings help us understand a little bit about the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. Now, our failures don't even compare to the sufferings of Christ, but they can help us understand them a little better. Because Christ suffered, many people think that he was a failure. But He certainly was not. His sufferings had a purpose, and so do ours.

Conclusion: Someone has said, *"Success is built upon a mount of failure."* If that is true, then we have to, as best we can, forget our failures and put them behind us. The problem most of us have with our failures is that we can't forget them. We continue to relive them or punish ourselves with our failures. Paul said in **Philippians 3:13-14a (NIV)**. *"But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize."*

The story of Peter's failure to catch any fish in John 21 does not end with the phrase, *"...that night they caught nothing."* You see, there standing on the shore was Jesus. He called out to them, *"Friends, haven't you caught any fish?"* They replied that even though they had fished all night they had caught nothing. Jesus told them to put down their nets on the right side. And they put their nets down as they were told and when they pulled them up they were so heavy with fish that they nearly broke.

Where is Jesus when you fail? He is on the sea shore. When your life's story is finally told, you will see that there were no failures, only the hand of a loving, guiding God, refining and building you up into the person He wants you to be, because it is in failure that God does His finest work in our hearts.