

SOMETIMES

Failure: ^ The Front Door to Success

Erwin Lutzer wrote a very good book many years ago titled “Failure: The Back Door to Success.” But sometimes, biblically speaking, failure not only brings spiritual success through the back door but also through the front door. In fact it is absolutely necessary for us to experience the failure of our human efforts before God can truly use us in his kingdom.

- (Philippians 3:3 NLT) For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort.
- (2 Corinthians 12:9–10 NLT) Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Failure is never “an easy pill to swallow.”

- (Matthew 26:31-32 ESV) Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”

This particular “failure” was prophesied, and Christ’s place as leader and shepherd was solidified with their failure. He would go before them.

- (Matthew 26:33-35 ESV) Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I

will never fall away.” Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.

But being willing to die with Christ is not enough to successfully follow him.

- (Luke 22:31–34 ESV) “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” 33 Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” 34 Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

Especially for leaders, such as Peter, Satan will demand an opportunity to sift you. (See Job 1:6-12.) When we fail in our human effort but keep believing God, then we will turn again and be able to strengthen our brothers and sisters.

- (1 Peter 1:3–7 ESV) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your

faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We see from these words that Peter later wrote that he had learned his lesson well.

- (John 13:36–38 ESV) Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.” 37 Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” 38 Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

We cannot truly follow Christ until we realize that we cannot follow Christ. We cannot do it. It must be the work of the Spirit in us.

- (Luke 22:54–62 ESV) Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance. 55 And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. 56 Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” 57 But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” 58 And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” 59 And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” 60 But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” 62 And he went

out and wept bitterly.

Now Peter was ready.

- (John 21:15–17 ESV) When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

We are only ready to follow Christ and serve him when he is in reality our first love. First love means that we love him even above ourselves. Now we can follow; now we are ready to serve.

Every inner struggle will be resolved in bowing before the will of the One we love the most. Every discontent of the heart we will lay at his feet. Every thought we will be willing to bring captive in obedience to our first love.

Someone may protest that Christ calls us repeatedly to follow him. He does. But we cannot follow from any inner motivation or strength no matter how emphatic and determined we are. We have to know that one thing that will allow us to conquer all obstacles. And that one thing must be our love for Jesus Christ.

Proper shepherding only happens when Christ is truly first in our love. How many times have we heard someone challenge our commitment? But commitment is not enough. Our love for Christ must rise above everything else.

Now we are ready to serve.