

SUCCESS THROUGH FAILURE



June Hunt



HOPE
for the Heart

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JUNE HUNT



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Success Through Failure

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Dear friend,

Looking at someone's life experiences to determine whether that person is a success or a failure is not uncommon. In fact, it is typical. We look at a person's resumé when we want to hire someone.

In line with such a practice, how would you classify this one particular man? Scan his resumé—his track record—and decide for yourself. Is he a success or a failure?

He grew up in poverty, spoke with a twang, and tried various occupations, such as storekeeper and surveyor.

At age 22—He failed in business.

At age 23—He was defeated for the legislature.

At age 24—He failed in his business again.

At age 25—He was elected to the legislature.

At age 26—His sweetheart died, leaving him heartbroken.

At age 27—He suffered a nervous breakdown.

At age 29—He was defeated for Speaker of the House.

At age 31—He was defeated for elector.

At age 34—He was defeated for Congress.

At age 37—He was elected to Congress.

At age 39—He was defeated for Congress.

At age 46—He was defeated for the Senate.

At age 47—He was defeated for Vice President.

At age 49—He was defeated for the Senate.

This is basically the half-century mark of his life—not a very impressive record. But what if this man lived to be 100 years old, or 90, or 80, or even 70? Perhaps his record would improve. Well, in this case it didn't. At age 56, he died a violent death, murdered by a man who hated him intensely.

In your estimation, then, how would you rate his life—a failure or a success? As it stands, the picture is dismal. Oh ... but let me add one fact that I failed to mention earlier. At age 51, this man became the 16th President of the United States of America.

His name? Abraham Lincoln.

Would you classify “Honest Abe” as a failure? *Hardly!* In fact, most Americans consider Abraham Lincoln *the most significant president*—and the most beloved—in United States history. He succeeded at preserving the Union during the Civil War, the most turbulent time in U.S. history. And he succeeded at freeing the slaves with the Emancipation

Proclamation—a monumental achievement. Clearly, just because he failed at times, he was not “a failure.” Failure was not his identity.

What if Abraham Lincoln had *not* run for President? What if he had given up after his last unsuccessful Senate bid? What if he had deemed failure as his identity?

Now look at your own life, specifically at the times when you have failed. Is your failure an *act* or an *identity*? (Do you say, “I failed” or “I am a failure”?) If you feel like a failure, what would you be willing to forfeit in exchange for what you have gained? What clear victory? What character growth? What wise discernment? What eternal gain would you exchange for your failure? Would you truly benefit if you allowed yourself to be limited by your failure?

On a personal note, my closest friends know me as someone who hates to waste things. I’ll use an envelope a second time, wrap leftover food on my dinner plate for “later,” and pick up a penny on the sidewalk. As motivated as I am not to waste such little things, I have to work hard to make sure I don’t waste one of my most valuable assets: my *failures*!

I haven’t always seen my failures as friends. For years, they stalked me, slashing at my self-worth, filling me with guilt and regret. Let’s face it: *personal failure hurts*! While I’d never

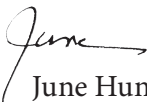
ask God to cause my plans and dreams to fail, I've learned that, when they do, my response makes all the difference.

I've concluded that I learned far more from my failures than from my successes. Because my failures were far more painful, they taught me what was not good, what was not beneficial, and what would not work. I learned, more poignantly, *what not to do*.

Winston Churchill said, "Success is going from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm." I'd add, "And without losing your *faith*." I want to encourage you to take time to pause, to stop and learn all the lessons you can from your failures. These lessons will be invaluable. Then, once you've grasped what the Lord wants you to learn, don't dwell on past defeats. As Isaiah 43:18-19 says, "*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!*"

Decide now to learn from your failures. When you do, failure will not *define* you, it will *refine* you!

Yours in the Lord's hope,



June Hunt

Never forget: Just because you fail, that doesn't make you a failure!

SUCCESS THROUGH FAILURE

From Stumbling Stones to Stepping Stones

The boat is battered and tossed about on the waves. Surging water surrounds the disciples as they rigorously row their way across the lake in the dark of night. Before the voyage is over, Peter would both ride the crest of faith and be submerged under a wave of doubt. Jesus had instructed His disciples to go on ahead of Him. Now He joins them—by walking out to them on the water.

“It’s a ghost!” They scream in terror, but immediately Jesus assures them it is He—there is no need to fear. Peter then makes a bold, if not brash, request: *“Lord, if it’s you ... tell me to come to you on the water.”* Jesus responds, *“Come”* (Matthew 14:26–29).

Quickly Peter climbs out of the boat and begins walking toward Jesus, literally walking on the water! Imagine the excitement—imagine the exhilaration! But a tide of fear soon sweeps over Peter when he becomes preoccupied with the blustery wind around him and he begins to sink. *“Lord, save me!”*

Peter frantically cries out. Immediately Jesus reaches out His hand and rescues him—and then rebukes him: “*You of little faith ... why did you doubt?*” (Matthew 14:30–31).

Could the Lord of nature, who also is the Lord of our individual lives, ask us the same question? Have we ever taken a giant step of faith with our eyes squarely on the Savior and then found ourselves distracted by distressing and daunting circumstances? While once engaged in the miraculous, doing great and mighty things in the strength of the Lord, have we later found ourselves drowning in doubt, fear, and distrust of the One who called us?

What can we learn from Peter, who like us, wavered between faithfulness and faithlessness? Can we really trust Jesus, no matter what? God often refers to Himself as a Rock—steadfast, immovable, a safe haven of refuge while the waves of perilous circumstances surge around us. And yet we often go it alone. Our repeated failure to trust can be likened to stumbling stones that trip us up and throw us off balance on the path to success. But God in His grace stands ready to reach out His hand and rescue us—just like he rescued Peter.

Discover, as did Peter, how stumbling stones can be turned into stepping stones and how God's heart is to teach us through our missteps of doubt to "walk on water."

**"Now to him who is able to do
immeasurably more than all we ask or
imagine, according to his power
that is at work within us."
(Ephesians 3:20)**



DEFINITIONS

Sinking was a certainty when Peter shifted his gaze from Jesus to the surrounding circumstances. Only after many such failures would Peter learn a primary lesson: *replace your fear with faith.*

His impetuous personality thrust him forward and knocked him backward. At times he succeeded and at times he failed. It was Peter who walked on water, who professed Jesus as “the Christ,” and who delivered powerful sermons to the early church. But it was also Peter who rebuked Jesus concerning His death and resurrection, who denied Jesus three times, and who hastily at Jesus’ arrest drew his sword and cut off the ear of “the enemy” (an act that Jesus immediately reversed by restoring the ear).

In truth, Peter needed grounding stability. He needed to be led not by personal passion but by the sustaining strength ... by the peace that comes from an assurance of God’s perfect plan and presence.

WHAT IS Failure?

He was emphatic in his proclamation—unwavering in his commitment. “*Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you*” (Mark 14:31).

Bold words from a man who had just heard a painful prophecy from Jesus, piercing words that Peter tried his best to quickly dismiss. Jesus told Peter he would indeed deny him—not once, not twice, but three times *that very night*—before the rooster crowed twice.

Shortly after this conversation with Peter, Jesus’ arrest triggered a dark chain of events characterized by chaos, persecution, and betrayal. The disciples’ lives would be forever changed and Peter’s die-hard devotion would fail again ... and again ... and still again.

“‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.’” (Mark 14:30)

- ▶ **Failure** means not performing up to expectations, being unsuccessful, or defeated.¹
 - Unmet expectations lead to disappointment and sometimes to despair.

- Disappointment with personal failure is one of the tools God uses to cultivate our spiritual growth.
- ▶ **Failure** in Hebrew is *parar*, which means, “to break, destroy, foil or make useless.”² This word often applies to plans that fail because of outside opposition.

“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” (Proverbs 15:22)

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: David experienced disappointment to the point of despair over his moral failure with Bathsheba. However, his broken and contrite spirit brought him closer to the heart of God. (Read Psalm 51.)

- ▶ **Failure** to act in accordance with God’s will brings negative consequences.
 - Undesirable consequences can lead to a self-evaluation that can result in a changed heart and life.
 - Consequences are used by God as discipline to accomplish His ultimate will and purpose for our lives.

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:11)

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Jonah's failure to obey God resulted in very difficult consequences. When running from God's call to preach repentance to a city repugnant to Jonah, he was swallowed by a great fish. In his distress, he was willing to obey. God used these consequences to accomplish His ultimate purpose of saving the people of Nineveh through Jonah's preaching. (Read the book of Jonah.)

The Two Types of Failure

► **Destructive Failure:** Reveals your limitations and weaknesses, highlights your shortcomings, and when not processed correctly, keeps you feeling inadequate and defective.

Example:

“When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ‘I have sinned,’ he said, ‘for I have betrayed innocent blood.’ ‘What is that to us?’ they replied. ‘That’s your responsibility.’ So Judas threw the money in the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.”
(Matthew 27:3–5)