

The Virtues of Failure

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Once Jesus told a story about a rich man who took a journey to a faraway land. Before he left, the rich man entrusted his money to three men. To one man he gave five bags of gold. To another he gave two bags of gold and to the third man, he gave a single bag of gold. It was more money that the poor man had ever seen before. Can you imagine him holding the bag? Looking inside? Weighing and worrying about so much money? Worse, the wealthy man expected his three servants to put the money to work. The first two did so and reaped enormous profits. They doubled his wealth. Five became ten and two became four, but the man with a single bag of gold was so frightened he buried the money and waited for the rich man to return. Let's listen to the conversation:

"Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours." But his master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will



more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," (Matthew 25:24 - 30).

I've often wondered what the Master would have said if the fearful man would have tried and failed? "Master I did my best, but I failed."

Have you ever considered the virtues of failure? Failure should be a learning experience. I've been told Edison burned up hundreds of filaments as he was trying to invent a practical light bulb. When asked about his failures, he objected strongly. We haven't failed! We've just learned another material isn't suitable. There is a true story about a project manager at IBM who lost the company 10 million dollars. Dejectedly, he walked into the president's office and said, "I'm sorry. I'm sure you'll want my resignation. I'll

be gone by the end of the day." The president's response showed his understanding of the value of failure. He said, "Are you kidding? We've just invested 10 million dollars in your education. We're not about to let you go. Now get back to work."

Consider what these great men have said about failure:

Admiral Hyman G. Rickover said, "Success teaches us nothing; only failure teaches."

Thomas Watson, the founder of IBM, promised, "Success is on the far side of failure." He also observed, "If you want to double your success rate, double your failure rate."

Winston Churchill said, "Success is never final. Failure is never final. It is courage that counts."

F. D. Mattiesen observed, "Failure is the true test of greatness."

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Perhaps one man illustrates the failure principle best:

- 1831 He failed in business
- 1832 He was defeated in legislature
- 1833 He again failed in business
- 1834 He was elected to the legislature
- 1835 His wife died.
- 1836 He had a nervous breakdown
- 1838 He was defeated for Speaker of the House
- 1840 He was defeated for Elector
- 1850 A son died
- 1855 He was defeated for the Senate
- 1856 He was defeated for Vice President
- 1858 He was defeated for the Senate
- 1860 This man, Abraham Lincoln, was elected President.

So, while we don't know for sure what the Master would have said to the one talent man if he would have tried and failed, I suspect this adage would have applied: "A friend is someone who, when you fail, doesn't think it's a permanent condition."

Alan Loy McGinnis, in his book, *Bringing Out the Best in People*, wrote: "strong people make as many and as ghastly mistakes as weak people. The difference is that strong people admit them, laugh at them, learn from them. That is how they become strong."

Philip C. Brewer composed these, "Paradoxes of a Man of God:"

- Strong enough to be weak;
- Successful enough to fail;
- Busy enough to take time;
- Wise enough to say, "I don't know";
- Serious enough to laugh;
- Rich enough to be poor;
- Right enough to say, "I'm wrong"
- Compassionate enough to discipline;
- Conservative enough to give freely;
- Mature enough to be childlike;
- Righteous enough to be a sinner;
- Important enough to be last;
- Courageous enough to fear God;
- Planned enough to be spontaneous;
- Controlled enough to be flexible;
- Free enough to endure captivity;
- Knowledgeable enough to ask questions;
- Loving enough to be angry;

- Great enough to be anonymous;
- Responsible enough to play;
- Assured enough to be rejected;
- Stable enough to cry;
- Victorious enough to lose;
- Industrious enough to relax;
- Leading enough to serve.

Finally, Emilie Griffin believes, "The Lord loves us – perhaps most of all – when we fail and try again."

