12 Ways To Turn Your Failure Into Success

“A just man falls seven times but will rise again…”
—PROVERBS 24:16

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Introduction

I heard it said once that “failure is the parent of innovation.” This is a very true statement because before every successful career or endeavor there are usually a multitude of failures.

We all have to learn to “fall forward.”

As we entered a new year, we should have reflected on the successes and failures of the past year, using both as a trajectory toward a more productive experience this year.

Each time we enter a new year, we should reflect on the successes and failures of the past year, using both as a trajectory toward a more productive experience this year. By “failure” I mean anything we initiated or participated in that did not bring glory to the name of Jesus and/or bear any immediate, noticeable fruit. Failure can also be defined as when a paradigm, strategy of life, or ministry is no longer producing the results we set out to obtain.

Recently I celebrated 37 years as a believer and follower of Jesus Christ. I have served in official full-time church ministry since November 1980; hence I have had to deal consistently with numerous people with a plethora of challenges in the context of a complex metropolis like NYC. During these years I have been through many stages and cycles of life and have experienced both success and failure. I have learned the hard way to embrace failure as part of the normal process of learning; the older I get, the more experience I have, and hopefully the less intense lessons of failure I need to experience in my life journey.
Since Christ is the redeemer of all failure and sin, the Bible is replete with success stories and has a narrative that involves utilizing failure and evil for good. Let’s look at the patriarch Joseph, for example. Joseph was sold into slavery by his biological brothers. Many years later he was providentially promoted to second in command in Egypt. After Joseph encountered these siblings as their political leader, they feared vengeful retribution. But he told them that what they meant for evil, God had ordained for good (Genesis 50:20).

The Apostle James wrote that we should count it pure joy when we fall into diverse trials because the outworking of these tests develops our character (James 1:2-4).

Furthermore, Jesus’ suffering resulted in His glorious resurrection (Philippians 2:5-12). No matter what the devil tries to do, God outdoes him and turns the tables on him every single time!

Thus, the Bible has a theology of success that can come out of any failure we experience, if we respond to God in faith and humility.

Romans 8:28 teaches us that all things work together for good for those who love God. One of the greatest discoveries I have made is that I can’t lose as a Christ-follower. Even when I fail, I can seize failure as an opportunity for further growth so I can go to another level of success!

Every situation and circumstance, no matter how difficult, can be redeemed for good! We have to realize that since all of us are sinners who fall short of the glory of God—failure of some sort is inevitable for every one of us. This does not mean that we stop trying to succeed or have a defeatist mentality; it merely means we have to have the right perspective if we are going to breakthrough to success.

As a case in point, Abraham Lincoln—arguably the greatest president of the USA—had a long list of failures on his résumé before he actually made it to the top.
The following was his path to the presidency:


Overcame the death of his sweetheart at age 26. Had a nervous breakdown at age 27. Lost a congressional race at age 34. Lost a congressional race at age 36. Lost a senatorial race at age 45.

Failed in an effort to become vice-president at age 47.

Lost a senatorial race at age 47.

To the shock and surprise of many, he was elected President of the United States at age 52!

Psalm 37: 23-24 says, “The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when He delights in his way; Though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD upholds his hand.”

Proverbs 24: 16 says, “A just man falls seven times but will rise again…”

Anybody who thinks they will be exempt from severe tests and failure just because they serve God is mistaken. All they have to do is read the book of Psalms, which is replete with the stories of people who have experienced both failure and success along with emotional depression and exultant joy.

In light of this, it is extremely important for every person to understand how to turn every failure into (eventual) success.

The following are 12 ways to turn failure into success
—Joseph G. Mattera
Change what you say to yourself

The first and foremost thing we have to do after failure is to pick ourselves back up! The way to do this is to shut out every negative voice inside of our head. Entertaining negative thoughts will result in hopelessness, discouragement and even depression. The importance of this cannot be overstated! Proverbs 23:7 says, “As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.”

We become the accumulation of our thoughts since thoughts lead to actions and actions lead to habit patterns, which then determines our destiny! The longer we wallow in this kind of “stinking thinking,” the harder it will be to climb out of this emotional pit. Since we speak to ourselves more then we speak to anybody else, it is vitally important we control what we think. In Numbers 13:33 we see that the children of Israel thought that they were like grasshoppers compared to the giants in the promised land, and that thinking filled them with unbelief and caused a whole generation to miss the purpose of God!

We need to change our internal conversations and tell ourselves that we are more than conquerors through Christ who loves us (Romans 8:37) and that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). We also need to make a commitment to only speak and think words that release faith, truth and purpose. Philippians 4:8 tells us “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

We would all do well and recover from any failure, if we would only obey that passage.
Learn from your past mistakes

If scientists and innovators in technology treated failure the way most people do, then scientific and technological progress would be stifled. Those in fields of research understand that for every failed experiment they are closer to proving or disproving their hypotheses. Failure should always serve as a catalyst to get us to recalibrate how we operate and make us more efficient. Even the corrections in the market economy during the past several years are part of a normal cycle of allowing what really works to come to the fore and correct some of the systemic ills regarding our cultural business habits.

What does this all mean? That failure is the natural process of learning to be successful, but only if we reflect and learn from the mistakes that eventually lead to failure.
Examine your priorities

One of the greatest lessons I learned in life is the realization that knowing what not to do is just as important as knowing what to do. Many gifted people I know never accomplish anything of substance because they are scattered and not focused. Their schedule is always filled up morning till evening with numerous activities. I get numerous opportunities and invitations to minister locally, nationally and internationally, for instance. If I took every good opportunity that comes my way (even those that seem to fit my mission and purpose in life) I would lose my center of gravity and become less effective in my key relationships in family and ministry.

I have learned that it is a huge mistake to equate mere activity with significance. Failure has helped shape my core priorities in life that are centered in seeking God, personal study, family relationships, and mentoring key and emerging leaders. Everything else has to take a back seat! Be true to your core values and prioritize everything in your life around them. Do not allow yourself to participate in things that are not Spirit led and are contrary to the most important things in your life. Of course, this does not mean that we only do things we like—that would be narcissistic and self-serving.

We all have unexpected things we can’t help that invade our life and interfere with our normal schedule. When unexpected things happen, just be faithful, fulfill your responsibilities, and get back on track as soon as possible. Don’t let these emergencies get you out of your divine rhythm and into bad habit patterns.

The apostle Paul said it best: “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time because the days are evil; therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 4:15-17).
Surround yourself with spiritually mature people

As a young leader I hoped God was going to use me to bring great revival to New York City. But several years into our young ministry I went to hell and back (figuratively) and experienced much suffering due to failures in my own key relationships and ministry. After several years of intense trauma I came out of these trials with an understanding of how much I need to relate to my peers in ministry. This resulted in an intense desire to network key leaders and churches from around the city which gave birth to “All City Prayer” initiatives starting in 1991 in which more than 1,000 people and more than 50 churches and leaders would come together for a day of fasting and prayer for our city.

That was followed by many other citywide initiatives too numerous to mention (read my book Kingdom Awakening for more on these initiatives). All of this was precipitated by my experiencing failure in multiple areas. The greatest lesson I learned during that time (besides the faithfulness of God) is to surround myself with godly friends and mature believers with a passion for God who can lift me up when I am down and visa versa.

Truly, God said it is not good for a man to be alone (Genesis 2:18) and Scripture also says, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might
prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:8-12)

Many believers make the mistake of hanging out with people just because they attend the same church, but Paul, writing to Timothy in the context of the local church, told him to pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22). Not every person in the church is good for you to hang out with when you are struggling with failure—some will actually encourage your failure because it makes them feel good about their own shortcomings.

Be careful, be selective, and pursue mature believers with a good track record, ones who have proven themselves to be faithful and successful through the tough challenges in life. They are the only ones who can help lift you up to where you belong.

As I close this point let me say one final thing:
I can always tell how successful a person will be in the future by the kind of people they socialize with and include in their inner circle.
Get mentors who can help bring you to the next level

Ask God to provide you with a mentor, who has already been where you desire to go; who has weathered the storms of life and has a proven track record. Every person needs a mentor – which is a person who will advise you and keeps you accountable in a specific area of life. Listening to the advice of a good mentor can save you years of learning and spare you from wasting precious time.

Why invent the wheel if somebody else already created one?

Remember, without the Apostle Barnabas, we may have never had an Apostle Paul, and without the apostle Paul we would never have had an Apostle Timothy; without Elijah we would not have had Elisha; without Moses we would never had a Joshua. Everybody needs somebody else to take him or her to where they need to go (Read Acts 9:26-27; Acts 16:1-3; 1 Kings 19:19-21; Numbers 27:18-23).
Let your failure work godly character in you

God has used failure to bring me closer to Him and rely upon Him more for my wellbeing, identity and success. As a younger person I could only reach a certain point of humility on my own based on Bible reading and private devotion. God had to use the fiery trials of life experience that come through time, to work a deeper level of humility in my soul. The worse thing we can do when we experience failure is to blame other people for what happened.

Doing this will stop the process of internal growth. The only people who grow and come out better on the other side of failure are those who have humbled themselves and taken responsibility for their part in failure. In hard times, we can either get bitter or better; run from God or run to God.

Remember, what happens to you is never as important as what happens inside of you! Circumstances will never destroy you; only how you respond to them will determine your destination in life.

Failure can develop greater compassion towards others.

Struggles with my own children and family have given me more compassion with Christian parents and spouses who have their own family challenges. If I did not have these challenges it is highly likely I would have been judgmental towards those who have experienced family failure.
Hence, my own struggles have produced in me the compassion necessary to empathize with others. Furthermore, I have found that I have far more authority to speak and minister to people in the areas with which I have experienced the most challenges.

My heart and emotions can now resonate with people who are going through the same battles I have experienced. Related to this, I have learned that, the greatest point of demonic attack against me is a cue as to my greatest calling in life. Our greatest calling in life is always hidden beneath our greatest point of resistance and challenges. I have found that my “mess” can work compassion in me and become my “message” that can be a great benefit for others with the same struggles (Read II Corinthians 1:3-7).

*There is always a purpose for everything; every failure can be a schoolmaster who prepares us to go to the next level of success and influence.*
Become more self-aware and less defensive

One of the greatest lessons from failure is that it made me more aware of who I am and what really motivates me. I started to discover more acutely when I am being driven by fleshly personal ambition and when the Lord is leading me. It is very important, after or during a failure, that we take the time to reflect and allow the Lord to reveal to us the things we did to contribute to the mess we are in. We need to realize when we are operating on presumption and running ahead of the Lord.

Every time we experience failure we should use it as an opportunity to self-reflect and learn how and why we did what we did so we do not repeat the same mistakes.

Also, part of the process of becoming self-aware is to listen to the rebuke and or correction of others God sends into our life. The worst thing we can do after failure is to isolate ourselves from others or become defensive when a person attempts to speak into our life. A “wise person hears and increases in learning” (Proverbs 1:5) and “the wise in heart will receive commandment” (Proverbs 10:8).
Let your spirituality be grounded in reality

Sometimes success can lead to failure. I have found that more people have fallen because of success than because of failure. That is because often when we go from one successful endeavor to another we lose our sense of reality and begin to take things for granted (like doing due diligence before making important decisions and making commitments to others). Failure shakes us up and brings us more to the ground level of how the world really operates. It can also be the impetus of acquiring more discernment for future decisions.

Some folks are so mystical in their approach to Christianity, that they never take into consideration the realities, challenges and complexities of their environment. We are not only called to pray but we are also called to think and act. We are called to have powerful encounters with God so we can successfully engage the earth in His power and might. Jesus did not stay on top of the Mount of Transfiguration, but came down to the valley to encounter the evil spirits that were afflicting human kind (Matthew 17:1-18). He was empowered and strengthened so He could successfully deal with the betrayal of His disciples, His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, and endure the excruciating pain of the crucifixion.

He did not attempt to use prayer and spirituality as way to escape the realities of the earth but depended upon His powerful encounters with the Father to obtain the wisdom and strength necessary to complete His purpose on the earth.
I spend a lot of time mentoring young people. One of the most fruitful times I have in those sessions is when I am sharing with them areas of my past failures and the reasons that led to them. Without these compelling stories I would not be equipped with the wisdom I need to encourage and exhort these younger, less experienced people. Don’t waste your failure merely on yourself, but use these experiences as a way to train the next generation and bless others with the lessons you have learned.

Truly, I have found that the teacher always learns more than the student, and when we share our life’s lessons with others, it helps us gain more insight as well.
Learn to construct a better model for others to follow

Ultimately, our life is our legacy. Consequently, every failure should become a building block for us to construct a better model of how we live.

It can force us to pause in this hectic world and grapple for balance and proper rhythm. It enables us to see what really works as opposed to what is an unworkable concept.

When a person with little experience has immediate success, it pains me to see them become a mentor or coach before they know if their model is sustainable over the long haul! For example, there are some pastors who have enormous church growth and are writing books and giving advice to a new generation of leaders, yet they lead local churches that are less than 10 years old. This is too early to tell if their model can withstand the test of time in regards to ministry burnout, leadership turnover, and multi-generational success in developing healthy families who will keep their children and perpetuate the faith. I don’t believe we can trust models and philosophies of life and or ministry, until they have experienced the fiery trials of life and come out successfully on the other side!
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Constantly grow in faith

The bible passage in Zechariah 4:7 is more real to me today than ever before. Truly I have found that, when all is said and done, it is not by my power or might but it takes God’s Spirit to accomplish His will and purpose in the earth. Failure has taught me the vast limitations of depending upon my natural gifts and abilities to fulfill my kingdom purpose.

When I hit a wall and have no solutions, God reminds me that it is going to take faith in His ability to intervene and perform a miracle to accomplish His will!
Give God opportunity every day to instruct you

The longer I live, the more I realize that I will never get the results I want in life without seeking God earnestly! We need to give God space to mold us, and speak to us. I have found that when I initiate anything significant based solely on my own planning, natural gifts and abilities—then it is up to me to keep it going on my own strength! God is not obligated to empower that which He never willed to exist! One of the greatest keys to Jesus success was the fact that He only did what He saw His father doing (John 5:19)

The older I get the more I try never to get involved in anything unless it fits my purpose and mission and is accompanied by a strong witness in my spirit of God’s leading. Of course, I have come to this conclusion after going through “the school of hard knocks” and almost suffering burnout on several occasions!

Conclusion...

It is my objective with this short book to encourage you not to quit, to help you understand that failure is one of the key stepping-stones to success. I pray you will reflect on each of the twelve points in this book so you can apply these timeless truths to your life; if you do, I trust you will have a far greater chance of turning your failures into success.
About Joseph

Joseph G. Mattera has been in full-time church ministry since 1980 and is currently the Presiding Bishop of Christ Covenant Coalition and Overseeing Bishop of Resurrection Church in New York. He is also serving as convener of the United States Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (USCAL) and is one of the founding presiding bishops of the International Communion of Evangelical Churches. He has ministered extensively internationally in many nations including the former Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Turkey, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Holland, the Ukraine, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Russia, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Rwanda and Uganda.

Joseph has a Doctor of Ministry degree from Bakke Graduate University and is the author of four theological books on the Kingdom of God, entitled, Ruling in the Gates (2003), Kingdom Revolution (2009), Kingdom Awakening (2010), Walk in Generational Blessings (2012), and Travail to Prevail: A key to Experiencing the Heart of God (2014).

He has appeared on TBN, Daystar Television Network, Cornerstone Television Network, and his work been shown on numerous mainstream media news outlets. He also has numerous original articles, position papers, seminars, sermons, podcasts and videos presently posted on his website, www.josephmattera.org. His blog “The Pulse” can be read at Charisma News.

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