

# Successful Failure

## MATTHEW 14:22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. **23**And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, **24**but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. **25**And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. **26**But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. **27**But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

**28**Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.'

**29**He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. **30**But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' **31**Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'

**32**When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. **33**And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'



What does success and failure look like in this passage?

# Have you noticed **THAT PRETTY MUCH EVERY KEY CHARACTER IN THE BIBLE HAS A “FAMOUS FAILURE”?**

- Peter’s Denial
- James and John: “Let us sit at your right and left...”
- Saul/Paul: The stoning of Stephen, persecution of the church
- Moses: angry at the rock
- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel, Joseph
- David and Saul—the difference between them is not the nature of their failures, but the nature of their responses: self-justification vs. “I have sinned against the Lord.”

## What elements make failure successful?

1. None of us needs to choose failure—that will inevitably come. But its inevitability should take the sting out of it when it does. Further, it seems that famous failure does us some deep good.

### Grace is only possible

2. If failure is a part of our larger development—we need to find ways to
- a. Seek honest even brutal feedback—have you ever been dissatisfied with the feedback you receive, because you aren’t sure it’s the whole story? Perhaps our tendency is to be relieved—but instead work at hearing the whole story. Don’t waste an opportunity to grow.
  - b. Take risks in relationships. Look for ways to acknowledge your own failure rather than quickly identifying that of others. Refuse to be defensive. When people point out your failings, get used to hearing yourself respond, “Oh, it is worse than you think.”
  - c. Don’t move on too soon. Our temptation, when we realize we have tasted failure, is to move on from it as quickly as possible. Chances are that failure lesson is longer than you would wish, though shorter than you fear. Give yourself to it.

3. Ultimately, the biggest failure is not failure itself, but failure One difference between Peter and Judas, after their failures, can be seen from their reactions. Peter ran to the tomb, to see if the news were true. Judas never hung around to find out, but fled his life in despair. The sweeping promises of Romans 8 tell us that no failure can separate us from the love of Jesus, if we are blithe to be kept by him.

4. And what is there to fear? Big enough, early enough, famously enough, often enough. We probably all know peers or parents who’ve lived life in the shadow of the fear of failure, and we know that’s no life we want to lead. For failure will lead us

## FOR REFLECTION:

- What has success looked like in your life?  
How has God used this success in your growth and development?
- What has failure looked like, so far, in your life?  
How has God used this failure in your growth and development?

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What does success and failure look like in this passage?

- Failure: The disciples fail to recognize Jesus—they failed in the previous story when they didn't respond very well to the idea that they were to feed the crowds
- Success: Peter wants to be near Jesus, and he begins in faith by asking Jesus to command him to come to him (he didn't want to be out on the water unless he knew Jesus authorized it)
- Success: Peter is able to walk on water—for a little while.
- Failure: Peter is distracted by the wind and waves, and he begins to sink. His faith is overcome with his fear.
- Success: Peter calls out to Jesus (in a very efficient, every-word-matters prayer) for Jesus to save him.
- Failure: Jesus saves Peter but points out that his doubt was caused by his small faith.
- Failure: The other disciples didn't get out of the boat at all—and never experienced the chance to walk on water.

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## What elements make failure successful?

1. None of us needs to choose failure—that will inevitably come. But its inevitability should take the sting out of it when it does. Further, it seems that famous failure does us some deep good.

Only after the denial is Peter able to hear Jesus express forgiveness in his affection even as he calls him to suffer and die in Jesus’ name.

**Grace is only possible past the limits of our success.**

2. If failure is a part of our larger development—we need to find ways to **lean into redemptive failure:**

- a. **Evaluation.** Seek honest even brutal feedback—have you ever been dissatisfied with the feedback you receive, because you aren’t sure it’s the whole story? Perhaps our tendency is to be relieved—but instead work at hearing the whole story. Don’t waste an opportunity to grow.
- b. **Reconciliation.** Take risks in relationships. Look for ways to acknowledge your own failure rather than quickly identifying that of others. Refuse to be defensive. When people point out your failings, get used to hearing yourself respond, “Oh, it is worse than you think.”
- c. **Patience.** Don’t move on too soon. Our temptation, when we realize we have tasted failure, is to move on from it as quickly as possible. Chances are that failure lesson is longer than you would wish, though shorter than you fear. Give yourself to it.

3. Ultimately, the biggest failure is not failure itself, but failure **to learn from failure.** One difference between Peter and Judas, after their failures, can be seen from their reactions. Peter ran to the tomb, to see if the news were true. Judas never hung around to find out, but fled his life in despair. The sweeping promises of Romans 8 tell us that no failure can separate us from the love of Jesus, if we are blithe to be kept by him. **You pay the tuition for failure, so go to class and write the paper!**

4. And what is there to fear? **Fear NOT failing.** Big enough, early enough, famously enough, often enough. We probably all know peers or parents who’ve lived life in the shadow of the fear of failure, and we know that’s no life we want to lead. For failure will lead us to wisdom with humility, which, in turn will lead us to a new and better version of success as children of God.

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