

# For the People Who Fail

by J.R. Miller

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*The sermon emphasizes that failure is not always a lack of success, and that faithfulness to God and duty is the key to true success.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 126:5-6, Matthew 25:40, John 12:24, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 15:58, Galatians 6:9, Philippians 3:14, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 6:10, James 1:12

**Topics:** "Failure", "Service to Others"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the often-overlooked stories of those who fail, arguing that their struggles and sacrifices lay the groundwork for future successes. He highlights that while society celebrates victors, the true heroes are often those who toil in obscurity, paving the way for others. Miller uses the metaphor of a fallen tree that becomes a bridge to illustrate how apparent failures can lead to significant contributions. He asserts that true failure only occurs when one strays from God's will, while every act of love and service, regardless of worldly success, holds eternal value. Ultimately, he encourages listeners to recognize the importance of serving others and remaining faithful to God, regardless of the outcomes.

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## Transcript

It is quite time some helpful words should be spoken for the people who fail. There are enough to sing the praises of those who succeed. When a man is valiant, and overcomes in the battle, and stands a victor at the close of strife, there are enough to shout the hurrahs, and to twine the laurel for his brow. When a man prospers in business, rising to wealth and influence, living in splendor, there are enough to do homage to his achievements. When one has won honor in any calling, attaining eminence and distinction, as in art or in a profession, there is no lack of voices to speak commendation. Books are written, telling the stories of heroes who won great victories on land or sea. Poets weave their verses into garlands of honor for those who conquer in the world's battles. We have many volumes filled with the world's records of men who became famous, and women who became famous, rising from obscurity to greatness.

All this is well. But who tells the story of those who fail? Who sings the praises of him who goes down in the fight? Who tells of the heroism of him who is defeated in the battle, and falls wounded and overwhelmed? When the struggle is over, and the victors come out of the smoke and carnage in triumph, there is a jubilant shout to greet them; but who lifts up the cheer for the men who fell and died on the field? Yet were they any less brave than those who came unwounded from the strife? Did the honor of the victory belong any less to them--than to those who lived to hear the shout of conquest?

In all departments of life, there are a few who seem to succeed, while the many seem to fail. Have all those who sink down, weary and broken-hearted, who fall out of the ranks, unable to keep up in the swift march, who do not get on in business, whose hopes are disappointed, and who drop in the dust of defeat--have all those who seem to fail, really failed?

When a great building is to be erected, deep excavations are made, and piles of stones are laid down in the darkness, only to be covered up and hidden out of sight by the imposing superstructure which rises high into the air. This foundation work receives no praise. It is not even seen by any human eye. It appears in a sense, to be wasted work; yet we know that without it there would be no massive buildings towering in majestic proportions in the air. Just so, many men's lives seem to be failures, while in reality they have been built into the foundations of great temples. Their work is covered up and hidden out of sight, and makes no show before the world; but without it those who come after them could not have achieved the success which makes their names bright.

For a whole generation men are experimenting along some line; for example, in electricity. Some of them almost succeed. They seem to be on the very edge of achieving what they are seeking; but success persistently and narrowly eludes them, and they die at last, broken-hearted over their failure. Then a new man arises, and takes the results of their experiments as a starting point. He is successful, and all over the world rings with his praises; yet he never could have brought the invention to this triumphant issue but for the long, patient experimenting of those who went before him, toiling, sacrificing--failing. Nearly every great discovery or invention which has proved a blessing to the world, has had a long history of such effort and failure behind its final success. Who will say that the men who wrought thus so unselfishly in obscurity, and without result or reward, really failed? They did their part in preparing the way. Their work was essential in its place. Should they not share the songs of victory which the world sings for the man who at last brings the invention to triumphant completion?

Recently a man, prospecting in the mining regions of Arizona, found a remarkable natural bridge. It spans a deep canyon, forty-five feet in width. The bridge is made by a great agatized tree that lies across the gorge. Scientific men say that many ages since this tree was prostrated by some terrific storm, and fell across the canyon. By the effects of the water and of time, it has passed through many stages of mineralization, and is now a wonderful tree of solid agate. And there it lies, making an agate bridge over which men may pass from side to side. This tree seemed to be a failure when, that day in its prime, it was broken off by the storm and hurled to the ground. But, instead of being a failure, to what nobler use could it have been put, than thus to become a bridge of agate, to stand for ages, and on which countless human feet may walk across the chasm?

This fallen tree is an illustration of countless human lives which have fallen and seemed to fail--but which in time have proved to be bridges over which others can walk to honor, success, and triumph. We are all daily passing over bridges built of the toils, sacrifices, and failures of those who have gone before us. The luxury, ease, and comfort we now enjoy--have cost other men ease, pain, and loss. We cross continually to our blessings and privileges, our promised lands, our joys--on the bridges built for us by those who failed!

Christ himself is the greatest example of this truth. His life was a failure as seen on the world-side. At the age of thirty-three it was all over, the brightest light which ever shone on the earth, was quenched in the darkness of the cross! But now it is a bridge of agate, over which millions are passing from sin to holiness, from sorrow to joy, from death to life, from earth to heaven. Christ said, "I am the way--no man comes unto

the Father but by me." So his failure (humanly speaking) became the saving of the world. It built the bridge over the chasm between earth and heaven, on which all who are saved pass over. We live--because he died.

So in smaller measure, it is with thousands of human lives. They fail. They sink down in the dust and are forgotten. Their names are lost in the indistinguishable multitude. No fame, no remembrance, is theirs. But without them the world would have missed a portion of its blessing--and many lives, honored now, would have missed their honor. Many a man is living today in bright happiness--prosperous, successful, enjoying distinction--because his parents toiled, sacrificed, and--failed. None of us know what we owe to the past--to those who have gone before us, to the lives that sank down in unmarked obscurity. They labored--and we are entered into their labors.

It is doubtful if any good man can make the most possible of his life in a worldly pursuit, and yet be a loyal Christian. He may have brilliant powers, all the qualities that lead to success. If he were to devote all his energies without reserve to his chosen business, he could outstrip all his competitors, and win the highest place. But he is a Christian; and a Christian cannot live for this world's ambition alone, though he does it honestly and honorably, and though the ambition is altogether worthy, and he altogether faithful to his Master. He must serve his fellow-men as he passes through life. He must be as Christ to the weary and stumbling ones. He must turn aside oftentimes, like the Good Samaritan in his journey, to help those who are in need, whose cries break upon his ear. He may not press on in his ambition, heedless of love's duties.

Then, while he thus stays his feet to do service to those who need sympathy and help, his competitors in the race, not troubling themselves to heed the calls of distress about them, thinking only of winning the goal, gain upon him, and pass him by. Men say he is foolish thus to permit himself to fail through his heart's tenderness and sympathy. But that is not failure which comes through pausing to comfort and bless others. Rather it is such ministries as these which alone redeem an earthly life from utter failure. The man who steels his heart against all appeals for pity and help, and goes remorselessly on to the goal of his ambition, without turning aside at the calls of need--finds no blessing in that which he achieves. But he who seeks first the kingdom of God, stopping in his busiest days to do good, and turning aside from his most ardent pursuits to minister to human need or sorrow, though his hands hold less of this world at the end--he will be rich in the reward of love's service.

Not every good man succeeds in worldly affairs. Not every true effort which is made, has apparent success. Sometimes it is by failure that a man can do his best. Success the undertaking can come only after many have sunk down without attaining. Nearly always the first prophets and heralds of a new reform must perish in defeat, thus preparing the way, building the bridge over the chasm, for those who come after them to carry the reform to success. But surely it is just as glorious to do one's part in the essential preparatory stages, and then fall without sharing the victory, as it is to have one's part at the last among the victors.

We may set it down as an unalterable truth, however, that there can be no real failure when one is faithful to God and to duty. Sin is always a failure. The apparent success which men build up through unrighteousness, is only a gilded picture. It has no foundation, no substance. It is an illusion. It will vanish in the presence of the divine judgment, as the morning mists vanish before the rising sun. But whatever men build up in truth and justice, is as real as God himself. All truth is part of God, and is imperishable. No failure is possible when we with God. "He who does the will of God abides forever." Nothing may seem to come from the toil, the sacrifice, and the outpouring of precious life; but sometime, somehow, somewhere,

there will be a harvest from every sowing. Not one grain of the holy seed of love can ever be lost. The life may sink away, and seem to have perished; but from its grave will come an influence which will be a blessing in the world. We need not care what we do, nor where we go, nor what comes of our work--if only we do God's will.

It is sweet to see the blessing come from our serving, to gather the fruit from our sowing, to witness the success of our work--if that is God's will for us. But whether we have this privilege or not, it is a comfort to know that nothing done in love and truth for God, can ever fail, and that no service rendered in Christ's name can be in vain.

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