

# People Who Fail

by J.R. Miller

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*True success is not measured by earthly prosperity, but by the quality of our character and the use we make of our life.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:19

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Success vs. Failure"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the distinction between worldly success and true success as defined by God, arguing that many who appear to fail in the eyes of society may actually be thriving spiritually. He warns against the dangers of pursuing earthly prosperity at the expense of one's character and spiritual life, suggesting that true success is measured by the growth of one's soul and relationship with God. Miller encourages individuals to recognize their God-given potential and opportunities, stressing that failure often stems from neglecting to develop one's gifts or succumbing to worldly temptations. He concludes that life is a precious trust from God, and we must guard it and use it wisely to avoid the tragedy of a wasted existence. The sermon serves as a cautionary reminder to remain vigilant against the subtle paths leading to failure.

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## Transcript

There are many people who fail. Yet there are two standards by which success and failure may be measured: there is the world's standard, and there is God's standard. Many whom men set down as having failed--are successful in the higher sense; while many of earth's vaunted successes, are really complete and terrible failures.

If we are wise, we will seek to know life's realities, and will not be fooled by mere appearances.

True success must be something which will not perish in earth's wreck or decay; something which will not be torn out of our hands in the hour of death; something which will last over into the eternal years. No folly can be so great as that which gives all life's energies to the building up of something, however beautiful it may be--which must soon be torn down, and which cannot possibly be carried beyond the grave!

The real failures in life--are not those which are registered in commercial agencies and reported as bankruptcies, nor those whose marks are the decay of earthly fortune, descent in the social scale, the breaking down of worldly prosperity, or any of those signs by which men rate one another. A man may fail in these ways, and, as God sees him--his path may be like the shining light, growing in brightness all the

time. His heart may remain pure and his hands clean through all his earthly misfortunes. He may be growing all the while--in the elements of true manhood.

In the autumn days, the stripping off of the leaves--uncovers the nests of the birds; and for many a man the stripping away of the leaves of earthly prosperity--is the disclosing to him of the soul's true nest and home in the bosom of God. We cannot call that life a failure which, though losing money and outward show, is itself growing every day nobler, stronger, Christlier. It matters little what becomes of one's circumstances, if meanwhile the man himself is prospering. Circumstances are but the scaffolding amid which the building rises.

The real failures, are those whose marks are in the life itself--and in the character. A man prospers in the world. He grows rich. He gathers luxuries and wealth about him--instead of the plain circumstances amid which he spent his early days. The cottage is exchanged for a mansion; he is a millionaire; he has wide influence; men wait at his door to ask favors of him; he is sought and courted by the great; his name is everywhere known. But the heart which nestled in purity under the home-made jacket--has not retained its purity under rich broadcloth: it has become the home of pride, ambition, unrest, unholy schemes, and of much that is corrupt and evil; his knee bends no more in prayer, as in childhood it was taught to bend at a mother's knee; his life is stained with many sins; his character has lost its former innocence and loveliness. His circumstances have advanced from poverty to wealth--but the man himself dwelling within the circle of the circumstances has deteriorated.

There is a story of a man who built his enemy into the wall of the castle he was erecting--made a tomb for him there, and buried him alive in the heart of the magnificent castle he was setting up. That is what many men do with their souls in their earthly prosperity: they bury them in the heart of their successes. It is a splendid monument which they rear; but when it is finished it is the mausoleum of their manhood. Shall we call that true success--which erects a pile of earthly grandeur to dazzle men's eyes--while it strangles a man's spiritual life and forfeits him the divine favor and a home in heaven?

There is no doubt that God creates every human soul for a high destiny; he has a plan for every life, and that plan in every case is noble and beautiful. There is no blind fate which predestines any soul to failure and perdition. No man is born in this world--who may not make his life a true success, and attain at last to coronation in heaven. Every soul is endowed at creation, for a noble career. It may not be for a brilliant career, with honor and fame and great power; but there is no one born who is not so gifted, that with his endowments he may fill his own place and do his allotted work. And there can be no nobleness higher than this. Then to everyone, come the opportunities by which he may achieve the success for which he was born. No man can ever say he had no chance to be noble; the trouble is with the man himself. Opportunities offer--but he does not embrace them, and while he delays--they pass on and away, to return no more; for "lost opportunity comes not again." Opportunities are doors opened to beauty and blessing--but they are not held open for laggards, and in a moment they are shut, never to be opened again.

Both in original endowments and in opportunities, every life is furnished for success. "But men are weak and sinful, and are unable to make their lives noble." True--but here comes in the blessed secret of divine help. No one ever need fail, for God is with men--with everyone who does not thrust him away--and he is ready to put his own strength under human infirmity, so that the weakest may overcome and rise into beauty and strength. No man is foredoomed to failure; there is no man who may not make his life a true success. Those who fail, fail because they will not build their life after the pattern shown them in the

mount, because they do not use the endowments which God has bestowed upon them, because they reject the opportunities offered to them, or because they leave God out of their life and enter the battle only in their own strength.

The saddest thing in this world--is the wreck of a life made for God and for immortality--but failing of all the high ends of its existence and lying in ruin at the last, when it is too late to begin anew.

To the readers of this book--this chapter is cautionary. The paths that lead to failure, begin far back and slope downwards, usually in very gradual and almost imperceptible decline, toward the fatal end. The work of the Christian teacher is not with those who have hopelessly failed, wrecked all, and gone down into the dark waters--these are beyond his warning voice and his helping hand--but he should seek in time--to save from failure those whose faces are just turning toward its sunless blackness.

It may be, that these words shall come to one whose feet are already set in paths of peril. There are many such paths, and so disguised are they by the enemy of men's souls, that oftentimes to the unwary they appear harmless. They are flower-strewn. They begin at first in very slight and in only momentary deviations from the narrow path of duty and of safety.

Young people should be honest with themselves in these matters. The question at first is not, "What are you doing now?" but, "Which way are you facing? What are the tendencies of your life?" If the compass registers falsely by but a hair's breadth when the ship puts out to sea, it will carry her a thousand miles out of her course a few days hence, and may wreck her. The slightest wrong tendency of life in early youth, unless corrected, will lead at length far away from God and from hope!

We should always deal frankly with ourselves. We must not imagine that we are so different from other people, that what is perilous for them--is yet safe enough for us. It is a sacred and most momentous responsibility which is put into our hand when our life is entrusted to us. Life is God's most wonderful gift. Then, it is not our own, to do with as we please. It belongs to God and is but a trust in our hands--as when one puts into the hand of another, a precious gem or some other costly and valuable possession, to be carried amid dangers and delivered in safety at the end of the journey.

God has given us our life, and there are two things which he requires us to do with it. First, we are to keep it. Enemies will assail us and try to wrest from us the sacred jewel--but we are to guard and defend it at whatever cost. Then, mere keeping is not all of our obligation. The man with the one talent seems to have kept the talent safely enough: he wrapped it up and laid it away in a secure place. It did not gather rust; no one robbed him of it. When his master returned he presented it to him, safe and unspotted. But he had done only part of his duty, and was condemned because he had not used his talent and thereby increased its value. The lesson is plain.

It is not enough to guard our soul from stain and from robbery--we must also make such use of it as shall bless the world and develop our life itself into ripeness of beauty and of power. Our endowments come to us only as possibilities, powers folded up in buds or germs, which we must draw out by use and culture. We are responsible not merely for guarding and keeping the possibilities which God puts into our lives--but also for developing these possibilities until the talents multiply into many, until the little seeds grow into strong and fruitful plants or trees!

There are, then, two lines of possible failure. We may not guard our life from the world's corrupting influence, nor defend it from the enemies that would filch the precious jewel from us. All who yield to

temptations and fall into sin's slavery, fail in this way.

Then, we may neglect to make the most of our life, developing its possibilities, cultivating it to its highest capacities for beauty, and using it to its last degree of power, in doing good. Thus indolence leads to failure. A young person who has good mental powers and is too slothful and inert to study and thus educate, or draw out, the possibilities of his endowment, is failing in life just so far as his indolence is leaving his talent buried in his brain.

The same is true of all the capacities of life. The lazy man is a failure. He may be richly gifted and may have the largest and best opportunities--but he has no energy to do the work that comes to his hand; then, while he lingers, indolent and self-indulgent, the opportunities pass on and pass away, to return no more--and the powers of his being meanwhile die within him. He comes to the end of his life without having left in the world any worthy record of his existence, anything to show that he ever lived--and with only a shriveled soul to carry up to God's judgment bar.

No other curses in the Bible are more bitter--than those upon uselessness. A man made for a great mission, and magnificently endowed for it, who does nothing with his life, even though he does not yield to sin and turn the forces of his being into courses of evil--is still a terrible failure! Uselessness is failure! The penalty upon such malfeasance in duty--is loss of unused capacities, the wasting and shriveling of the powers which might have been developed to such grandeur and trained to such efficiency and influence. The eye unused, loses its power to see; the tongue unused, becomes dumb; the heart unused, grows cold and hard; the brain unused, withers to imbecility.

To save our lives, then, from at least some degree of failure, it is necessary that we not only keep ourselves unspotted from the world--but also that we make the fullest possible use of all the powers God has given us! Hence every young person who would save his life from failure--must begin with the bright, golden days now passing, and make each one of them beautiful with the beauty of fidelity and earnestness. A wasted youth is a bad beginning for a successful life. We have not a moment to lose, for the time allotted to us is not an instant too long--for the tasks and duties which God has set for us.

We shall have no second chance--if we fail in our first. Some things we may do over if we fail in our first or second attempt--but we can live our life only once. To fail in our first probation, is to lose all.

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