

How to Stop Failing and Start Succeeding



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HOW TO STOP FAILING AND START SUCCEEDING

Scripture: Psalm 84:11; Matt 8:20

THE topic we are discussing today is: how to stop failing and start succeeding. At the outset I think perhaps one of two things ought to be said about this topic. First, there is a certain element of presumption in anyone's having the audacity to speak on such a subject, for there might be some intimation hidden in it that the speaker is an expert in success - which I assure you is not the case. I wanted to make that clear.

The second thing that some people might regard this as rather a strange subject matter for a sermon. That of course, depends entirely upon your conception of a sermon. We hold that a sermon is a God-centered, Christ-centered, Bible-centered exposition and discussion of principles and practices designed to develop the very finest type of person and, in turn, the finest type of society.

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When we speak of a person as failing, we have no reference to any economic status whatsoever. We refer, rather, to that unfortunate and unhappy individual who is failing to approximate his highest potential, who is not realizing his greater capacity, who is living a lower level than God intended him to live. We refer to that person who is tied up and locked up inside himself who has never yet succeeded in getting fully released to become what God meant him to be. When we speak of a person as succeeding, we are referring to an individual who is free, who has found the answer to life, is no longer the victim of his inner conflict but is released and is whole and normal in his approach to life.

Still another thing we would like to make clear is that when we speak of how to start succeeding we do not mean, or even imply, that you can have everything you want in this life. That, of course, would be a sinful human being is going to get everything he wants. Let us hope indeed, that he won't; because it is reprehensible that what he thinks he wants is just what he ought not to have.

FOR example, there is a friend of mine by the name of William Gargan, who was one time a well-known motion picture actor. Among many pictures he made one called *They Got What They Wanted* and was so well received that he thought maybe he might receive that coveted award known as the "Oscar." But he was disappointed. He did not get an Oscar. Instead he got cancer of the throat. Presently his larynx had to be removed and his golden voice was stilled. He was deeply disgraced.

Then he would tell that there is a method by which an artificial voice can be put in and the patient taught

to use it. Patiently, he did this. I'll never forget the night he and I spoke on the same program and I heard him talk for twenty minutes with a fair semblance of his mastery of speech. He became a tremendous inspiration to people who had been similarly afflicted.

Not long ago I happened to catch a television program originating in Hollywood where honor was being paid to William Gargan by the whole motion picture industry. A vast and brilliant assemblage of noted people had gathered. Speeches were made by various people. But the greatest speech was made by Bill Gargan himself. In the rasping mechanical voice which he had mastered he called that he once played in a picture *They Got What They Wanted* and that he wanted an Oscar, but he did not get it. "I was deeply disappointed," he said. "But God permitted me to have a part in a far greater production which I call *Got What God Wanted*."

You could see, even over television, how deeply that vast assemblage was affected by a man who wanted one thing but got another and who admitted that the thing he got was greater than the thing he didn't get.

So the wise God isn't going to give you and me every thing we want, because He knows what we need. I am reminded of Tagore, the great Indian mystic and poet, who said, "I have often been saved by God's hard refusals." Not getting something you greatly desire isn't pleasant; it can be painful. It can be very bitter. But sometimes the greatest thing that happens to us is when God says, "No. I want it another way." Infants and people complain and say that God is cruel or that there is no God. Mature people, however, know that there is a God and sometimes an eternal kindness in God's refusals.

HAVING said all this, I want to repeat that the Bible and Christianity offer a way whereby an individual can develop a quality and richness of life that is beyond all imagination. And this is the kind of success referred to in this topic, how to stop failing and start succeeding. The essence of the matter contained in a passage in the 84th Psalm - one that you have heard all your life, I am sure - where the psalmist tells us that "no good thing will (God) withhold from them that walk uprightly." But what does it mean *uprightly*?

I think the usual understanding is that no good thing will be withheld from a person who lives a good life. Uprightness means honorableness, truthfulness, purity, decency - just general goodness. The only trouble with that is that from the days of old until now we have seen in instances where the righteous suffer and have all manner of heartache and pain; and the evil flourish like the green bay tree. I've even had people tell me, "It never pays to be good." They contend that the smart ones get away with it and good people don't get any reward. Well, it is like an old farmer once told me, "God doesn't pay all His debts on the first of January." And he continued, "I've watched these evil-doers over many years. They may get away with it for one year, five years, ten years, thirty years, maybe forty years. But I've lived a long life and evil pays in its own coin in the end. Whereas those who are good do suffer, and there is no promise that they won't; but they come out on a higher value level. *God* is with held from those who are upright.

But it seems to me that if you take this sight and stop with it you haven't probed its profounder meanings at all. I would hold that it also means that no good thing will He withhold from those who stand tall. Man is

the only really upright animal. I guess a monkey is sort of a saxophone and the same note on the piano would vibrate. They could see it vibrate - and no other string of upright, a horse is not upright, a dog is not upright. Man would.

is the one who is upright. He is so designed that his head If sounding just the right note can shatter a glass or climbs toward the sky. He has an upthrust in him. He has cause a certain string on a piano to vibrate, is it hard to a mind that can reach beyond the stars, even to the inconceive that there may be a similar connection between tricacies of space. He can reach up until he approximates the sensitivity of the human soul and the divine truth of and makes contact with the great flow of truth and, once God? The person who walks uprightly makes this harmonic connection. Life then flows not away from him but he does so, no good thing in this upright universe is denied toward him, and "no good thing" is withheld from him. him. So to stand upright can mean to get yourself tall, into contact with divine truth.

LET me use an illustration which I used in a sermon once before and which was later printed. I thought it was a good illustration. But a woman up in Maine who read the printed sermon wrote to tell me I had missed a little on this one - hadn't got the facts quite right. It was about Enrico Caruso. I once heard Caruso in the old Metropolitan Opera House. I will never forget the majesty of that tremendous lilting, soaring voice. Well, Caruso had a dinner-table trick which he used to do. As I'd recalled it, he would hold up a slender glass and sing in ascending scale until he got to a certain note, whereupon the glass would crack into a hundred pieces. But the woman in Maine said that was not the way he did it.

"Mr. Caruso tapped the glass first with a spoon or knife," she wrote, "to get the key note. He sang that note with power into the glass to shatter it. He could not have done it till he got the key note. *Everything in the world is in vibration and has a key note.*"

She went on to add that her husband was an accomplished musician and they used to take the top off their piano and her husband would sound a note on a clarinet.

The little woman didn't say anything. I gathered that the man in the front had no idea of going. I said, "I'm going to the meeting."

"You are?" said the big woman. "Well, that's good. I'm sure we're going to have a good meeting. Who's speaking at this meeting?"

"I am," I answered. She looked at me and asked, "Where'd you come from?" "New York City."

"My!" she said. "You must be pretty good. Then she looked at me again and added, "At least I hope so."

Well, I hoped so too. As we went along she enthused about how wonderful everything was until finally the saturnine character in the front seat turned around and said, "I have never seen anybody as happy as you. Are you as happy as you sound?"

"Why," she said, "bless your life, of course I'm happy. You see, I've been walking with God and He has made me happy."

And what was the result of all this? The little lady beside me loved her, the taxi driver loved her, I loved her and even the man in the front seat loved her. With her natural joyous upthrust she had shown us divine truth. When she got out I thought to myself that the simple people of this world are the ones who take Him at His word and walk tall, uprightly - and no good thing will He withhold from them.

Again I remind you that this doesn't mean you can be free from the pain and trouble of life. You can't. Maybe when God gives you trouble He is not withholding any good thing from you but instead is showering you with wonderful blessings. People contend that this is theoretical and say they want to hear something practical. Well,

I do; theoretical religion just doesn't interest me. An idea has to work if it is to hold my interest.

A FINAL element in how to stop failing and start succeeding is to ask if there is any error in us. Why is it that so many people cut themselves off from receiving God's marvelous benefits? I suspect it is because of the amount of error we build up in ourselves across the years.

In reading Christian Science literature we constantly encounter the teaching that error gets in the way of health and all well-being and that the only way to counteract error is by truth. It is taught that the truth makes you well.

Well, error can indeed make you sick, error can make you weak, error can make you futile, error can make you fail; because error makes a person do things the wrong way. Error makes a person inept. The erroneous person says the wrong thing at the wrong time, he fails to establish rapport with people, he messes things up, because he is a victim of error. On the other hand, a person filled with truth speaks rightly, acts rightly, does rightly; he has nothing he has perceptiveness, he has rightness. And when you have rightness, then you are in the high flow of God's truth and no good thing is withheld. The problem is to get error out of you. How do you do that? Let me conclude with this illustration of how one person did it:

Somemonths ago I was in North Carolina to make a speech and was staying at a motel. When I returned to the motel after my speech there was a man waiting for me who said he would like to talk with me. "I've read some of your books," he said, "but I still haven't got the answer to my problem. I'm a failure. I've got to admit it. I get a job for which I have all the qualifications, all the know-how, but after a while I'm in trouble with my asso-

ciates and I'm out. It seems to happen everywhere I work wrong with yourself. Now if your attitudes are altogether
"I'm very unlucky this discouraged man continued. right, how come you never make a right rapport with
"All the people I have worked for have treated me badly. the men you try to work with? Maybe that is something
I haven't had a single job where I got cooperation. We ought to explore."

every case there have been chiselers and shirkers." And was afraid you'd say something like that," he said.
he related several incidents. Describing how associates had "Well, can you see any specific thing in your personality
treated him, he used such words as "obstructed," "h that would make for trouble?"
strung," "undermined," "double-crossed."

"And when it comes to a showdown," he said, "I always to gripe."
find bosses unreasonable. I haven't had an employer yet I'm willing to believe that may be one of your prob
whom I'd call a really straightforward, friendly man. So ms," I said.

how can I help but fail? I guess maybe I'm oversensitive "You see," he then told me, "I'm so sensitive that if
- I don't know." And he asked, "What am I going to do? anybody does the slightest thing that rubs me wrong I
What's the answer to my problem?" begin to hate him."

"Now look," I replied, "you are asking me to tell you," "Go on. You're doing fine." And little by little he came
just like that, what's wrong with you. That I can't do up with a number of other wrong conditions in himself.
And I wouldn't do it if I could, because if I were to lew wrote them down, handed him the sheet of paper, and
you what is wrong with you, it wouldn't come alive to you reminded him, "Now I didn't tellyou you had these
as the real answer. You'd think of it as just my answer to things wrong with you. This is what you told me. This is
your problem. That is why we have to discuss things the value of a conference brings such things out. There
the point where you see the answer for yourself." it is. Why don't you take these things and go home and see

"Well," he asked, "in what I've told you, do you see if you can't pray this error out of you. Then take the con
any clues?" trary thing, which is truth, and pray that into you?"

"Yes, I do see one clue," I said. "You've told me about HE reported to me much later that he not only got his
failing in several jobs. It sounds like these jobs have dif wife to pray with him, but also his pastor. And they formed
fered one from another quite a bit, both in general set-up esunity of prayer on the basis of remembering that "where
and in type of personalities you were thrown with. These who or three are gathered" in His name, He is there "in
situations seem to have had little in common except what the midst of them." He said, "It wasn't easy, because long
you were in them and in every case you failed. So maybe the bit of thought was involved in it, but we prayed out the
you should take a closer look at yourself. You say you had no and we're praying in the truth. I'm working now for
associates and employers have been terrible people, but no a company where things are working out just great. I've
once have you implied your own attitude might be wronga ever been with. finer people."
Everything's wrong with all these other people, not a thing

I would say in terms of the old-fashioned religion that what happened to this man was that he had a conversion, not from drink or from lust or from dishonesty, but from error. And he began to walk uprightly. So much so, that the truth overbalanced the error ultimately and he is today well on the way to that quality of success which I defined earlier as the full releasing of the whole personality.

"No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." So let us take a look at the error that we have in us and ask God to take it from us and build up the truth within, that we can become tall and walk uprightly and stop failing and start succeeding as personalities in the highest sense of that concept.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we know that Thou hast put into us all a very great and wonderful potential which we have often choked off and inhibited by the error which we have proceeded to build up in us by thought, word and deed. Help us to open ourselves so completely to the truth that the error may be flushed out and truth may prevail, so that walking uprightly as tall men, with head and heart in harmony with Almighty God, we may enter into richness of life. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.