

The Concurrently Companion



Episode 30: Failure and discipleship formation

Topic introduction

A theme with which we grapple constantly in the news and also in our own lives, in our own discipleship, is failure. What is failure? What does it do for us? And is it really all bad? In this episode, we explore what failure means for our personal and spiritual formation.

Key ideas: *failure, iteration opportunity, educative failure, standard of expectation, experiential learning context, dissonance, process, transformation*

Questions to guide deepening understanding and discussion

Questions marked * are aimed at drawing out the discussion with teens and older students. Their answers will allow you to understand their thinking and feeling regarding failure and equip them for future growth and learning.

*What do we mean when we use the word *failure*? And what do we need to consider in our definition?

Dr. Donald Guthrie uses the terms “iteration opportunity” and “educative failure.” Put those ideas in your own words with regard to learning and discipleship.

Jessie Swigart asks: *Whose* expectations or standards do we have in mind when we consider whether failure has taken place? In *which* domains of our human learning (intellectual, physical, relational, moral, social, spiritual) are those standards communicated? To whom are we accountable/under whose authority are we in these areas: ourselves or someone else?

Dr. Bob Burns asserts: failure is a subjective idea, an individual response and the response of the people around the individual—an emotional response—to circumstances and situations which can range from the very smallest issues or problems to major instances. Failure is an *experiential learning* context. How does the idea of learning through experience shape our perspective on failure?

*What are our subjective responses to failure? What impedes our willingness to embrace failure? What does it take to begin perceiving failure as opportunity?

*Is any failure “too great”? Explain your answer.

*What does it mean to be “in process”? What does human growth/transformation look like? What are inevitable pieces of that growth/transformation?

*What circumstances or contexts allow us to process failure reflectively, healthily? How do we cultivate those spaces?

How do we as parents coach a healthy expectation of and response to failure? How does our expectation and response display the gospel to our children/students? What does acceptance of failure look like in practice in our home?

How does the spectrum of insecurity vs. belonging factor into the equation? What can we do about these factors?

*Where do we see failure in scripture? Why do you think the biblical record includes failure? What is the purpose in that of the authors and Author?

*What are two things with which to surround ourselves in our quest to embrace and move through failure? What is one practical thing you could do to cultivate a different attitude towards failure?

Diagnostic questions

What is the attitude towards confession and repentance in the context of my community, from the worship service through to educational and discipleship programs?

How does that play a role in the worship environment, from a large group? Where are the people with whom I can become more vulnerable and open?

What level of vulnerability can I have in my congregation? What level of vulnerability can I have in my small group?

How are those things exhibited in the context of the youth ministry, from the youth minister on down to the small groups in which my children participate?

How do we manage and accept vulnerability and failure in the context of our home?

Scriptural anchors/provision

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. — James 1: 2-4

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