

The Concurrently Companion



Episode 35: Failure and cultural engagement

Topic introduction

On a previous episode, we looked at the role of failure in discipleship formation. Today, we consider what failure means on a community and cultural level. What do we do with the stories of failure that we encounter in the news all the time? How can we see failure as opportunity to love neighbor?

Key words and ideas

Explicit/implicit aspects of a learning environment, freedom to fail, modelling as teaching, chief learner, practice with (constructive) feedback, proximate success, humble excellence, teachability, repentance, high stakes iteration, punitive system, learning system

Questions from our discussion

What does embracing failure look like in operation in an educational setting, at home or in the classroom? Amidst failure, ask: Why didn't it work? What could work better next time?

What are some of the most significant formation influences that we and our children are facing today? How much are we receiving in this formation process? How much are we receiving an opportunity to learn and grow through failure? How is failure approached in this context?

What is countercultural about learning through failure? How is it reflective of a gospel-centered culture?

How does renaming failure as "proximate success" and seeing it on a learning continuum change your mindset towards failure?

What do we notice regarding the process of moving from abject novice (one who doesn't know what one is doing) all the way to expert? How long does it take?

Where have you seen your Christian worldview posture toward failure influence the way that you might engage unbelieving neighbors and community? How you expect that posture to influence the neighbors, the community, and even the culture around us?

Where do you have the opportunity to live out the gospel—a gracious posture towards the neighbor kid who broke a window or bumped into your car—toward failure around you?

Questions to explore with your kids and students

Are all failures inevitable? What about SpaceX was just honest trying and learning from what failed? Where could Elon Musk grow in teachability? With the *Titan* submersible, what warnings went unheeded? Where was teachability lacking, resulting in catastrophe?

Describe something you learned, from riding a bike to learning to cook. What did it take to grow and improve?

How does a biblical worldview inform the idea of “high stakes”? What causes the stakes to be high? [Human life, leading and serving other humans physically, spiritually, emotionally, morally] What types of responses to failure in situations with “high stakes” would disqualify a person from serving or leading? [Consider the examples of a surgeon, pastor, or teacher.] What would an appropriate response be to these types of failure?

What is the danger of a punitive system? [People are incentivized to hide mistakes/failure.] Listen to the news together. Talk together about what you learn about how failure is approached and managed in each context. Make it a topic of worldview conversation with family members, neighbors, and friends, even if they’re not believers. How is failure accepted or not accepted on Capitol Hill? How is it accepted or not accepted in the context of a local police department? How is it perceived in our schools? Churches? Community? What difference does it make when failure is taken through a constructive process versus a punitive one?

Scriptural anchors/provision

When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. — Titus 3:4-7

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