

MOSES

A Man of Selfless Dedication

STUDY FOUR

Lessons Learned from Failure

Exodus 2:11–25

There's nothing wrong with success. But there is something wrong if we leave out the process, which often includes defeat and failure.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

PEOPLE like a good success story. A talented young singer moves from a small town to the dazzling lights of the big city, where a producer hands her a small part in a Broadway play. On opening night, the lead actress falls ill. The girl takes the role at the last minute, wows the audience with her singing, and a star is born.

Moses seemed to be living his own rags-to-riches story, but when he stepped into the limelight, he fell flat on his face. Word spread that Moses killed the Egyptian taskmaster, and the once-Pharaoh-elect was now a fugitive on the run. Success slipped through his fingers like desert sand.

But God views “success” through a different lens than we view it. We see the product—the fairy-tale ending—and we forget the *process*, which often includes failure.

God teaches His most valuable lessons in the wilderness. In the vast, uncluttered spaces of our personal desert, God clarifies our vision. Our ears tune more intensely to God’s voice in His Word. In the stillness, we sense God’s nearness in ways we’ve never experienced before.

Let’s take a seat next to Moses in God’s school in the desert. His diplomas from the finest academies in Egypt won’t do Moses any good here. Moses, along with us, must go back to the basics and learn what it truly means to walk with God.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

The Holy Spirit is your spiritual instructor whenever you study God’s Word. Write a prayer, inviting Him to teach you the lessons you need most.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Moses looked “in all directions to make sure no one was watching” before unleashing his anger on the Egyptian and killing him (Exodus 2:12). This was Moses’ first mistake. He looked to the right and the left . . . but he didn’t look up. He didn’t look to God to know how best to rescue his Hebrew brothers and sisters.

Now he was in exile. He was a man without a family, without a country, and without a future. Dejected and defeated, Moses “sat down beside a well” (2:15)—probably feeling his heart sink to the bottom. He had reached the lowest point in his life. Finally, Moses looked *up*.

Having quit his running, he reflected on his actions from *God’s perspective*. If he had recorded his thoughts in a journal, what do you think he would have written? Review the passage from the previous *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, [Exodus 2:11–15](#), and write down the lessons that emerge regarding the following subjects.

The means Moses chose to right a wrong.

Lesson: _____

The timing of Moses’ attempt to free the slaves.

Lesson: _____

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Hiding the evidence of Moses' wrongdoing.

Lesson: _____

Assuming God would enable Moses' self-initiated plan.

Lesson: _____

Do you think these lessons took hold of Moses' heart? They certainly did. Let's explore the next passage and discover the ways failure made a new man out of Moses.



Observation: The Changes in Moses

Observe closely Moses' actions in [Exodus 2:16–25](#) and note the positive qualities he displayed despite the defeat and failure he had just experienced. Remember to read slowly and carefully, looking for every literary nuance as you answer the following questions.¹

The Attitude of a Servant—Exodus 2:16–17

Moses was a born liberator. Although he failed in his first attempt to rescue those in need in Egypt, God gave him another opportunity in [Exodus 2:16–17](#). What did Moses do? What impresses you about him? What character qualities do you see in this Egyptian prince who once had servants serving him?

Moses had eaten the biggest piece of “humble pie” when he ran out of Egypt. He was ready to do anything to help others in need. God uses failure to help us cultivate a servant’s heart. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Willingness to Be Obscure—Exodus 2:18–22

Once again, women played a key role in Moses' life. According to [Exodus 2:18–22](#), what report did the sisters give Reuel (named Jethro in [Exodus 3:1](#)) about Moses? Why do you think Moses took Reuel's offer? What new identity was Moses willing to accept?

Through our failure, God breaks down our desire to be known. Later He may put us in the lights, but then acclaim won't matter. We just want to be available for God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Ability to Rest and Rely on God—Exodus 2:23–25

Moses was forty years old when he fled to Midian where he lived in simplicity and obscurity. “Years passed,” the text states, marking the passing of *forty more years* (Exodus 2:23). Certainly, Moses received news from Egypt during that time, and, eventually, word arrived that “the king of Egypt died” (2:23).

The Pharaoh who died was “Thutmose III, who enjoyed a long reign (about 1490–1436 BC)” — the same Pharaoh who issued Moses' death sentence.²

What did Moses record in [Exodus 2:23–25](#) regarding God's thoughts about the enslaved Hebrews now that Thutmose III was dead?

Not only was it God's “time to act” (Exodus 2:25), but also Moses was ready. Over the years, he had learned to *rest and rely on God*, which made communication with God possible for Moses. How else would he know God's thoughts unless he was walking closely with Him? This was the beginning of the intimate relationship that Moses would have with God, who spoke to Moses “as one speaks to a friend” (33:11).

Whatever accomplishments Moses would achieve in the future, there was no greater success than the close walk he cultivated with God during his years in the school of the desert.

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Interpretation: Moses' Course Correction

Before God could use Moses, Moses had to be willing to *grow* through his failure. What do you think might have happened if Moses *wasn't* willing? How might Moses' life have been different?

How important is a person's attitude after failure? What principle do you discover in Moses' attitude?

*Sometimes, our problem isn't that we've failed, it's that we haven't failed enough.
We haven't been defeated to the point that we're ready to learn.*
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Shaped on the Anvil of Failure

When Moses killed the Egyptian, he probably thought he was fighting for God, just as Paul thought he was fighting for God when, as Saul, he sent Christians to their deaths. Not until Christ told Saul that he was fighting *against* God did Saul repent. He went to the desert of Arabia to learn from God, just as Moses did in Midian. What was the main lesson Paul learned from his failure, according to [1 Timothy 1:12–15](#)?

How was Paul's growth through failure similar to Moses' spiritual growth through failure?

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The psalmist affirms two key truths about how we grow through failure in *Psalms 119:67, 71*. What lessons does the psalmist teach in these verses?

Times of failure bring us to a place of wanting to be obedient more than ever. Failure breaks through the pride barrier and gives us a sensitive, teachable spirit. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Learning Lessons, Making Changes

Let's restate the lessons Moses learned from failure so we can apply them. First, *spiritual ends are not achieved by carnal means*. Killing the taskmaster was Moses' idea. Are you in a stressful, unjust, provoking situation? Even if the end is righteous, sinful means are not the solution. Use the following space to look to God in prayer instead of looking to yourself for what to do.

Second, *timing is as important as action*. Have you ever done the right thing at the wrong time? Didn't go well, did it? Consider the timing in your situation. When is it best to wait on the Lord?

Third, *hiding the wrong doesn't erase the wrong*. Is there a misdeed you need to own up to? What might it be and who needs to know about it?

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Fourth, *spiritual leadership is God-appointed, not self-appointed*. God didn't appoint Moses as a leader until later. What indicators might help you know God has appointed you to a leadership role?

On the anvil of failure, God shaped Moses into a tool He could use. Moses developed an attitude of a servant, a willingness to be obscure, and an ability to rest and rely on God. Is God shaping you in similar ways? How has He used your past to change you?

What changes is God still making?

Take a moment to rest and rely on God right now. Imagine yourself sitting by a well in a desert. What would you like to talk about with the Lord? What cool sips of truth from the well of His eternal Word might He offer you?

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A FINAL PRAYER

Read and meditate upon Psalm 63:1–8 below and use it to inspire your own prayer in conclusion to this study.

A psalm of David, regarding a time when David was in the wilderness of Judah.

O God, you are my God;

I earnestly search for you.

My soul thirsts for you;

my whole body longs for you

in this parched and weary land

where there is no water.

I have seen you in your sanctuary

and gazed upon your power and glory.

Your unfailing love is better than life itself;

how I praise you!

I will praise you as long as I live,

lifting up my hands to you in prayer.

You satisfy me more than the richest feast.

I will praise you with songs of joy.

I lie awake thinking of you,

meditating on you through the night.

Because you are my helper,

I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings.

I cling to you;

your strong right hand holds me securely. (Psalm 63:1–8)

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"
2. Ronald F. Youngblood, *Exodus* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1983), 31.

For the 2024–2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1975, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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