

PREFACE

For months, I debated whether to publish this book or bury it forever.

This book is about growing through failure. Specifically, it recounts my own experience of failure while attempting a daring moonshot project and struggling through my PhD. It also explores my inner journey through healing into a richer, wiser, and more centered life.

Publishing a book like this entails several dangers. In our age of personal branding, society expects us to project an image of success. Openly sharing our inner struggles violates a taboo, and a fine line separates authenticity and oversharing. There is also danger in identifying ourselves by our hardest life experiences, even if only for a season.

Time transforms how we understand hardship. In her book *Rise*, Sarah Lewis writes that she deliberately avoids using the word *failure* because “once we begin to transform it, it ceases to be that any longer.” We retroactively describe such an experience as “a learning experience, a trial, a reinvention.”¹

I agree with Lewis. Failure is never the last word, but rather a dynamic process that breaks us open and allows new life to shine forth. However, that retrospective alchemy is precisely why I felt the need to write this book. Failure does not transform overnight; this journey takes time, and honest accounts are rare. All too often

the inner journey is, to borrow a phrase from the poet John Keats, writ in water.

However the world receives it, this book is the most vulnerable, true, and important thing I have ever written. Failure taught me precious lessons about life, and I choose to embrace that story—rather than hide it safely out of view—as I enter a new season of teaching, mentorship, and writing.

I ultimately decided to publish this book in order to help others. We all have experiences that shatter our sense of self and leave us gasping to breathe. The aftermaths of these experiences are rich seasons in which we can experience tremendous personal flourishing, but few of us are prepared for them or have trustworthy guides.

I have done my best to name the thoughts, feelings, and opportunities that accompany the journey through failure, because in naming a thing we gain power over it. What I ultimately hope for are empowered men and women who confidently embrace their stories to live more effectively and wholeheartedly in the world.

I must make two notes up front. First, I am not a mental health professional, and this book is only a tale of my own journey. When mental health struggles become serious, there is no substitute for experienced, professional help.

Second, I am acutely aware of my own privilege and would never dare to compare my experiences to the traumas, injustices, and oppression that so many in our world tragically face.

I will just say this: privilege does not armor us against the experience of personal failure. We are all human, we all struggle, and we all doubt ourselves and our place in this world.

During the years I wrote this book, two of my friends took their own lives. Both were successful, well-educated military officers who inspired and encouraged others. Yet both succumbed to inner battles they fought in secret. That was enough motivation

for me to finish this book and release it into the world.

When I was at my worst, I took comfort in knowing that I was not alone. I treasured the writings of brave souls who told their raw, honest stories. They redeemed their failures by generously sharing their experiences. If this book can help others navigate their own inner journeys, I will be content.

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Montgomery, AL

E A T I N G G L A S S



*The Inner Journey
Through Failure and Renewal*

MARK D. JACOBSEN



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