

FAILURE: WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT SIN, MISTAKES AND MESSING STUFF UP

Emma Ineson (SPCK)

My first thoughts on opening this book? I can't really imagine sending this to anyone for their birthday! It's not an easy title. A point that Emma herself recognises.

However, perhaps the right response would be to send it to everyone, because a central concept of the book is the ubiquitous nature of failure – and our need to sit with the discomfort for a while, learning to be more relaxed about failure as a companion. And for that reason, it is a great choice for the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book for 2023.

Emma has such an engaging style, using humour in a helpful way. She brings her English language training to bear in looking for a definition: 'when something doesn't go to plan'. She attempts a taxonomy of failure, but I wonder whether a little more differentiation between types of failure would be instructive – the frailty of old age requires a different response than the sins of commission, which are different again to using salt instead of sugar.

The central chapters of Failure address the concept of corporate failure in the Church. In them, Ineson walks a

tightrope, painting a compelling picture of the beauty and glory of the Church as the bride of Christ to give a window to the world on the wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10, how awesome is that) whilst being deeply divided and flawed.

She argues that we need to leave space for failure in strategy and attend carefully to how and what we measure.

As might be expected of a Lent book, it centres around the events of Holy week, looking at human failure through this lens. Ineson contests that it is the uncertainty of Easter Saturday that most fully interprets our experience of failure.

Her treatment of the cross and whether it felt like failure to Jesus is compelling. She is not quick to jump to Easter Sunday for resolution: 'There is always hope, always redemption - because of the cross, the ultimate symbol of failure.' She points to the cross and resurrection as the ultimate end of all failure for everyone, made possible because Jesus never failed.

There was plenty of grace in this book. It would be fascinating from a leadership perspective to develop this further with an exploration of redemption and

restoration in church life. Leaders would do well to grapple with Ineson's treatment of the fear of failure and how it leads to paralysis when it comes to creativity and innovation.

Reading this book made me feel. I experienced the pain of remembering my personal failures. I felt thankful for the incredible grace offered to me through Jesus. I thought of John Newton's exclamation: 'My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.'

Review by Sarah Pix.

