

The Monday Memo 261

I am on the run this week, but wanted to continue our momentum toward Celebrate A Failure Week, which I have determined will be held from October 1-7. I introduced the concept of celebrating failure last week, and I already have some interesting feedback. Let me explain what I don't mean by recommending we celebrate.

WHAT I DON'T MEAN

I am not exalting moral failures. Nor am I promoting a cavalier attitude toward weakness and sin. Paul wrote, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so grace may increase? By no means!" (Romans 6:1-2). I agree with Paul. Yet I have known people who have failed morally and went on to reconstruct their lives, learning important lessons about their own weakness and tendencies. I don't intend, however, for this celebration to make light of those failures.

I am also not advocating a spirit of wrecklessness or gambling with lives or money. There are some who have a spirit of adventure and that spirit can cause them to embark on risk that is irresponsible. I would say that if you enjoy risk for risk sake, then you must be careful. You may be headed for a colossal collapse. Risk is necessary to advance, but the risk is for the possibility of gain and advancement, not just to enjoy the rush that comes from putting everything on the line.

WHY CELEBRATE A FAILURE?

Here are some reasons why I feel it is important that we celebrate failure:

1. There is a false sense of spirituality that says if you are following the Lord, failure isn't possible. If one fails, then one didn't have enough faith or somehow wasn't spiritual enough. I reject those assumptions. Paul wrote, "We know in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9).

One man wrote me this week to ask where failure is in the Bible. I see failure in Paul's speech to the Athenians (some believe it was his best sermon, yet he got few converts). I see failure when Paul wrote, "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them." (2 Timothy 4:16). I see failure when Peter vowed to die for the Lord and then denied even knowing Jesus just a few hours later. I could go on and on. Each man recovered from their failure and we honor them as saints today.

2. I have talked to hundreds of people who are so afraid of failure that they won't even try to succeed. Thus countless great ideas that are inspired by God languish in the hearts of his people. If we can celebrate failure and see that in most cases it isn't final or terminal, then perhaps we can face the possibility of succeeding if we will just step out and try. Failure isn't final unless you make it so. If you can learn from and even laugh at your failures, then perhaps it will prepare you for the success that God intends for you to have.

AN EXAMPLE

Last Saturday, I hosted a seminar here in Johannesburg. I sent out a lot of emails inviting people to come and I charged a registration fee. To be honest, I was scared. What if nobody came? What if I lost money on the deal? What if it didn't go well? Do you see how fear of failure could have stopped me from moving forward?

But I refused to give in to the fear and went ahead. I had it at one of the best hotels and spared no expense. I only had a few advanced bookings, but I prepared like 1,000 people were going to come. What happened? People came, I broke even, I made some new friends, I touched lives with the purpose message and made a significant contact that I think will advance my work and the purpose message here in South Africa. Fear of failure or my actual past failures could have kept me from that wonderful success.

So let's proceed as planned. The Celebrate a Failure Week will take place October 1-7. I'll give you some guidelines on how to celebrate in the weeks to come, but for now, just get ready to celebrate. I'm sure you will have a lot of material!

Feel free to post your comments to this Memo on the [site](#) where it is posted.

The Monday Memo 262

I am in Johannesburg on my way to Tel Aviv for a tour of the Holy Land with 80 other people. I know we are going to have a great time, but going to Israel is hard work! There is so much to see and do that you start early in the morning and can go until evening. You don't go to Israel to sit in the hotel lobby, however, so you do what you can when you can and come home with fabulous memories, souvenirs and pictures.

Don't worry. I haven't forgotten about our Celebrate a Failure week coming up this October 1-7. The idea is to overcome our fear of failure

today by focusing on the lessons learned from past failures. If we can see that failure isn't fatal, in most cases, but actually a great teacher, then perhaps we can succeed in something that we would not have attempted because failure had us paralyzed.

HOW TO CELEBRATE

I would recommend that you take every chance during the first week of October to talk about failure, its role in your life and the lessons learned from past failures. You can do this any number of ways:

1. If you are a pastor, I would recommend that you talk about failure in your Sunday services on October 1. I know you can find enough biblical and personal material to make quite a good message.
2. If you are a business leader, you could talk about failure with your leaders and staff. Do you have any failures to celebrate as a business or team? What did you learn from them? What could you do today if you weren't afraid of failing? What would you try to do?
3. Families can celebrate, too. Study a biblical character who failed like Samson, David, or Peter. Perhaps there is some family story of failure that could be redemptive. Maybe you could even focus on some historical figure like Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela or Winston Churchill. Are there any lessons to be learned about failure from their lives?
4. Schools and classes need not be left out of the celebration. If you teach, I would imagine that you can find enough teaching material to make up a class session or two. History and science are full of failure stories that turned into success, or that provided significant lessons for future students.

THE WAY FORWARD

I want to be clear that the purpose of this celebration is really to encourage success. I know that sounds like an oxymoron, but it's true. One way to succeed and do the will of God is to face your fear of failure. What could you do if you weren't afraid of failing your exams? What could you do if you didn't accept your first exam failures as the final word? If you don't give up, there's no telling what you can do in church, school, business or government.

Another goal is to get you to forget the past, even laugh at it, if your past includes some failure—which everyone's does. If you failed, it's time to

move on. Forgive yourself, forgive the others involved, and try again. I know people who struck out, so to speak, and took off their uniform to sit in the grandstands, content to now watch others perform. It's time that you get back in the game, to continue the baseball analogy.

If you strike out or miss the kick, don't stop trying. Failure isn't the end, unless you allow it to be. I urge you to look failure in the face on October 1 and see that it is powerless to control you unless you cooperate with its intimidating ways. Be watching in the weeks to come for more ideas for how to celebrate and what to discuss during the week with your family, friends, or flock. Have a great week.

Feel free to add your comments, questions, favorite failure quotes or anything else on your mind on the [site](#) where this entry is posted.

The Monday Memo 263

I am in Jerusalem for the last two days of my ten-day tour of Israel. What a great time we've had! As an added bonus, we are the first group in after the war in Lebanon, so we have had the city to ourselves. That has enabled us to see much more than would ordinarily be possible. If you would like to read my daily journal from the trip, you can go to my blog site.

I don't have much time to write today. When you're in Israel, you maximize every minute and get back to the hotel barely able to stagger to your room and dinner. But one thing is certain: There is plenty of Holy Land material for our Celebrate a Failure week coming up from October 1-7. (If you would like some ideas of how to "celebrate" this concept, check out Monday Memo 262 on the site where it is posted.)

ISRAEL NOTES

Jerusalem is the place where Peter denied Jesus, yet went on to become the leader of the Church after Jesus' ascension. It was here that all the disciples deserted Jesus in His hour of need. Judas failed when he betrayed Jesus into Roman hands. The disciples repeatedly misunderstood what Jesus said, failing to apply and carry out His teachings again and again.

When we were up north in Galilee, I reflected on Peter's attempt to walk on the water, which ended in failure. The disciples failed when they panicked and did not trust Jesus in the midst of their storms. When Jesus indicated in John 6 that the people would have to "eat his flesh and drink

his blood" in John 6, many turned away and refused to follow Him any longer.

Yesterday we visited the exceptional Holocaust Museum called Yad Vashem, which chronicles a time of insanity and genocide. Yet even out of that dark time, the Jews came home and the nation of Israel was born in 1948. Yes, Israel is the land of Jesus and Paul, but it is a land of failure and rebirth, sin and redemption.

"WE FAIL."

Our local tour guide loves to talk like an Indian chief in the old westerns who used very few words. So when we get off the bus, he says, "We go." When we stopped at the mall, he said, "We shop." Today when we go into the Old City, I'm sure he'll say at some point, "We walk." So if he were writing, perhaps he would say to you as you serve the Lord, "We fail." The intention of Celebrate a Failure week is to help you see that failure is seldom terminal, but a painful but important learning instrument.

This has been a great tour, but not a perfect one. I have been keeping a list of things we did wrong so we can do them correctly next time. Yet our failures haven't taken away from the tremendous success of this venture. Your mistakes and failures won't be able to take away from your success unless you allow them to do so.

So get ready to celebrate the past so that you can embrace your future. There are so many things for you to achieve, and if you can face the possibility of failure, you will be able to embrace success. Give some thought to how you will celebrate by thinking about the lessons learned from past failures, and then move on. As you do, I hope you'll have a great week. Shalom!

The Monday Memo 264

There are only two weeks left before we enter our Celebrate a Failure week festivities. Do you have your plans set yet of how you will celebrate and commemorate your greatest failures? I hope so. In case you missed or can't access Memo 262, here are some suggestions for how to celebrate. What you celebrate is up to you.

LET'S CELEBRATE!

I would recommend that you take every chance during the first week of October to talk about failure, its role in your life and the lessons you have learned from past failures. Here are some ideas of what you can do:

1. If you are a pastor, you can talk about failure in your Sunday services on October 1 or during your midweek gatherings. Someone wrote me that there is no failure in the Bible. See if they're right. If not, then share what you find from your own unique perspective.

2. If you are a business leader, why not talk about failure with the other leaders and staff. Do you have any failures to celebrate as a business or team? What did you learn from them? What is stopping you from creating new failures? What could you possibly achieve today if you weren't afraid of trying and failing?

3. You can celebrate as a family. You may want to study a biblical character who failed, like Samson, Moses, David or Peter. Maybe there is some family story of failure that can be discussed and examined. Maybe you can even focus on some historical figure like Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela or Winston Churchill, who were great leaders who experienced failure at some point.

4. Classroom settings need not be left out of our celebration. If you teach, I would imagine that you can find enough teaching material to make up a classroom session or two. History and science are full of failures that eventually led to success, or failures that provided significant lessons for future students and leaders.

MY FAVORITE FAILURE

My all-time favorite failure was Mobile Business Service, an advertising specialty company I helped start when I lived in Alabama. We began with such high hopes, but nine months later the business had already crashed and burned. What's more, I was stuck with paying all the remaining bills, for reasons I won't go into now.

One day I was praying, begging God to save or resurrect the business. It was that morning, however, that God gave me something better. He showed me that my purpose was to create order out of chaos! I was seeking a business success, but God turned that business failure into a life's message that has changed lives all over the world. You probably wouldn't be reading this today if I had not botched that business. I thank God for that failure. It was the road to one of my greatest success stories.

I've had other failures but I don't live with regrets. I have moved on and grown from each of them. How about you? What is your favorite failure? What failure has provided your most significant learning experience? Are you ready to try again, putting the past behind you?

I hope you are. That is the reason we are having a Celebrate a Failure week--so you can see that failure is seldom fatal. What's more, not trying because of the fear of failure can keep you from your next great success. So hurry up and get ready, Celebrate a Failure week is almost here. There's so much to look forward to. Don't wait until the last minute; make your celebration plans now. As you do, I trust that you'll have a great week!

Feel free to add your comments, failure stories, favorite failure quotes or other pertinent information on the [site](#) where this entry is posted.

The Monday Memo 265

I am in the Johannesburg airport heading to the Netherlands for a few days to be with friends. I am looking forward to my time there, but I am especially ready to go home and see my wife. In addition, next weekend we celebrate Mother Stanko's 90th birthday! If I'm not home for that event, I won't have a chance of reaching my own 90th! We are having a family gathering to commemorate the big event.

I am sure that you are getting ready for the other big event next week. What event, you ask? Why, Celebrate a Failure Week, of course. In case you've been out of touch, I gave you some ideas of how to celebrate in Memos 262 and 264. What you celebrate is up to you. Last week I shared my favorite life failure. This week I'd like to share what qualifies as a close second.

MY NUMBER TWO ALL-TIME FAILURE

In 1993, I went to work for Integrity Music as the executive director of their ministry division called Worship International. It was and still is my favorite all-time job. I had the privilege of organizing worship conferences and events all over the world featuring worship leaders like Don Moen, Ron Kenoly, Marty Nystrom and Kent Henry. I attended almost every event as the organizer and director, and it was at those events that I started teaching on finding your purpose.

I loved the people I worked with, I loved the company and told God regularly that I could hold that position for the rest of my life--and I meant it! Then in 1995, we started losing money on the events we held. Do you know what my strategy was to turn things around? I decided to plan more events! we were losing money on our events, so I decided to do more of what we were losing money doing. Looking back, I can't imagine a worse strategy to adopt.

The results were predictable. In six months, we were out of business and I was out of a job! I was devastated! I had an offer to move back to Pittsburgh, the last place at the time I wanted to be, to work in a local church, a job I had said I would not do again. Before we knew it, however, we were back in a city where we didn't want to be doing a job we didn't want to do. Now that's how I define a colossal failure!

HOW CAN I CELEBRATE?

I received many emails this past week from readers describing terrible failures--broken relationships, bankrupt businesses and ministry disappointments. The common question from them all was, "How can I celebrate such a terrible thing?"

You will celebrate your failure the way I celebrated the one I described above. I started out thanking God in faith for the pain and embarrassment. It is hard to rejoice at the time of the failure and even in the days and years that follow. But today, I thank God for that failure and the one I described in Memo 264. When they happened I thanked Him in faith and pain; today I do it with joy and laughter.

I would not be the man doing what I am doing today if it wasn't for those failures. I learned so much and, to be truthful, I would do those things again, knowing what I knew at the time. I did the best I could, but things didn't work out. It was painful, but I lived and learned. Those failures didn't define me because I didn't allow them to define me. I only allowed them to teach me.

So, are you ready to Celebrate A Failure even if it means doing so in faith, even if right now you can't see the lessons therein? I've written about my two biggest failures in the last two weeks, but not to worry--I have plenty more where those came from. I wish you and yours the merriest of weeks next week as together we celebrate God's goodness even in the midst of our worst moments.

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