

## **Monday Memo 341: The Halls of Failure**

In case you missed last week's announcement, by the authority vested in me as a purpose coach and teacher, I have declared the week of April 27 officially to be Celebrate a Failure week the world over. During that week, I urge you to find every way possible to celebrate the powerful role of failure in your life or the life of your organization. You can read last week's Memo to discover some suggestions of how to celebrate. This week, however, I want to talk about the halls of failure, of which there are quite a few in my country. These are places where thousand of people come every year to honor those who failed regularly and with distinction in their careers.

Where are these halls of failure, you may ask? There is one in Canton, Ohio, another in Cooperstown, New York and another in Springfield, Massachusetts, just to name a few. If you follow such things, you know that these are the locations of the baseball, football and basketball halls of fame. Let's talk about why I call them halls of failure.

### **FAILURE IGNORED**

Let's first look at baseball. The best batters in baseball failed at least 65 percent of the time when they came to bat. The best pitchers failed as many as 40 percent of the time when they pitched, not to mention how many "non-strikes" they threw. The best fielders failed only about 10 percent of the time, but some of the managers remembered in the hall of failure lost almost as many games as they won.

In football, the hall of failure quarterbacks missed 50 percent of their pass attempts. The best running backs fumbled numerous times and the best defenders missed many tackles. In basketball, some of those enshrined in the hall missed 40 percent of their free throws. Others turned the ball over (gave it to the other team) hundreds of times and many lost games for their team when it counted most -- at the very end when they were the last ones to touch the ball.

You know that these halls where the greatest players are memorialized are not called halls of failure but instead halls of fame. They are places where thousands pay money to go and remember the greatest players, regardless of how many times they failed. In fact, no one even remembers how many times they failed. Their failures are ignored in the face of the successes they enjoyed.

### **FAILURE FORGOTTEN**

What about the players memorialized in these halls of fame? What is their attitude toward failure? The statistics I quoted above are accurate; they did indeed encounter many failures in their careers. The key to great success for them was that failure did not define who they were or the legacy they left. Consider Michael Jordan, perhaps the most famous basketball player of the modern era and these facts about him in his own words: "I missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

The great players learned (and learn) to forget their failures. They used them as a means to improve. They studied what they did wrong and what they would do again if faced with a similar situation. They failed so much that they learned how to succeed. More importantly, they did not allow failure to define them because they did not quit.

So what's your story? How many times have you failed? Truth be told, you probably haven't failed nearly enough to be successful. Have you allowed past failure to limit your attempts to succeed today? Have you allowed the voice of past failure to coach your play today? I'm not referring to your sports career, but to your attempts to write, act, lead or parent. If you don't learn to forget your failure, no one else will ignore it. That's why we are celebrating failure, so can laugh at it and move on to success, however you define success for your life.

Don't miss this wonderful chance to put failure in its rightful place as a teacher and mentor. Join with me on April 27 and the days following to put failure in perspective. If nothing else, take a moment now and then to reflect on the truth found in Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Talk about how God has worked God in and from your failure and then go out and do something great that your failure taught you to do. Have a great week and preparation time leading up to April 27.

### **Monday Memo 342: Is Failure Spiritual?**

I am in Amsterdam on my way to Abuja, Nigeria. I thought I would send the Memo while I have a chance today, not knowing what the Internet is like where I am going. Before I left home yesterday, I got a rejection notice from a publisher about a book proposal I submitted. Isn't that great? I know for sure that the publisher isn't someone I am supposed to work with, and I am gathering my own material for the upcoming Celebrate a Failure Week, starting Sunday, April 27. In case you are a new

reader, here are some ways to celebrate (you can also read more about failure on the Monday Memo site):

1. If you are a pastor, you can talk about failure in your Sunday services on April 27 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 that can help people who have failed. You have plenty of them sitting right in front of you every Sunday.

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 also experienced great failures 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, of failures that provide significant lessons for your students.

## THE QUESTION

This week, let's consider whether or not failure is spiritual. Let me start by quoting from Thomas Merton's book, *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

Perhaps we still have a basically superstitious tendency to associate failure with dishonesty and guilt—failure being interpreted as “punishment.” Even if a man starts out with good intentions, if he fails we tend to think he was somehow “at fault.” If he was not guilty, he was least “wrong.” And “being wrong” is something we have not yet learned to face with equanimity and understanding. We either condemn it with god-like disdain or forgive it with god-like condescension. We do not manage to accept it with human compassion, humility and identification.

Thus we never see the one truth that would help us begin to solve our ethical and political problems: that we are all more or less wrong, that we are all at fault, all limited and obstructed by our mixed motives, our self-deception, our greed, our self-righteousness and our tendency to aggressivity and hypocrisy.

Merton was saying that failure to face my own humanity causes me not to accept the humanity of others. Failure is part of being human. We cannot serve God in the hopes that He will save us from our propensity to fail. If God did that, for example, He would not have commanded us to forgive one another. He knew we would fail one another and provided the means by which we could deal with it appropriately. God didn't say, "Now that you are mine, you won't be needing to forgive one another any longer." He was saying, "Now you can come to terms with your failure toward one another by forgiving one another."

Those who take refuge in a false sense of spirituality as they try to avoid human failure have already failed. If you don't fail, you don't try and if you don't try, you won't ever know which thing you might have done was the thing you should have done. If you don't fail, you deprive yourself of the great learning experience that learning can provide. If you don't fail, you won't fully know or understand God's love that is with you no matter what.

## **THE ANSWER**

So is failure spiritual? Indeed it is, for it contributes to our spiritual growth by grounding us in our humanity. It's then that we know God's love and grace, and are able to share those things with our fellow failing humans, not from a position of superiority, but from a position of identity.

So I pray that you will have a profitable time leading up to April 27. This is an annual event, so if you can't cover all your failures this year, there's always next year. I already have enough failures to cover the next ten Celebrate a Failure weeks, and I'm sure I will collect even more material in the coming year! With that in mind, I look forward to celebrating my humanity and my spirituality with you in a few weeks. Thank God He still loves and uses you and me, even in our human condition. Have a great week!

### **Monday Memo 343: Is Failure Biblical?**

I just got home from Nigeria and before I unpack, I want to write this week's Memo. I had a great week in Nigeria where I met new friends and family who persevered with my laryngitis the last two days of our conference. Yet things went well and below you will see the first picture I have ever put in a Monday Memo.

I had some failures this week as we prepare for Celebrate a Failure Week starting April 27. I had a bid for some training, which I thought was a

pretty sure thing, postponed and I had a grant proposal turned down. I failed to get all the writing done this week I had planned and some physical challenges limited my effectiveness in Nigeria. All in all, it was a very good week! How many failures did you have this past week? Probably not near enough for you to be a success.

So last week I answered the question of whether or not failure is spiritual. I came to the conclusion that it is. This week I ask if failure is biblical. For the answer to that question, you must read on -- but I think you have a hint as to what the answer is. Let's take a look.

## **BIBLE FAILURES**

I could think of a number of prominent failures in the Bible. Here are some. Feel free to write and add your own.

1. Abraham's decision to have a son through Hagar (see Genesis 16).
2. Moses' failure to circumcise his son, which almost cost him his life (see Exodus 4:24–26).
3. David's attempt to move the ark without following directions for doing so (see 1 Chronicles 13).
4. Peter attempting to walk on the water and sinking (see Matthew 14:29–31).
5. Peter's denial that he knew Jesus (see Mark 14:71–72).
6. Paul's sermon in Athens, which was technically brilliant but lacked results (see Acts 17)
7. Peter's hypocrisy in turning away from the Gentiles when the Jews arrived in Galatia (see Galatians 2:12–14).

Obviously there are a lot of accounts of failure in the Bible because the Bible has a lot of stories about people, and people and failure go hand in hand. Yet perhaps the most powerful failure story of all is the one that involved David and Bathsheba.

## **THE SECOND SON**

I assume you are familiar with this story. If not, you can read about it in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. Bathsheba became pregnant by David while she was still Uriah's wife, so David had Uriah killed in battle. When all this came to light, the Lord took the life of David and Bathsheba's baby boy. What a failure! What a disgrace for the king and his legacy!

Yet David had taken Bathsheba as his wife and she got pregnant again. Now surely this child would also be under God's judgment. Surely the fate

of this child would be like that of the first one. At least, that's what human wisdom would dictate. That, however, is not what happened.

She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him; and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah [which means loved of the Lord] (2 Samuel 12:24–25).

Does this mean that the Lord condoned what David did? Absolutely not! Does this mean that you can go ahead and fail, assured that the Lord will eventually work everything out? Absolutely not! What does it mean then?

It means that God can bring something good out of any situation in which we have faith. David reacted so honorably when he was confronted with his sin, acted so nobly when the first baby died, that God had mercy. That's the point of celebrating failure. God is merciful! Failure is never the end, but very often the means to a new beginning, one that is more glorious than anyone could have hoped for. In our eyes, failure is terminal. From God's perspective, it's a chance to learn more about ourselves and about Him. Only God could allow one of the world's wisest rulers to come from a union so marred by failure and sin.

So what's the answer? Is failure biblical? I don't know if it's biblical, but it sure is in the Bible. And if it's there, I know it will be present and relevant in the here and now. So plan the party! Get the decorations ready. The week is fast approaching when we will celebrate failure, or perhaps I should say when we celebrate God's goodness and mercy. Armed with the confidence that God has been and is with us, celebrating failure will prepare us to attempt new ventures and learn new lessons that will equip us for the ultimate success that God wants us to enjoy.

Feel free to add your comments to this entry on the [site](#) where it is posted. If you would like to read more about the topic of failure and Celebrate a Failure week, you can read past Monday Memos on the topic.

### **Monday Memo 344: Is Failure Practical?**

We are only one week away from our fourth annual “Celebrate a Failure” Week. I’m trying to instill in every reader the notion that there’s no perfection this side of heaven, and that failure is a necessary albeit sometimes painful part of success, purpose and productivity. If you would like to learn more about failure or how to celebrate, you can read my past Memos on the subject.

**LET'S CHANGE THE NAME.**

I've had many people tell me, "Dr. Stanko, I just can't celebrate my failures. They are still too painful, or they don't glorify God!" Even though I've written about this principle and even shared some of my own failures, you still may struggle with this concept of celebrating failure, too. That is why I'm proposing another name for failure, a name that is hopefully easier to accept. If you can't embrace "Celebrate a Failure" Week, how about "Celebrate Some Feedback" Week? It isn't as catchy, but I believe it's just as accurate.

You see, failure is simply feedback. The feedback tells you that you need to make an adjustment because you are off course. When you accept this feedback, then you can make the necessary changes that will put you back on track and help you succeed. The astronauts that went to moon had to make a course correction every few seconds. If they had rejected the feedback of where they were, they would and could have shot right past the moon. They accepted where they were, however, and then did what they had to do to correct the situation.

I believe that our PurposeQuest is similar to what those astronauts encountered. For example, you send your manuscript to a publisher and they reject it. You should simply see this as feedback. You can change your manuscript to make it more acceptable, try another publisher or write a whole new manuscript. If you experienced a broken relationship, you can reflect on that feedback and set a course that will make your next relationship more lasting and meaningful. If you started a business and you ran out of money, you can start again more intelligently as you use the feedback from the first business.

Failure is what you make of it. It can be devastating if you accept it as such. If you receive it as feedback, however, you can use it to do a better job and plot a new or revised course forward. The choice is yours.

## **WHO'S YOUR COACH?**

I was watching a clip of American baseball spring training from Florida a few weeks. This clip showed a well-known batsman taking practice swings in the batting cage. Right behind the batter was his hitting coach, watching his every swing and giving him feedback. He was getting feedback on every swing, using that feedback to improve. When the season starts, that batter's batting average will be posted every day for all the world to see. He will have to face that feedback and then meet with his coach almost every day to stay on course and be all that he can be.

Baseball players aren't alone. Opera singers take lessons, and so do successful actors. Tennis players almost always have a coach who travels with them, helps them devise strategy, and provides immediate feedback on their performance. The most successful performers actually invite feedback—they encourage and even pay people to tell them where they are failing so they can improve. What about you? Who is your coach? What are you doing to encourage and process feedback?

I can answer the question in the title of this week's post by saying, "Yes, failure plays a practical role in life." It helps you be the best you that you can be. If you are serious about being a person of purpose, you must learn how to handle feedback, even the painful kind. If something isn't working, you need to know that and learn what you can do to make it better.

Why is this so hard for spiritual people to grasp? Why do we feel that we have to do it alone? Why are we afraid to fail and learn from the failure? I leave you to come up with the answers to those questions in the coming week. As we approach "Celebrate Some Feedback" Week, you need to assess how much feedback you are prepared to handle. That will determine what success level you will achieve. As you prepare for April 27, I hope you have a good week of preparation.

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

### **Monday Memo 345: The Time Has Come!**

It's here! You made it! This is our week to celebrate failure. (If you don't know how to celebrate or what the celebration is all about, you can access my other entries about failure on the site where they are posted.) I've had so many failures that I hardly know where to begin. Should I focus on my business failure that led me to discover my purpose? Or how about my time at a Christian ministry that ended when we ran out of money in my division? Or perhaps my less-than-stellar stint as a senior pastor in Orlando, Florida?

I have so much to celebrate this week because each of these experiences—you could call them failures—made me the man I am today. Each one helped shape my purpose message that now touches thousands of lives all over the world. I can celebrate these failures because I now see God's fingerprints all over them. I want to continue to learn and grow and, to do that, I must not shrink away from failure. You need to have this same attitude.

**IS THERE ANYTHING LEFT TO SAY ABOUT FAILURE?**

A few years ago, my pastor preached a message that included some quotes on fear and failure and I want to close our celebration by looking at those quotes.

1. Failure is an attitude, not an outcome. That's so true! Failure can't be an outcome or a destination, for it teaches and trains us in better ways to carry out God's plan for our lives. One time I received this email from a reader in Zimbabwe: "My business failed four months ago and I have been running away from the fact that things have not gone according to plan. It's been good to read the memo every Monday openly talking about failure. I have come to terms with the failure and look at it as a positive experience for me. Today's memo about the astronauts having to change course has been an eye opener. I was so afraid to declare the business a failure because this would have reflect my short coming and thought it meant that I am not a good business man. Truth is the failure has freed me to take risks in life. A life of faith is a life of risk. All the great men of God were big risk takers. Thank you very much for ministering to me at this very emotional time in my life. Looks like I am a "Successful Student" who has just learned important, life-changing truths from a failed business idea! Let me go and celebrate my success." This reader understands that failure is an attitude; it is a destination only if you accept it as such. Otherwise it's a wonderful, powerful learning experience.

2. Failure isn't final; God's promises are. I think failure teaches us to look past what is before us so we can stand on something much more lasting and powerful—the word and promises of God! Paul wrote about this when he said: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16–18). Have you lost heart? Then be encouraged today. God's plan for you isn't finished. Your best days are ahead of you. Pick yourself up, determine what you've learned and move on! Don't allow failure or your interpretation of it slow you down.

3. Faith is merely fear that has said its prayers. Many people believe that courage is the absence of fear, and success is a steady stream of successes and right steps. If you are going to succeed and be a person of purpose, however, you must face your fears and one of those fears is failure. You don't want to look foolish, don't want people talking about you, and don't want to endure the criticism or misunderstandings. When you were a baby, you learned to walk by falling down. The same is true today. Proverbs states, "For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity" (Proverbs

24:16). When you fall down, face your fears, say your prayers and then get back in the game called life. Only the wicked can be brought down by failure.

4. A life lived in fear is a life half lived (Spanish proverb). It's my experience that many believers live half-lives. They're so afraid of missing the Lord that they miss the Lord. So afraid of doing the wrong thing that they do no thing. In Revelation, Jesus said: "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death" (Revelation 21:8 emphasis added). It's the fearful and those without faith who are first thrown into the lake of fire. What does that tell you about how God's people should treat fear and unbelief? Stop letting fear of failure rob you of your success. Shake it off and do something, not anything, but something that God has put in your heart to do. And if you fail, well, then pick yourself up and try again. Don't be reckless, but don't be too cautious either. Just don't let fear rule your life any more.

#### **LET'S WRAP IT UP.**

So there you have it. We have studied and celebrated failure. More importantly, we have survived it to move on to new adventures. Are you ready? This week isn't about building monuments to your shortcomings; it's about moving forward in boldness and faith. It's not about a morbid analysis of your weaknesses, but a new, exhilarating realization that God is with you. When you realize that God is often more comfortable with you and your past than you are, then you can get up and step out. I pray that the grace of God will be with you this week and that you will move on to great victories in the coming days. Thank you for celebrating with me and have a great week!

Feel free to write your comments on the [site](#) where this entry is posted.