

## [436: 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 March 1 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 (sorry to my non-U.S. readers). 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 learn to forget their failures. They use 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 March 1 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 March 1.

Free free to respond to this entry on the [site](#) where it is posted.

### **[437: Is Failure Spiritual?](#)**

I am in Nairobi, and it feels great to be back! I have a team of 13 with me on this trip and they all traveled well. You can follow our journeys on my travel [blog](#), which is also linked to my Facebook account. There may or may not be a Monday Memo next week depending on my access to the Internet where I will be.

In case you are just joining the Monday Memo family, I have declared the week of March 1-7 to be Celebrate a Failure week the world over. 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 March 7 or during your midweek gatherings. Someone wrote me once 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 said that failure to face my own humanity causes me *not* to accept the humanity of others. Failure is part of being human. You cannot serve God in the hopes that He will save you from your 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 won't try to succeed and if you don't try, you won't ever know which thing you could do is the thing you should do. If you don't fail, you deprive yourself of the great learning experience that only failure 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 your spiritual growth by grounding you in your humanity. It's then that you know God's love and grace, and are able to share those with your fellow failing humans, not from a position of superiority, but from a position of identification.

So I pray that you will have a profitable time leading up to March 1-7. This is an bi-annual event, so if you can't cover all your failures this year, there's always next time. I already have enough failures to cover the next ten Celebrate a Failure weeks, and I'm sure t I will collect even more material in the coming season of life! 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!

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

## [438: The Case of the Missing Memo](#)

I am home from Kenya and I had a great visit. I invite you to visit my travel [blog](#) to read all about it. In the meantime, I am still searching for the Memo that I posted last week, which mysteriously disappeared. In nine years of writing the Memo, that has never happened, so I guess I was due, so to speak. That doesn't change anything, however, where Celebrate a Failure week is concerned. It is still set for March 1-7. You can read about how to celebrate [here](#), but in the meantime, let's see If I can't reproduce what was lost last week and overcome my failure to deliver.

## FOLLOW MY LOGIC.

During one past Celebrate a Failure week, a woman told me, "Couldn't we make these *Tolerate A Failure Weeks*? I'm learning to tolerate failure, but I'm not ready to celebrate it!" My view on the matter, however, is that failure plays such a vital role in your life, purpose and personal development that you must value failure for the important part that it plays.

When I conduct leadership and purpose seminars, I usually lead people through this sequential argument where failure is concerned. Perhaps you have heard me go through this:

1. First I ask, "Can failure be an important learning experience?" Everyone usually answers, "yes."
2. Then I ask, "Don't we often learn more from failure than we do from success?" People again answer, "Usually, yes."
3. I go on to ask, "Aren't we as leaders and followers of Jesus to be learning and growing at all times throughout our life?" Once more, the answer that comes back is "Yes!"
4. Then I conclude by asking, "Then shouldn't we be failing as often as possible?" At that point, the room usually falls silent.

That reasoning is why I believe it's important not just to tolerate failure, but to celebrate it, which we will do all next week. I have my list of my personal failures to study, and I want to milk them for all they are worth to prepare for my future successes.

## THE ONLY REAL FAILURE

In Marianne Williamson's book [\*The Gift of Change\*](#), she wrote, "The only real failure is the failure to grow from what we go through." (There's another way you can celebrate - by posting your favorite quote about failure on this [site](#) as some have already done). If what Williamson said is true, then we need to allow that truth to sink down to the core of our being. Henry Ford said that failure isn't the end of the world; it's just a chance to begin more intelligently. I agree; do you? If you do, then join me in celebrating failure and developing a mindset that failure is an important part of success.

Please enter your comments or questions about this entry on the [site](#) where it is posted.

## [439: It's Time To Celebrate!](#)

It's finally here. It's time to celebrate a failure! In case you missed it, I have declared this week Celebrate a Failure week, asking that you take some time this week to focus on the important role that failure has played in your life or the lives of others. If I ask you to do that, it's only fair that I do the same, so here is a reprint of my all-time favorite professional failure.

## THE WORST CONFERENCE IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

When I worked for Integrity Music, I helped plan and organize the worst conference in the history of the world! Our team was scheduled to be in Dallas, and we thought registrations were coming in slowly, but didn't think there was anything to worry about. Then we learned right before we were scheduled to be there that the postal service had lost our brochures, all **50,000** of them. Only a handful were delivered and that explained the low response.

Instead of canceling the event, we pulled out all the stops to spread the word that we were coming, confident we could still have a successful event. Were we ever mistaken! On the first night of the event, we had less than 1,000 people in a church that seated 5,000. Right after we started the event, the sound system failed. When I returned from trying to work in the audio booth, I saw Ron Kenoly on stage playing the guitar and trying to lead worship. (Ron isn't known for his guitar-playing skills, believe me.) When he asked for the words to come up on the screen, it was then we realized that the projection system had malfunctioned. The bulb burned out and the church didn't have a spare.

I ran backstage to try and print off some sheets with the words on them only to discover that the copy machine was broken. I got up to take an offering and apologized, saying that I felt like *I* should be paying anyone who happened to be there that evening. To make matters worse, the event went on to lose about \$15,000. I realized that weekend that a bad event is like flushing a toilet. Once you flush, there isn't any way you can stop the process; you just have to let it run its course.

## TWO CHOICES

I had two choices after that disastrous weekend. The first was to quit, which I briefly considered. The second was to take three months between Dallas and our next scheduled event and study what went wrong. I chose the latter and we went through everything we did. We came up with a number of innovations and built in more than a few safeguards to make sure what happened in Dallas would never happen again.

By God's grace, our next event was a fantastic success. We introduced some changes that generated quite a bit of revenue, and our team was better prepared and focused. Today I thank God for that terrible Dallas event and some others that followed. I learned more from those failures than I ever did from the good events. I also learned that a bad event isn't the end of the world.

When a baseball player strikes out or a soccer player misses an open goal, they don't go off the field and sit in the stands. They keep playing through their failure. In practice, they work on their technique but in the game they keep swinging and kicking. That's what you and I need to do as well.

Don't ever let your failures discourage you, and don't give up on your dream. Accept that failure is a part of every successful person's life, even your own. Adjust your expectations, but don't quit! Today I can organize great events because I organized some poor ones.

So bring out the confetti! Put up the banners and inflate the balloons. We have some celebrating to do! Don't let *Celebrate a Failure Week* end without taking the lesson of the week to heart: Failure isn't fatal or final unless you allow it to be. I hope you have a great week as you join with friends and failures around the world as we stare failure in the face and laugh at its attempts to limit our effectiveness and creativity. As you do, I know you will 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.

## [440: Economic Terrorism](#)

I trust that your week of celebrating failure went well and that you learned a lot in the process. (I posted a daily failure quote on my Facebook page in case you missed them.) Now it's time to move on. This weekend the Monday Memo turns nine years old! I wrote my first Memo in March, 2001 and I never thought I would still be writing it nine years later. I still have something to say, however, so if you keep reading it, I will keep on writing it.

This week I want to look at what perhaps your greatest obstacle to purpose and that is what I call economic terrorism. To understand this concept, of course you will have to read on.

## STRAWLESS BRICKS

When Moses announced to Pharaoh that it was time for God's people to go, Pharaoh did not like what he heard. Egypt depended on the Israel's slavery for bricks, and Pharaoh wasn't about to let the people go. So he did something to make their life even harder than it had been before Moses showed up:

That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: "You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Make the work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies" (Exodus 6:6-9).

Pharaoh was trying to intimidate his slaves and make them believe that their freedom was unachievable. He increased the pressure so they would work longer and harder for the same results and have less time for anything other than he wanted them to do.

I have found this same dynamic at work in some who decide they will pursue their purpose. After they make that decision, things that they can't explain begin to happen. Their car needs major repairs, they have an unexpected financial setback, or they even lose their job. Sometimes that causes them to conclude, "Maybe this isn't the right time" and they then postpone or even abandon their dream.

## **ECONOMIC TERRORISM**

I refer to Pharaoh's actions as a form of economic terrorism. It was done to strike fear in the hearts of God's people and to distract their attention and activity. It seems that if the enemy can't keep you from your purpose, then he will try to starve you out or frighten you into abandoning your quest. Almost everyone I know, including myself, who is pursuing purpose has gone through hard economic times. The temptation is there to quit but often that is not the time to quit.

God allows these hard times to test you and see if you are serious. Hard times increase your faith and dependence on God. They purify your motives and focus. I have talked to many who stood up to the terrorism and made it through to purpose. I am among those who did.

So if you are in the midst of economic terrorism, hang on. Help is on the way! The challenge is that you don't know exactly when the help will arrive. So take it one day at a time, thank God for what you have, visualize better days and do whatever you can to make it through. Whatever you do, don't lose sight of your purpose, for that purpose will see you through to the end, because your purpose is the will of God for your life. Have a great week!