

# **Life is Filled with Failures, Therefore . . .**

## **We must learn to Fail Forward**

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**Trinitarian Congregational Church**  
**Feb. 24, 2013**  
**Philippians 3:12-14**

*Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*

This message is entitled, *“Life is Filled with Failure, Therefore . . .”*

Life is Filled with Failure. To error is human (period).

Illustrations:

- The best hitters in baseball fail to get a hit 70% of the time
- Cy Young won more games than any pitcher in baseball history - 511.
- He also lost more games than any pitcher in baseball history - 316.  
(he actually lost more games the Pedro Martinez won)
- The year Roger Maris broke Babe Ruth's single season home run record he also set a new record for strikeouts.

Life is filled with failure.

- Tom Brady is one of the top 3 quarterbacks in the history of football.  
He's been the starting QB now for 11 seasons.  
8 of those seasons have ended with heartbreaking losses.  
Yet he comes back the following year as determined as ever.

Life is filled with failure. So we'd better learn how to deal with it. In fact, could make a case that the most successful people in life not only perform better than the rest of us, they also fail better than the rest of us. *They “fail forward,”* to use a phrase from John Maxwell

Maxwell says, *“The difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to failure.”* Successful people learn to fail forward, not backward.

Illustration: *"Shake It Off!"*

A farmer had an ole mule that was close to death. So the farmer went out to a remote part of his farm and dug a large hole. But he just couldn't bear to shoot him. He'd been such a good worker for the farmer. So the farmer did a rather strange thing. He simply lowered the mule down into the hole. He decided to bury that ole mule alive. But he couldn't bear to watch. So he turned his back to the mule and threw the dirt over his shoulder to fill in the hole. When he scooped up and tossed the last bit of dirt he turned around and who was looking him straight in the eye? - that ole mule. When that dirt came down upon him, he just shook it off and stood on top of the pile. And that's what you & I have to do - when life is hard and unfair, when you're in a pit, when your mistakes have put you there - you gotta shake it off and rise above it. Success people learn to shake off their failures because they say to themselves, "I am not a failure. I failed at something, but I am not a failure." As Max Lucado says, *"Our lives are not futile, our mistakes are not final."*

I learned an expression on the golf course once. It's this - *"All you have is your next shot."* You can't dwell on the bad shot you just hit. Great players put it out of their minds immediately. They just focus on the next shot. *"All you have is your next shot."* People who fail forward focus on the next shot.

St. Paul did that. Before he was "St. Paul" he was Saul, a fierce persecutor of the church. He even approved the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. He eventually came to see that his fierce religiosity, everything he had devoted his life to, was keeping him from God. But even after his conversion he knew all kinds of failure. He was kicked out of the synagogues, thrown out of towns, beaten, stoned, imprisoned, you name it.

But St. Paul said this: *"One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."*

All you have is your next shot.

To fail forward we have to not let our mistakes become our identity. And we have to quickly focus on our next shot. But most importantly we have to learn and grow through our mistakes.

Illustration. A cartoon, *"Learning Experiences"*

I once saw a cartoon which had a blackboard and at the top of it was written "Learning Experiences." The board was divided in half - two columns. The cartoon showed someone making a tally of all the learning experiences of

their life. On one side it said, "Successes" - a few tallies. The other side said, "Failures & Mistakes." It was full. We learn a lot when we lose, when we fail.

The playwright William Saurian once said: *"Good people are good because they've come to wisdom through failure. We get very little wisdom from success, you know."*

- Thomas Edison discovered the technology for the phonograph while trying to invent something entirely different.

- Kellogg's Corn Flakes came about when boiled wheat was left in a baking pan overnight.

- Scott Paper Towels were first made by a toilet paper machine that put too many layers of tissue together.

(the above illustrations are from John Maxwell's Failing Forward, pp. 117-118)

The writer and historian Horace Walpole: *"In science, mistakes always precede the truth."*

Illustration. John Maxwell has written a great book entitled, Failing Forward. In it he includes the following story. An art teacher announced on the first day of class that he was dividing the class into two groups. Half of the class would be graded solely on the quantity of work they produced. The other half of the class would be graded solely on the quality of the work they produced. What they were to produce were ceramic pots. He developed a grading scale for how many ceramic pots the one group would have to produce to receive an "A." The other group only had to produce one pot, but it had to be perfect.

When it came time to grade a strange thing occurred. The best ceramic pots came from the group being graded on quantity. What happened was as the Quantity Group was busy churning out pot after pot, they learned from their mistakes and started making a really great product. The other group, the Quality Group, had sat around theorizing about perfection, and in the end had little to show for it.

It's our mistakes that shape us more into who we want to be - because we learn from them, we grow from them. We grow up. But only if we learn to fail forward.

By refusing to let our mistakes define us.

By focusing on what's next, what's before us, not behind.

And by learning and growing from our mistakes.

Never waster a mistake.

Think about it.