

name wasn't on it. I carried over that for months. Looking back, however, I can see that I didn't have the body or the skill to be a very good basketball player. I'd given basketball my best, and it wasn't enough; the most I could have hoped for was a seat on the bench. Instead of spending hours practicing a sport I lacked skill at, I was better off concentrating on tennis, a sport I was better at, and having extra hours for friends and books.

Failure can bring freedom.

After a failure, when you're no longer protecting a reputation, you're free to try things. You're free to look at yourself in a new way, to ask yourself, "What really matters to me?"

I felt this way in college when I failed, by my standards, to be the kind of leader that our Christian Inter-Varsity group needed. I'd thought I was big stuff, and suddenly I felt as though the lowliest, newest Christian had more to offer than I did. It was a strange new way to look at the world — as though nobody really needed me or "depended" on me. But in another way it was a relief. I began to ask myself what I wanted to do. I began to seriously ask God what his plans were for me, instead of assuming that he needed me to be the big organization man.

Failure can bring warmth and vulnerability.

Who do you look for when you fail a test? Do you want to talk to the kid who got an A? No, you seek out someone who scored near you. When you fail, often your self-protective wall crumbles, and people can see the real person. God can find a way into your life, where before you were too busy for him, too proud to depend on him. Often dramatic failure brings *more* friends, not fewer.

Of course, failure isn't guaranteed to do you good. It depends on you. If a failure crushes you, so you conclude that you are a failure rather than a person who failed at one specific thing, then you have failed indeed. If a failure terrifies you, so you run from it, then fear is controlling you. But if you accept the pain and evaluate what the failure means, you can convert it into one of the best experiences of your life. □

Turning Failure into Opportunity

As I reflect on my experience in writing class (and plenty of other places), I've learned that failure can help us in several ways. Here are four:

Failure can give you new information.

When you succeed at the same old thing, you learn nothing. But failing gives you the opportunity to ask why. If you get a D on a paper, go in and ask the teacher what could make it better. If someone you like seems to be avoiding you, take time to ask what you're doing wrong. If an employer turns you down for a job, ask why.

Failure can push you in a new direction.

One of my most devastating failures was being cut from the high school basketball team. When the coach stuck the list of team members on the bulletin board, I couldn't believe my