

If you've ever failed at anything in life, you may have been inclined to give up and call the whole game off. What if you could take the lessons gleaned from that failure and reframe the entire experience? Perhaps you could jump ahead on this game board of life with that knowledge and wisdom and reinvent your life, reclaiming a better future.

WHAT LOOKS LIKE FAILURE TO AN UNTRAINED EYE

By Myla P. Erwin, MA

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Myla P. Erwin

What Looks Like Failure to an Untrained Eye

Failure, seen in the right perspective,
can become our greatest fuel
for success



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ISBN: 978-1-64438-425-1

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2018

First Edition

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Keeping It Real

We got saved in a church where most of the women, precious though they were, had these amazing “white bread” testimonies. They lived such pure and holy lives, I felt completely out of place. I was always humbled to be in their presence because I was such a wretch in comparison. They led Bible studies and prayer groups and knew the Word in its entirety. I was always flipping to the Table of Contents and by the time I found the right verse, they were on to the next one.

One day, a *Sister-sister* asked me how I came to the Lord and I began to share my past. When I finished, she told me I had an amazing testimony. You could have knocked me over with a feather because I thought only certain *holy* women were allowed to have those! I couldn’t wait to get to Bible study and ask someone, “Have I ever told you how I came to know Jesus?” I had a testimony!

Well, I tried it, and as I began to share, one woman actually began to lean away from me and pull her chair back a little. It was almost as if she thought she could catch my past! I watched her face and realized she was intimidated by my story; I saw judgment all over her

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face. It's not like we were good friends, but I had admired this woman and trusted her. Our sons were friends and our children all played on the same homeschool soccer team. I quickly wrapped up my story and vowed never to share it again in that kind of circle.

I learned a valuable lesson. You don't cast your pearls before swine, and there are swine crawling all over the church. I failed to know my audience and it was a painful but necessary lesson, one I have never forgotten or repeated. I was overzealous to connect with these women and let them know the good things God had done for me. I didn't want to shortchange Him because He had brought me from darkness into His marvelous light. However, not everyone can handle everything about you all at once; the truth is, some may never be able to handle it.

I failed to realize that you may have to spoon feed some folks, even church folks, a little bit of your salvation story at a time. I compartmentalize my life now and share bits and pieces with certain people because not everybody needs to know everything about me. Just like smart investors diversify their investment portfolios, wise Saints may have to keep one or two close friends they can share their whole hearts with. Aside from that, you

must diversify yourself by not placing all your life and trust into one basket.

I recognize that the church is supposed to be a safe place, after all, we meet in a room called a sanctuary; but because it is comprised of people who have been hurt and are in various stages of healing, it often fails to be as safe as we need it to be. Heaven will be amazing because we won't be thinking about ourselves; the focus will be on God alone. Unfortunately, we're not home yet.

Shortly after we got saved in that church, we decided to homeschool because "everybody else was doing it" back in 1993, and the truth is, I should not have. I loved **our** kids, but didn't like children in general. I'm just keeping it real. Being held hostage all day with three people under four feet tall made all of us a bit antsy. If you don't believe me, ask them. Most of those other moms who homeschooled *seemed* to truly enjoy their children; I felt as if I was merely enduring mine. They excelled out of sheer terror. When puberty and menopause hit around the same time, after six years together, we agreed it was time to try something different. For us, that decision was a Godsend. I admire women who can homeschool for 12 grades; we did it for

one child from K-5 and for our twins from grade 1-6. There is no shame in my game.

Ironically, all of this occurred in Charlottesville, VA, most recently known for the great racial tension of 2017. It wasn't like that in the 90s, although I imagine there's always an undercurrent in every town. We chose a Montessori school that was just implementing a middle school program. We felt it would be a nice segue into public school since all three of our children would continue to learn in the same small classroom with a total of 14-16 students. I would work off one tuition in the school office; they gave us a scholarship for one child and we paid for the third. How perfect!

The campus was on a hillside just across the way from Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. Unfortunately, our children learned more about racism on that beautiful campus than we could have even imagined, and we pulled them out in April and enrolled them in public school. It was quite an experience, one that broke our hearts as parents, but made our children stronger and taught them that even very smart people can do very stupid things. Two of our children are now published authors and one works for a wonderful organization addressing domestic violence and sexual assault within

all the major sports leagues. They are people I admire and enjoy spending time with. It is humbling to think that God entrusted them into our care because they have turned out so well.

Homeschooling is not for the faint of heart. It wasn't for us in the long-term. I could have continued homeschooling because it was expected of me. To quit, seemed like I was admitting defeat. What would my "*friends*" think? But my kids and I were miserable and those other moms were not responsible for our children, we were. My husband was always traveling and I struggled with patience on a good day.

Did I fail at homeschooling? I'm sure many of the other mothers thought I did. I seldom heard from them as it was, so they never contacted us again once the kids began public school. We had belonged to a homeschool play group, soccer team, support group, etc. We had to leave those groups and our children were no longer invited to associate with ANY of those kids. But we moved on and our children thrived. And eventually, we moved to another state and all three did quite well.

Sometimes, you just have to take the lumps and bruises and "Do You". It can be a lonely ride; however,

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I've learned that you can be lonely in a crowd too. Failing can lead to new ways of learning and new ways of achieving if you'll keep your heart and mind open. Sometimes, nobody fails; differences just create new space.

One of the homeschool moms called me out of the blue a few years ago. It was nice to talk to her and we prayed together at the end of the call. I had always wished we'd connected more when I lived closer to her, but it wasn't part of God's plan. Looking back, we were as different as butterflies and mountains. God made us and we're both beautiful, but we really don't have much in common. You can admire us both, but we're different and that's okay.

I've often wondered just how content some of those other moms really were. We have a tendency to speak "Christianese" and say things like, "I'm too blessed to be stressed," and "I'm too anointed to be disappointed," and "God is so faithful" when people ask us how things are going and meanwhile the house is burning down all around us.

We set new believers up to question their faith and wonder if they're cut out to withstand the trials in their

own lives. We do them a terrible disservice when we're not as transparent as they need us to be. Jesus was real. While it's true He spoke in parables, He didn't flat out lie and misrepresent the truth to people and I don't think we should either.

I had a professor who would often open classes by asking the question, "Where does the Lord find you today?" Never fail, I would be hard-pressed to come up with an answer. You see, I recognized that this required a heart-check. Where I might think I was and where God might see me could actually be worlds apart and I was concerned about that reality. When He asked Adam and Eve where they were in the garden that day after they had eaten the forbidden fruit, it wasn't because He had lost sight of them. He was checking the attitude of their hearts, what I refer to as a "hearttude".

I might think I was walking in love even though I knew full well that if push came to shove, I could just as easily get in my car and speed dial my best friend and launch into a full-blown, "Girl, you won't believe what she just said to me about so and so. Yes, she did, too." And I had just smiled all in girlfriend's face...How Godly was that? Or I might have held someone while they cried and said all the right things, yet been thinking

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to myself, “Well, Lord, this one belongs to You. You fix them. I told them what to do, but You know better than anyone, they just don’t listen.” As if I am totally obedient and get everything in life perfect...

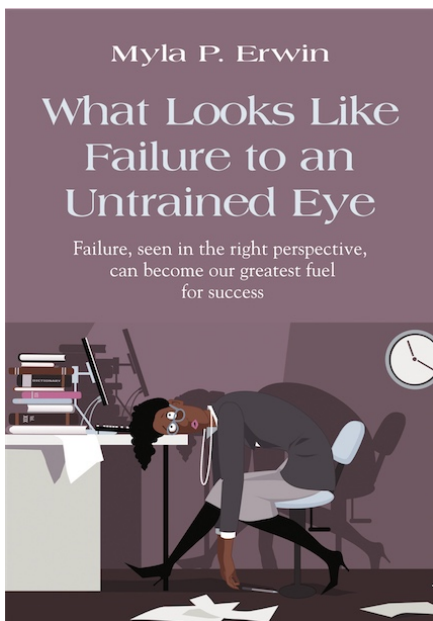
Or I might have sat in church praying up a storm, then rushed home to watch something trashy that I know no child of the Most High has any business watching, as if He takes naps and misses an afternoon. Or the time I said a bad word in Spanish (regularly, because I only know the bad ones), like He doesn’t speak Spanish. You get my drift.

The Word tells us to judge not lest we be judged, and to be mindful that with the same measure we dole it out, we’ll surely get it back. So I ask you to consider searching your hearts, I mean, mine those things real deep. There’s probably some things in there you don’t want other people to know about and I don’t blame you; I’m embarrassed just typing this! But we have to know that there is One we can’t hide anything from because He knows the intentions of our hearts before we do.

In fact, Jeremiah 17:9 tells us, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure; who can understand it?” God can and there is forgiveness and help in

changing these wicked hearts of ours. First, we must recognize how imperfect we are. Then, we must acknowledge we need help and be willing to seek Him daily; for some of us, that may even mean moment by moment. We have to be more honest and transparent about our walk, our shortcomings, and our triumphs for sure, but also about our struggles. We serve a real God who saves real people and if we are going to represent Him to a dying world, we must represent Him and show people what He can do with and through us, not what we can do.

We have NOT arrived; most of us don't even know where the station is and if we did, we'd still miss the bus, train, Uber, etc. Let's stop being phony Christians and be real with ourselves. Maybe then we can impact the world around us. A lot of us are failing at evangelism because we're refusing to be real; it doesn't have to be that way. Let's put some honesty in our fuel tanks and really make a difference!



If you've ever failed at anything in life, you may have been inclined to give up and call the whole game off. What if you could take the lessons gleaned from that failure and reframe the entire experience? Perhaps you could jump ahead on this game board of life with that knowledge and wisdom and reinvent your life, reclaiming a better future.

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