

My fear of failure kept me from developing talents and seeking opportunities for growth.

But What If I Miss?

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When I was six, my dad took me and my older sister to play basketball. It was my first time playing at a real gym. The basketball felt heavy in my small hands and the hoop—even at its lowest setting—seemed overwhelmingly high.

“Don’t worry, just take a shot,” my dad said.

I turned to my dad. “But what if I miss?” I asked.

More than two decades later, I don’t remember if I made that shot or not. But I do remember the fear I felt: “What if I miss? What if my best efforts fall short? What should I do if I fail?”

Fearing to Fail

That same fear of failure has plagued me throughout my life. For a long time, I was naturally skilled in enough activities to cover that fear. But it still manifested itself in small ways. I didn’t try a sport until I knew I was good at it. I avoided school

subjects that did not correlate with my strengths. When I did try new activities that I was not immediately successful in, my solution was to quickly quit and move on to something I was more skilled in.

Then I went on my mission. For the first time, I was forced into an environment where my weaknesses were blaringly evident and I couldn’t easily back out. I had a hard time initiating conversations. I struggled teaching in a new language. I faced rejection multiple times a day. I was constantly failing—taking shots and missing—and there were days when I considered following my usual pattern for failure: giving up and going home.

Trouble with Translating

During this time, I received much-needed inspiration and correction from the story of Oliver Cowdery trying to translate the plates. After a few weeks of scribing for Joseph Smith, Oliver began to wonder if he could also translate the plates.



Joseph asked the Lord and received an answer that Oliver would be allowed to translate. However, the Lord also gave Oliver a few cautions, two of which were to “be patient” and “fear not” (D&C 6:19, 34).

Translating was not as simple as Oliver imagined. When the words didn’t come easily, he became frustrated and soon gave up.

Overlooking Opportunities

As I studied the story, I recognized that Oliver’s problem was similar to my own. He had expected to master translating quickly, and when it became evident that he would not be immediately successful—that he would fail many times as he worked to develop the gift—he went back to scribing, something he was

comfortable with. The Lord’s cautions were accurate: Oliver was not patient with himself or with God, and he feared. So God took the opportunity away from him (see D&C 9:3).

I realized how often my fear of failure had stopped me. I had been so afraid of “missing shots” that I hadn’t even taken them or had given up after a few attempts. In trying to avoid failure, I had missed opportunities at future success. I hadn’t been patient with myself or God, and I had feared.

Oliver Cowdery’s story also gave me hope. Although the Lord told Oliver that he would not be able to translate then, He also promised, “Other records have I, that I will give unto you power that you may assist to translate” (D&C 9:2). Oliver’s

opportunity to translate was not lost, just delayed. Likewise, opportunities I had missed were not lost. The Lord would provide more, if I was willing to be patient and not allow fear of failure to prevent me from trying.

Failing to Fear

I resolved to work through my fear of failure. Even though I still felt anxious talking to strangers or teaching in a foreign language, I improved at both. These skills have helped me in my life, even after my mission.

There are still times that I hesitate to try something new or do something I’m not particularly good at. But I’ve learned to be more patient. I’ve learned to keep taking shots and not be afraid to miss. ■