

**Three skills
I learned from
playing basketball
can help each of
us get past hard
days and still
have a great life.**

Missing Shots and Grabbing Rebounds

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In high school I was on my school's basketball team. I wasn't the best player, so most games found me sitting on the bench, cheering on my teammates. As I observed basketball games from the sidelines, I started noticing three reasons players would miss shots: (1) not aiming correctly, (2) being distracted by the crowd, and (3) being fouled while shooting the ball.

These three reasons for missing a shot in basketball also reminded me of the mistakes, distractions, and discouragement we may experience in life. As we seek to improve our "shooting skills," trying to avoid or ignore distractions that take our eyes off our eternal goals, we can overcome challenges in this life and one day return to our "courts above."¹ Ultimately, pursuing the path to eternal life in Heavenly Father's kingdom really can't be equated with playing an earthly game, but perhaps looking at a few similarities can provide some helpful lessons.

1. Aiming Correctly

Each of us will "miss shots" in our lives by breaking commandments or through simply making mistakes. But there is a vast difference between missing a good shot (making mistakes) and deliberately trying to miss a shot (sinning). Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, "The Lord sees weaknesses differently than He does rebellion."² Rarely do good coaches bench players for missing good shots.

In life, our missed shots, or mistakes, can sometimes lead to miracles. Failure is not the opposite of success; it is part



of success. President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, taught: “We should seek to avoid mistakes, since some mistakes have very painful consequences. But we do not seek to avoid mistakes at all costs. Mistakes are inevitable in the process of growth in mortality. To avoid all possibility of error is to avoid all possibility of growth.”³

Every player will miss shots as they are learning to become better shooters. When a player misses a shot, there is an opportunity to learn from the experience and then to practice and improve—just as we can grow through our experiences by repenting. President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, explained, “Save for those few who defect to perdition after having known a fulness, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no offense exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness.”⁴ The prophet Isaiah recorded: “Wash you, make you clean. . . . Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:16, 18). Be grateful for what your missed shots have taught you!

2. Overcoming Distractions

Stew Morrill was the head basketball coach at Utah State University for 17 years. During his tenure, his basketball teams lost only 32 times while playing on their home court, an extraordinary record. But it wasn’t just due to his brilliant coaching ability—his teams also had the help of a fiercely loyal home crowd. The fans cheered their school’s team in a remarkable way. Quite often, teams from other schools were distracted by the cheers and antics of fans in the home gym, leading to many victories for the Utah State men’s basketball teams.

As we strive to live the gospel, sometimes the distractions and temptations of the adversary cause us to miss shots. For basketball players, the key to taking good shots is keeping their eyes on the basket and trying to not let the fans distract their focus; the key to making wise decisions as followers of Jesus Christ is keeping our eyes on our eternal goal—eternal life with our Father in Heaven—without allowing mortal distractions such as pornography, doubt, sins, and trials to sidetrack

us. These distractions will inevitably creep in. Evil influences and even “conspiring men” (Doctrine and Covenants 89:4) may try to divert us, but having our eyes riveted on our Savior and His restored gospel will strengthen us.

3. Getting Past Fouls

During basketball games, players commonly commit fouls against their opponents, causing them to miss shots. Likewise, many of us have been “fouled” during mortality, whether it’s as simple as being snubbed by a friend or as serious as being abused in some way. Some “fouls” may only damage our ego, while others may require professional help in addition to the Savior’s healing power.

Friends, family members, co-workers, and even strangers might make choices that harm us, but the Lord has provided inspired counsel regarding what to do when we are fouled by others: “Be not hasty . . . to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools” (Ecclesiastes 7:9). “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19). The Savior will help us develop the divine attributes that lead to showing kindness, pardoning faults, and apologizing when needed rather than backbiting, gossiping, and seeking revenge. He knows that every time forgiveness is extended, our capacity to grow and progress is fostered.⁵

If you’re withholding forgiveness from someone, pray for a desire to

forgive and the ability to let go of hurt and anger so that Jesus Christ can help you feel peace and comfort through His Atonement. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles counseled:

*“Let people repent. Let people grow. Believe that people can change and improve. . . . If something is buried in the past, leave it buried. Don’t keep going back with your little sand pail and beach shovel to dig it up, wave it around, and then throw it at someone, saying, ‘Hey! Do you remember *this?*’ Splat! . . .*

“ . . . Soon enough everyone comes out of that exchange dirty and muddy and unhappy and hurt, when what our Father in Heaven pleads for is cleanliness and kindness and happiness and healing.”⁶

Forgiving others who have fouled us means exchanging the desire for a better past (wasting time wishing that something hadn’t happened) for the hope of a better future (freeing your future self from the burden of resentment and anger).

As we think ahead of the present situation and look at the possible outcomes of our reactions, we allow the Holy Ghost to guide our next “shot.” When other people foul us, forgiving them will bless our lives and help us become more like the Savior. Elder Scott explained: “Forgiveness heals terrible, tragic wounds, for it allows the love of God to purge your heart and mind of the poison of hate. It cleanses your consciousness of the desire for revenge. It makes place for the purifying, healing, restoring love of the Lord.”⁷

How to Rebound

At my high school, Coach Bobof was our basketball coach. He focused on one particular skill at each practice: the ability to rebound, or retrieve the ball after a missed shot. We spent hours working on it. Coach Bobof often said that if a team could control the rebounds following missed shots, that team would typically have control of the game's tempo and would ultimately be in a good position to win.

The Lord, through His ordained servants, has taught divine principles about rebounding from missed shots. Don't be unduly concerned about your own missed shots or the fouls committed against you. If you've missed shots because of weakness or sin, turn to the Savior and allow Him to help you improve. Focusing only on your mistakes and feeling guilty will not help you progress. Guilt will accompany sin but will also be "swept away" (Enos 1:6) as we turn to the Savior with a repentant heart. Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reminded us, "God cares a lot more about who we are and who we are becoming than about who we once were."⁸

Rather than dwelling on the past, seek to rebound from missed shots. Ask yourself questions like, "What have I learned from my mistakes and from repenting of my sins? What blessings have come as I have turned to the Savior to help me forgive others? How can a missed shot be a blessing to others? What am I doing differently now because of my mistakes?"

Michael Jordan was one of the greatest basketball players in the United States. He once remarked: "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games; 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."⁹ If you feel like you have missed 9,000 shots or lost 300 games or missed game-winning shots and opportunities, take heart: the Lord will help you rebound through the forgiving power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. ■

NOTES

1. See "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," *Hymns* (1948), no. 70.
2. Richard G. Scott, "Personal Strength through the Atonement of Jesus Christ," *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 83.
3. Dallin H. Oaks, "Sins and Mistakes," *Ensign*, Oct. 1996, 67.
4. Boyd K. Packer, "The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 19.

5. See, for example, the story of Pahoran and Captain Moroni in Alma 60–61.
6. Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Best Is Yet to Be," *Ensign*, Jan. 2010, 26; emphasis in original.
7. Richard G. Scott, "Healing the Tragic Scars of Abuse," *Ensign*, May 1992, 33.
8. Dale G. Renlund, "Latter-day Saints Keep on Trying," *Ensign*, May 2015, 56.
9. Michael Jordan, in Torin Koos, "The 23 Most Inspirational Quotes from Exceptional Athletes," *Deseret News*, Sept. 25, 2014, deseretnews.com.

