Failure

I've been thinking about failure lately. There is a part of our society that looks at failure as one of the worst things that one can experience. In fact, it is now commonplace to place blame, and therefore responsibility, on anything or anyone other than the person who experienced failure. It's easy to fall into that trap. Instead of accepting responsibility and using the experience of failure to grow stronger and better, why can't I just blame someone or something else? Maybe it will make me feel better blaming them because then I can avoid the uncomfortable feeling of failing. Maybe someone else didn't help me enough, or maybe someone else made a bad call, or a wrong decision.

Of course we know what happens when a person hasn't experienced times of struggle and failure during their lifetime. They grow up lacking the work ethic and skills to be successful. Maybe in high school they can't make the athletic team so they turn to the "wrong" crowd for friends. In college perhaps they are struggling with a class that is required for their major, so they drop the class and give up on their dream career. Maybe as an adult when the economy gets bad and they lose their job they give up looking or turn to other unhealthy pursuits.

You get the picture. And you can think of your own examples of people who couldn't deal with failure and let it take them lower. But, I bet you can also think of those who failed and didn't let it stop them. Somehow they worked at it and became stronger.

Years ago some of the other dads and I would take our kids to these wrestling meets for elementary kids. When the kids were young we would just take them to a few tournaments a year so they (or we) didn't get burnt out. It was getting about the time when we usually would quit and I remember one kid's dad saying he couldn't quit yet. He said his son was undefeated and he needed to make sure he lost before he stopped for the season. He went on to say how much more his son learned when he lost compared to when he won. It was important that he teach his son to learn how to respond positively to failure. I think he knew what he was doing because his son ended up with a high school career record of 178-8.

Michael Jordan once said, "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six 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."

Thomas Edison was once described by his teachers as "too stupid to learn anything." He was fired from his first two jobs because he wasn't productive. He failed almost 1,000 times in his efforts to create the light bulb.

There are many examples of famous, successful people who have failed countless times in their lives. The important thing is that they learned not to look at their failure as an ending point, but as a way to learn. They developed an underlying belief that with effort, persistence, and some help (that they sought out themselves), that they would eventually learn what they needed to learn and become successful.

As parents and teachers, isn't this the attitude we want to develop in our children?

In His Service,
Jim Makey, Principal