

Among the things I like about baseball is the persistent reminder that failure is essential to the game. Each time a batter steps into the box, it is more likely than not he will fail. In fact, to succeed consistently twice in four chances is so extraordinary that it has never been achieved over the course of a year in major league history. This is no wonder since the batter faces a pitcher who will throw a baseball from 60 feet, 6 inches away, at unpredictable speeds ranging from 70 to 100 mph. The ball might curve, slide inside or out, arrive slowly or with blazing speed high or low in a very small hitting zone. The batter has less-than-a-second to calculate the necessary speed of the bat swing.

Yet batters, knowing these extraordinary odds, step to the plate to attempt the impossible. Each time it's a risk of failure. Failure is so much a part of baseball, that the rare perfect game is perfect only from the pitcher's perspective; from the batters' perspective, total failure.

Still, the IMPOSSIBLE does happen again and again. Hits occur, even home runs. It's thrilling to witness what is by-all-normal-accounts impossible. (I witnessed Jayson Werth battle 17 pitches in the bottom of the 9th inning of a playoff game only to hit a home run on the 18th pitch to win the game. Given the odds of that happening, is it any wonder there was pandemonium and my heart still races recalling the moment?)

Why do I say all of this? Because I often lose sight of the wise distinction Brené Brown makes between "I failed" and "I am a Failure." To fail is a great opportunity to learn, gain greater skills and grow wiser. Failure may be the best teacher of all. To risk failing is the path to courage and wholeheartedness. "I am a failure" is no teacher at all. It is a heavy burden, a relentless accuser with no purpose other than broken hearted despair. I've known despair.

Each day is an opportunity to risk on love, on goodness, on some worthy project knowing that failing is yet another Fine-Growth-Opportunity. The best counter to I am a Failure and to remember You are the Beloved.

Roy W. Howard