

A person is silhouetted against a sunset over the ocean, holding a large, translucent red umbrella. The sun is a bright yellow circle on the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sky and water. The person stands on a grassy shore in the foreground.

A Mistake Maker's Manifesto & more

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FOREWORD

Like a tattoo forever etched into my heart, I still remember the hours leading up to my mom's death. I sat by her bedside holding her hand. At one point she lost consciousness and I had to call to her several times before she woke up. I will never forget the story her eyes shared with me when she came to; it was a story of joy and hope.

I have no doubt that when she saw my eyes looking back at her they were telling a completely different story; a story of fear, fear and more fear. But her eyes were filled with confidence, complete confidence in a Savior who is forever faithful. If that moment was not poignant enough, she went on to reassure me with these incredible words, "You don't have to worry about me, I am going to be fine." Then she recited the 23rd Psalm.

As I sat there that afternoon watching my mom's life on this earth come to an end, it dawned on me that I wasn't worried about her, I was worried about me.

INTRODUCTION

As I write this eBook, I am reading Mark Batterson's book *Soulprint*. In his book he talks about life-symbols. Life-symbols are those significant points in our history that shape us into who we are today. "Life-symbols mark the inciting incidents, the place where the plot thickens, the defining moments, and the beginning of new scenes."

I have identified many of these life-symbols in my own life which have become markers I can look back on for encouragement whenever I fail. Like this one:

Eat An Umbrella

I was about eight years old when I struggled to find the beauty in the word *beautiful*. I sat at the kitchen table and tearfully told my mom, "I'll *never* be able to spell it." My favorite subject in school was spelling. Every week I would bring my spelling list home and my mom would quiz me. If I couldn't spell each word right on the first or second attempt then I thought my life was completely ruined!

"Beautiful" was one of those challenging words for me. After several attempts at trying to get the *e, a, u* in the correct order, the tears began to fall, "I give up! I'll *never* be able to spell it!"

"Sure you will," my mom assured.

I would try again. And I would fail again. And I would cry again.

That's when my mom said three simple words to me which would forever change my negative perception of the word beautiful.

"Eat an umbrella," she said.

"What?" I asked.

And she repeated her off the wall statement, "Eat an umbrella. Just remember that the first letter of each of those words is the order they are in the word **beautiful**."

Eat An Umbrella

Thirty-two years later and I have never again had a problem spelling the word beautiful. In fact, it's one of my favorite words to spell. I now see how this event from my childhood taught me a valuable life lesson about failing, one that has become deeply ingrained in me. To borrow Mark Batterson's phrase, it has become one of my life-symbols.

Any time I am confronted with challenges or failures, I look back on this incident and it reminds me to seek the beautiful in the midst of my failures and in the midst of life's storms.

"The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched; they must be felt with the heart."

Helen Keller

Why This Book?

A Mistake Maker's Manifesto & More

Everywhere I look, manifestos are cropping up. They're manifesting!
The idea of writing a manifesto started when I asked myself a couple of simple questions.

At what do you consider yourself an expert?

About what topic do you feel you have sufficient knowledge and passion that if shared in an eBook it might encourage others?

The one answer that kept coming back to me over and over again was...

Failure

I have learned how to fail.

I have failed my way to success.

I half considered naming this book Fail Your Way to Success.

Now this doesn't mean I am encouraging you to intentionally fail. Who wants to do that? Certainly not this recovering perfectionist! No one consciously looks for ways to fail. No one pursues their goals and their dreams eager to fall down.

However, the one thing I do want you to consider as you read the following pages is how you approach and respond to failure.

There's a scene in the movie *Toy Story* where Buzz Lightyear, the talking toy space ranger, insists he knows how to fly. He proceeds by trying to prove it to his skeptical new friend, Woody. He jumps off the bed and bounces off one object to the next, "flying through the air," before finally coming to a landing. Woody comments, "That's not flying, that's just falling with style."

This scene reminds me that there are times in life when we will not accomplish our goal. There are times when we will completely miss the mark and fall.

But, we can learn how to fall with style and with grace.

As we journey through life, failure and falling down is inevitable. However, if we will learn from it, and if the mistake forces us to grow in ways we never would have grown had it not happened, then falling can be done with style.

- When we learn to admit our failures...then we fall with style.
- When we learn to ask for forgiveness...then we fall with style.
- When we don't repeat our failures but allow them to teach us a better way of proceeding...then we fall with style.

When we fall with style, our biggest failures in life can help to bring us to where we needed to be all along.

Forming New Habits

Often, the lessons we learn from failure aren't tangible or they can't easily be measured. But they still exist. *Failure grows us in ways that success never will.* There are four essential habits that I must incorporate into my life on a daily and ongoing basis in order for me to move from failure to success.

Habit 1: Consume His Truth

Habit 2: Conquer your Fears

Habit 3: Chase after Life

Habit 4: Cling to Hope

Habit One

Consume His Truth

Consuming truth is the first step toward discovering the beautiful in the midst of your failure.

Stop Believing the Lies

*“If you think you have no choice but to do what you do now,
you’ve already made a serious error.”*

Seth Godin

If you want to move from failure to success, there comes a time when you must stop listening to the lies you tell yourself.

- “I’ve gone too far in the wrong direction.”
- “It’s too late to start over.”
- “It’s too late to make a different choice.”
- “I made my bed now I have to lie in it.”
- “I’ll ignore the pain and it will go away.”
- “I’ll hide behind my mask because it’s safe there.”

Coffee on the Rocks

A failed marriage brought me back to my dad's doorstep in Arizona when I was 27 years old. I had just finished a decade of going from one failure to the next. It was a season of starting over. My only possessions were two dogs, a car full of clothes and kitchen pots and pans. It was hard to come home after living on my own for several years, but I needed to get back on my feet. I knew my dad would have a hard time treating me as an adult. I was his only little girl. After discussing my concerns with him, he suggested I stay in the "guest house." This offered independence and privacy. Who could pass that up?

The guest house.

Though thankful for a place to live, I jokingly referred to my accommodations as the "shack out back." It was originally a storage building that my dad had converted into living space. It had one large room which I used as my bedroom. In the corner of the room was a wood burning stove for heat. My new home also (thankfully) had a bathroom. I knew this would be a special experience from the moment I moved in and discovered two dead mice floating in the bathroom toilet.

During the winter, I would prepare a fire at night in the wood burner stove. After several trial and error attempts, I became pretty handy at making a fire that was hot enough to keep me warm at night but not so hot that I was breaking out in a sweat in my tiny living space. My dad also had an extra microwave oven which fit perfectly on the small counter in the bathroom. I was able to cook my morning oatmeal, make my morning coffee, and shower all in the same room. That's pretty cool, depending on your perspective.

But this was a season in my life when I was deeply grateful for things we often take for granted. I was thankful for a bed. I was thankful for a bathroom. I was thankful for a microwave.

Every morning before the sun rose, my routine would be to stick a cup of water in the microwave and make myself a cup of instant coffee. Definitely not my first choice, but since I didn't have and couldn't afford a coffee pot, I was content. I would then take my instant coffee, grab my Bible, wrap up in a blanket and head outside. I always went to the same spot, a big flat rock which was perfect for sitting on and relaxing. Eventually, my dad started to refer to me as a rock lizard because he always saw me sitting on this one rock.

While I lived in the “shack out back,” I returned to that rock every single morning. I looked forward to this time of reacquainting myself with the Lord. After ignoring the Lord for years, we were now talking again on a daily basis. Some days, I would just sit quietly sipping my coffee while He spoke truth into my heart. Other times, I asked for advice or cried out to Him for wisdom. Even though it was a season filled with days of uncertainty, I loved sitting on that rock every morning.

Even though my world seemed to be falling apart, I treasured this time with the Lord.

Choosing to go to this rock every morning was the beginning of huge life change for me. It was the beginning of a new journey and a new chapter. Failure will often bring you to a crossroad where an important question must be answered:

Do I continue doing things the same way I have always done them or do I choose to take a long, hard look at how I got where I am?

Eleven years later, and every morning when I wake up I still have a choice to make. I have to decide:

Will I choose to go to the Rock? Will I choose to consume truth?

After years of running from the truth, I was now ready to hear and consume the answers found in God's Word. For years I made the mistake of looking for stability in my life apart from Christ. What I discovered on this roller coaster journey was that nothing and no one is capable of being my Rock and my Foundation except Christ.

*“The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock in whom I take refuge.”*

(Psalm 18:2)

*“Keep me safe, O God, I’ve run for dear life to you.
I say to God, “Be my Lord!” Without you, nothing makes sense.”*

(Psalm 16:1-2 Message)

I am thankful I can *now* make this choice to run to my Rock and consume truth with a cup of freshly ground coffee, brewed in my very own coffee machine!

One of the reasons I love reading the Bible is because it is filled with pages and pages of mistake makers. Throughout Scripture we find God using some of the biggest mistake makers in history to spread His message of hope.

God referred to King David “*as a man after His own heart*” and yet David committed adultery, covered it up, and was guilty of murder.

God referred to the Apostle Paul as “*His chosen instrument*” and yet this chosen instrument spent many years of his life (before seeing the light) persecuting and murdering those who loved the Lord.

God referred to Peter as “*the rock*” and yet this rock on three occasions lacked courage and crumbled when his faith was put to the test.

When we read God's Word, His Truth, we discover *this truth*...

God chose mistake makers *then*.
God chooses mistake makers *now*.

When our mistakes and our sins threaten to slow us down, we need to think about these chosen men of God. None of them were defined by their biggest failures. It was not the legacy they left behind. Instead, all of them were defined by the greatness of their God.

Start Believing the Truth

Instead of feeding on the lies we tell ourselves when we fail, we must understand that failure can lead to success when we focus on His Truth.

- God is bigger.
- It is never too late to begin again.
- Nothing you have done or will do can ever make God love you any less.
- God specializes in resurrecting dead and broken things.

What are you struggling with today?

What are the failures and the sins holding you back from the life God is calling you to live?

Feast On This Truth

God's grace is bigger than your biggest failure.

Fill in the blank:

God is bigger than _____.

Say it. Claim it. Believe it. Live it.

Love, I have waited for you
And love, I was wounded for you
Won't you look into my eyes
Through the pain and through your pride
And find I am true
You're the one I can't deny
And I'll never leave your side
I gave my life for you
So what are you waiting for?

~Tenth Avenue North
"On and On"

Habit Two

Conquer Your Fears

What was I thinking? Cross country running? I had never run more than a half mile in my life. Sure, I kind of enjoyed sprinting short distances, but what made me think I could possibly do this?

I was in the 8th grade, at a new school, and during a brief moment of insanity decided it would be fun to join the middle school cross country team. I had just finished my first “practice run” with the team and looking back, I am sure the run was only a mile or two, but at the time it felt like the Boston Marathon. My plan was to try cross country in the fall, track and field in the winter, and then maybe softball or swimming in the spring.

What was I thinking? Who knew that when they said cross country they actually meant it!

Completely discouraged, I walked toward the girl’s locker room after this long and excruciating death run across numerous dirt paths through the Arizona desert. It was not at all what I was expecting. And even worse, out of the dozen or so people on the team, I finished the first run in last place!

How embarrassing! I am definitely not doing that again! Cross country is not for me. I quit!

“You’re not gonna quit are you?” The voice made me jump. I turned around and coming up behind me was the 6’10” tall cross country coach, Mr. Spencer.

“Uh, no,” I answered, too shy to actually say what I *really* wanted to say to the long-legged man approaching me. “No, I’m not going to quit.”

I ended up staying on the team that entire semester and hating pretty much every single minute of my experience. Every practice I came in last. Every practice I was reminded that I wasn’t very good at running. I didn’t excel at it. Everyone on the team was so much better than I was at running. Since I never ever even came close to beating anyone, the only choice I had was to kind of make it a competition against myself. I was determined that I would never stop and walk. No matter how frustrated I got, I would at least be able to say at the end of each run that I kept running. But what really annoyed me were my team members who would stop and walk for a bit along the way during our runs and still end up beating me!

Finally, the time came to run against other cross country teams. You can probably guess I came in last every single meet. Every single meet...except the last meet! At the last meet of the season, my rule of not stopping and giving up finally paid off. During the last stretch, Eileen (Fast as a Herd of Turtles) Muldowney rounded the corner and came upon a runner from the rival school that had given up and decided to walk. After weeks and weeks of always bringing up the rear, I was about to make history. As I neared the finish line, my teammates saw me coming and started cheering me on and running alongside me. I crossed the finish line that day second to last.

Looking back on this experience, I wish I could say that it inspired me to go on and try track and field or swimming or softball later that year. But it didn't. *I made it to the finish line and I stopped running.* I was scared. Scared of trying something new and possibly not succeeding. Scared of not measuring up. Scared of coming in last. Oh, how I wish I could go back knowing what I know now and choose differently.

"In running, it doesn't matter whether you come in first, the middle of the pack, or last. You can say 'I have finished.' There is a lot of satisfaction in that." ~Unknown

Years later, a coworker convinced me to start running with her during the week. She taught me how to enjoy running. She made it fun. I didn't need to be the fastest runner. I didn't need to worry about coming in last. I run simply for the joy of running. And that has made all the difference.

I have joyfully (and slowly) run a 5K, a 10K, two ½ marathons, and countless miles around my neighborhood!

As I write this section in the book it happens to be the first day of April...April Fools' Day. I just returned from an eight mile run. If someone had told me ten years ago that *this girl* would be happily running eight miles today, I would have thought it was an April Fools' Day joke!

I often wonder what my life would be like today had I chosen to not face my fear of failure and take that first step out of my comfort zone, lace up my running shoes, and decide to run again. What if I had given up before experiencing the miracle? I would have missed out on so much joy over the past decade.

Conquer Your Fears & Reap Results

When we face our fears, our faith grows.

When we face our fears, we begin to understand that walking through the uncomfortable is vital if we have a desire to experience all the life God has in store for us.

When we face our fears, we begin to see that although the choice we are being asked to make might be one of the most difficult or painful decisions in our lives, it is also the only way to discover freedom from our fears.

What is one scary choice you need to make today?

This might hurt, it's not safe
But I know that I've gotta make a change
I don't care if I break,
At least I'll be feeling something
'Cause just okay is not enough
Help me fight through the nothingness of life

I don't wanna go through the motions
I don't wanna go one more day
without Your all consuming passion inside of me
I don't wanna spend my whole life asking,
"What if I had given everything,
instead of going through the motions?"

~Matthew West
"The Motions"

Habit Three

Chase After Life

How we choose to react to failure and challenges is one of the most important keys to success. Will the failure paralyze us or will we view it as an opportunity to pursue alternatives?

We either allow failures to defeat us or we allow them to help shift our perspectives in order to tackle the situation from a different angle. We've all heard Einstein's definition of insanity - doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. This behavior will eventually get the best of us.

Failure must compel us to look for another route.

Alfred Mosher Butts was one person who knew this to be true. Mr. Butts was an unemployed architect during the Great Depression who happened to also love words and games. I can only imagine how discouraging it must have been to be unemployed during the roughest financial crisis in history. But Mr. Butts took the opportunity to begin working on combining two of his favorite things to create a board game. He moved forward with his idea and didn't allow failed attempts to deter him from the dream he envisioned.

The game was originally named *Lexico*, then *New Anagram*, then *Alph*, then *Criss-Cross*, then *Criss-Crosswords* before finally receiving the familiar name it has today. Have you heard of *Scrabble*? It took nearly twenty years for Mr. Butts' idea to become a commercial success. Parker Brothers, Milton Bradley and many other game manufacturers rejected the game when Mr. Butts first brought the idea to them.

However, in 1952, Jack Strauss, the Chairman of Macy's department store in New York, happened to play the game while he was on vacation. After returning home he went to his game department wanting to purchase the game but they did not carry the game. Thus began the growing popularity of the famous word game so many of us still enjoy playing today.

What I've learned from Mr. Butts...

- As we pursue our dreams, we will fail many times on the road to success...don't let that stop you.
- As we pursue our dreams, there will be people on the road who don't share the same enthusiasm for our dreams...don't let that stop you.
- As we pursue our dreams, success will rarely follow our timetable...don't let that stop you.

Keep moving forward after failing.

Keep persevering after failing.

Keep learning after failing.

*The beautiful you are seeking is discovered
along the journey to your destination.*

Keep chasing after life.

Habit Four

Cling to Hope

The final habit, though certainly not the least, is the need to cling to failure's best friend, hope.

My favorite movie is *The Shawshank Redemption*. It's one of those movies that if it happens to be on TV, I need to pause and watch it. Here is one of my favorite quotes from the movie:

*“Hope is a beautiful thing, maybe the best of things.
And no good thing ever dies.”*

Andy Dufresne

Andy Dufresne is the main character who has been wrongly accused and incarcerated for the murder of his wife. While in prison, Andy meets Red, a man serving a life sentence for a murder he did commit.

Andy is hope personified. Despite his circumstances, Andy never gives up hope. His attitude and his actions begin to shine light into Red's dark, dreary world. Red had given up. Red had allowed his past failures to define him. His friendship with Andy was the turning point in his life.

Here is a fact about hope:

When failure collides with hope nothing is ever the same.

“I find I’m so excited I can barely sit still or hold a thought in my head. I think it is the excitement only a free man can feel, a free man at the start of a long journey whose conclusion is uncertain. I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend, and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope.”

Red

Red finally had hope.
And hope...

...never gives up.
...always perseveres.
...inspires you to journey on.
...patiently waits for you.

The Truth Hurts - The Truth Heals

I used to drink too much. My drinking certainly ranks up there as one of my biggest failures. But it also ranks up there as one of the moments in my life when God's greatness and the hope He is able to provide proved to be infinitely bigger.

After months and months of daily tug-of-war matches with God, I finally started to come to terms with what He wanted me to do. He wanted me to turn my drinking over to Him completely. I remember arguing with God about this. I feel like this was a huge turning point in my journey with the Lord.

If I could encourage people to do one thing, it would be to admit to God the sin you are struggling with even when you have no desire to change.

It was at this crucial point when I was so tempted to turn the volume down and walk the other way that I needed to listen to God and cling to Him even tighter. Our human tendency is to rebel and do it our own way. *Listening to God even when it hurts takes courage.*

I learned a lifelong lesson during this season in my life. The Lord can use even the smallest amount of willingness. And simply being willing to admit the truth that I didn't want to change, opened the door of communication with Him.

I remember telling the Lord in a rather kicking and screaming way, "Okay, Lord. I have NO desire to stop drinking and you know that. If you want me to stop drinking, then you are going to have to give me that desire. Lord, make my desire not to drink stronger than my desire to drink. Lord, change my heart."

I wish I could say that I gave my alcohol problem over to God right then, but it took another good month of praying for the desire to change, struggling and falling down again and again, before it happened. November 27, 2001, another morning of coming to God full of guilt and shame. I was exhausted. I didn't want to struggle anymore, emotionally, physically or spiritually. I remember saying, "Lord, I give up. I am so tired." And an amazing thing happened. It was like the Lord responded, "*Eileen, those were the words I've been waiting to hear.*" And, at that moment, I experienced the most incredible peace I have ever had.

That morning was different from all the other mornings. I had a strength inside of me and calm inside of me that I had never known. It was like the Lord had reached down into the pit I had been trapped in for years and grabbed hold of my hand. This time I wasn't going to let go. For the first time in the process, I was depending on His strength and not my own. He was fighting the battle for me. The months to come were by no means easy, but I had a BIG GOD fighting on my behalf.

I felt like I had been living Psalm 32 where David writes, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me, my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord' - and you forgave the guilt of my sin."

I knew that I desperately needed to depend on Christ, to listen to Him on a daily basis, *to consume His truth every day*. Without Him, life was hopeless.

A Hope-filled Prayer

It's been over ten years since I first prayed that prayer, *"Lord, make my desire not to drink stronger than my desire to drink. Lord, change my heart."*

I've come to understand that this prayer, to change our hearts, is the most productive request we could ever ask of God when we are seeking to overcome our failures and our fears.

This prayer acknowledges...

...that our hearts need help.

...that we can't succeed on our own.

...that we are willing to place our hope in the One who is more than capable of transforming our hearts.

...that we are ready to completely trust Him to move us beyond the sum of our failures and mistakes.

When we resolve to cling to Him and trust His direction no matter where He is guiding us, He changes our hearts in the process and takes us on an incredible journey that restores the broken mess and redeems the painful regrets.

He grows us and heals us in ways we never thought possible.

He makes things beautiful again.

It's time to seek Him out with all your heart.

Consume His Truth
Conquer Your Fears
Chase After Life
Cling to Hope

*"Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess,
for he who promised is faithful."
(Hebrews 10:23)*

About The Author



Eileen Knowles is a small town Arizona girl who studied English at The University of Arizona a long, long time ago. She now lives in small town North Carolina with her husband, Roger, their eight-year old son, and one quirky dog named Bisbee.

When she is not working part-time loving on animals at the local animal hospital, she thoroughly enjoys drinking coffee, running, playing *Scrabble*, leading Women's Bible Study at her church, and writing about how cool it is to journey through life with Jesus holding her hand.

Eileen is passionate about leaving a legacy for her son and encouraging others along the way who might need a dose of hope poured into their weary lives. You can find her taking *The Scenic Route* at www.eileenknowles.com.

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