

The God of Second Chances



Christopher News Notes

*“Success is not final, failure is not fatal:
it is the courage to continue that counts.”*

— *Winston Churchill*

**WE ALL WANT TO SUCCEED IN LIFE
AND BE GREAT AT EVERYTHING WE DO.**

Even in spiritual matters, we are called to perfection. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ describes the perfect love we are to have for all people, including our enemies, instructing us, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt. 5:48)

But Christ also teaches us to recognize our fallen state, and He guides us to understand that the way we respond to failure can actually

help us become more successful and grow closer to God, who is always there for us, offering second chances.

‘The Key to Success is Failure’

“I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”
—Thomas Edison

Thomas Edison is widely considered America’s greatest inventor. He invented the light bulb, the phonograph, and the motion picture camera. But as a child he was kicked out of school because teachers believed he was too slow to learn. His mother homeschooled him, and by the time he was 10 years old, he was already conducting experiments in his own chemistry laboratory. His early comeback taught him perseverance, which sustained him in times of trial, such as the period of his life when he failed over 9,000 times in trying to create the light bulb before finally getting it right.

Considered the greatest basketball player of all time, Michael Jordan once said, “The key to success is failure.” As a high school sophomore he was cut from his school’s varsity basketball team, losing the one spot they had for a sophomore to a friend who was taller. This prompted him to train rigorously in preparation for the following season. Years later, he was quoted as saying, “I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions, I have been entrusted to take the game-winning shot, and I missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

Failure teaches us to make adjustments that lead to greater success in life. But failure can also teach us to change our outlook—and that kind of change helps us grow closer to God through the appreciation we gain for the purpose of our endeavors.

Carolina Kostner grew up in Northern Italy and was considered the greatest figure skater her country had ever produced. In 2006, at the age of 19, she competed in her first Olympics, which were hosted by the Italian city of Turin. Kostner was her

Actor Mark Wahlberg has found great success in Hollywood, but his life could have gone in a different direction. During his youth in Dorchester, Massachusetts, Wahlberg’s life included drug addiction, being a gang member, and prison time for assaulting a Vietnamese man named Johnny Trinh.

One of the people who helped get Wahlberg on the right track was his parish priest, Father James Flavin. Wahlberg told the *Daily Mail*, “He was always there for me, through the good times and the bad...He always had faith that I could change my ways.” And Wahlberg did exactly that. Today, the married husband and father says, “My Catholic faith is the anchor that supports everything I do in life.”

And what does Trinh now think of the young man who attacked him back in 1988? He told the *Mail Online*, “He was young and reckless, but I forgive him now. Everyone deserves another chance.”

nation’s flag-bearer and many believed she would bring home Italy’s first Olympic figure skating singles medal ever. But she skated, as the critics say, “poorly,” and finished 9th overall.

For the 2010 Olympics, Kostner ventured to Vancouver, Canada, intent on redeeming herself and bringing the long-coveted medal back to her country. But she fell three times in the free skate and wound up finishing 16th. After that, she spent some time with friends and family away from the pressures of competition and considered retiring for good. But in 2014, having decided against retirement, she returned to the Olympics to represent her country for a third time.

Talking about the road that brought her to that point, she told the *Chicago Tribune*, “I think everybody has ups and downs in their lives. We learn from the biggest disappointments, right? You learn how to be humble to yourself and to be humble to others. You learn to respect and learn the value of a medal much more...It was really hard times. So I told myself, no results any more, just skating.”

With the idea of winning a medal completely out of her mind, Kostner skated with artistry and a pure love for the sport. Ironically, this was the time she won the medal she had longed for, bringing home the bronze with a series of routines that included a short program skate to “Ave Maria.” Speaking to *ESPN*, she said, “This medal is absolutely worth gold. I will cherish it in my heart. It feels so great that patience and sacrifice and

hard work and faith are paid at the end.”

Grace After Disgrace

In an op-ed column for *The Wall Street Journal* titled “How to Find Grace After Disgrace,” Peggy Noonan tells the story of John Profumo, England’s Secretary of State for War during the early 1960s. Caught in a scandal of infidelity, he lied about his misdeeds and threatened anyone who repeated the rumors with a libel suit. But his wife, the actress Valerie Hobson, encouraged him to come clean—and he did.

Noonan then goes on to describe the unusual comeback of John Profumo. “He did the hardest thing for a political figure,” she writes. “He really went away. He went to a place that helped the poor, a rundown settlement house called Toynbee Hall in the East End of London. There he did social work—actually the scut work of social work, washing dishes and cleaning toilets. He visited prisons for the criminally insane, helped with housing for the poor and worker education. And it wasn’t for show, wasn’t a step on the way to political redemption. He worked at Toynbee for 40 years.”

Profumo’s wife stood by him, and they dedicated their lives to helping others. He eventually became president of Toynbee Hall, and towards the end of his life was honored by Margaret Thatcher and the Queen for his service to the poor.

Profumo’s story demonstrates how a comeback from personal misdeeds can lead to success that

transcends worldly power. When we let go of our preconceived notions of what a second chance should look like, God can lead us on the path to true and lasting glory.

In a rare interview granted in 2003, Profumo was asked what he'd learned from his time at Toynbee. He thought about this for a moment and then said, "Humility."

Serving Second Chances

When Chef Chad Houser was asked to give an ice cream-making lesson to juvenile offenders at a Dallas County detention facility, he worried that he would encounter disrespectful and unruly young men. "I had stereotyped them before I even met them," Houser told journalist Chris Peak for a NationSwell article titled "Café Momentum: Serving Second Chances." But the eight students who awaited him at the facility proved to be eager learners. Houser later brought them to an ice cream-making competition at Dallas's central market, and one of the young men actually took home first prize, outdoing chefs and culinary students with his unique flavor.

Recounting the moments right after the victory, Peak writes, "The young man ran up to Houser and told him, 'I just love to make food and give it to people and put a smile on their face.'" He then asked for advice on where to seek work upon his release. Houser merely said, "I think you should work for whoever hires you first."

Houser pondered that exchange for over a year,


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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feeling he had let the young man down in not having a better answer for him. Closing up his restaurant one night, he approached his business partner and said, "I just want to open a restaurant and let these kids run it." His idea culminated in the creation of Café Momentum, a restaurant with a year-long post-incarceration program where young men and women learn to prepare gourmet cuisine from scratch and serve it to a discerning clientele.

Houser emphasizes that the most important aspect of the meal served at Café Momentum is that stereotypes are broken down for people who wouldn't ordinarily cross paths in life. The patrons realize that talent can come from anywhere, and the workers come to see a whole city willing to give them a second chance.

For Houser, the endeavor is clearly about more than just offering a second chance to those on the margins of society. It is also his own second chance to utilize his talents in a way to transform the world around him. His efforts demonstrate how God works through us to create second chances for each other, and, when we respond to that call, amazing things are possible.

A few days before Café Momentum's first graduation, a young man approached Houser and gave him a hug, saying, "You've changed my life." He confessed that when he first gained his freedom, he was convinced he'd wind up back in prison. Describing for Houser the state of despair that he was in, he said, "Last year, I knew I was going to prison, so I was preparing myself to go."

Then sharing the impact Houser's program had on him, he said, "But you know, I'm never going to prison. I'm not. I'm going to succeed. And I just wanted to say thank you."

*"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
His mercies never come to an end; They are
new every morning; great is Your faithful-
ness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my
soul, 'therefore I will hope in Him.'"*

—Lamentations 3:22-24