

Recovering From



Failure

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Leon Lett. Nice name. It has a bit of a ring to it. However, unless you are a true NFL football fan, it's probably not a name that rings a bell for you. So let me fill you in on Leon.

Leon played in the NFL with the Dallas Cowboys from 1991 to 2000 and the Denver Broncos in 2001. Leon was a great defensive tackle and the anchor of an even greater defensive line that helped the Cowboys win three Super Bowls during Leon's career (1993, 1994, 1996). He even made All Pro (league all-star for his position). The first time in 1994 and the second time during the 1996 season.

Unfortunately, for most NFL fans, these are not the memories of Leon left over from his great career. Instead, two memories of spectacular failure stand out. In fact, ESPN television rated two of his plays in the top three of their "25 Biggest Sports Blunders." NFL fans ranked his two blunders as numbers one and three, while a panel of sports experts rated them number two and three.

The first blunder occurred during Super Bowl XXVII against the Buffalo Bills. The fans rated it number one. The experts rated it number two. Leon recovered a Bills fumble late in the game. As he scooped up the ball and started his rumble to the end-zone, there were no Buffalo Bills even near him. He was on his way to a sure touchdown. Any touchdown for a defensive lineman is a career highlight...let alone a touchdown in a Super Bowl. Leon must have had great visions of seeing his running form all over the evening sports reports. He approached the end-zone with such ease that he slowed down and stretched out his arms. That's when everything went wrong. The fumble rumble turned into failure because the Buffalo Bills' Don Beebe came racing from behind to slap the ball out of Leon's right hand absolutely micro-seconds before Leon crossed the goal line. The ball bounced through the end-zone resulting in a touchback that cost Leon his touchdown, his glory, and his moment of fame. Instead, he ran into the end-zone and NFL history with a moment of infamy. Failure.



So, okay, what did it matter. The Cowboys had an overwhelming 52—17 lead and they went on to win the game easily. Well, beyond the personal embarrassment for Leon, the blunder prevented the Cowboys from gaining the record for most points scored in a Super Bowl.

Perhaps sadder yet is how that one instant of bravado overshadowed the rest of Leon's game. Like the All Pro everyone knew him to be, Leon sacked the Bills quarterback and forced two fumbles — one of which led to a Dallas touchdown. Yet, all we remember is his moment of failure. Too sad. Too bad. And not over.

Just 10 months later in the next season, Leon gave us another. This one directly cost the Cowboys a game. The blooper (ranked number three on both the fans and experts list) occurred while the Cowboys were leading the Miami Dolphins 14-13 with just seconds left on the clock. The Dolphins attempted a 41 yard field-goal. If they made it the game would be theirs. Miss it,

Dallas would retain the lead and gain the victory. The Dolphins center snapped the ball. The holder lined it up. The place-kicker took his two steps and swept his foot. The contact was solid, however a Cowboy player slipped through the line to block the kick. The ball should have fell silent and dead effectively ending the play and the Dolphins chances for victory. Leon's teammates jumped and shouted in celebration, but not Leon. Leon committed yet another bonehead football no-no. He attempted to recover the football as though it had been fumbled. In his attempt, he knocked it away from himself and, since he had touched it, put the ball back into play. The Dolphins recovered the ball on the one yard line. They kicked again. This time the ball sailed through the goal-posts. Miami 16. Dallas 14. Miami, winners. Dallas, losers. Everyone else—safe. Leon—the scapegoat, the failure...King of the Bloopers.

And, like before, this third greatest sports blooper overshadowed his greatness. The rest of the season was fantastic. Leon anchored the defensive line once again. The Cowboys went on to another victory in Super Bowl XXVIII. During this second of Leon's three Super Bowl victories, Leon forced a fumble from the Buffalo Bill's running back, Thurman Thomas, while the Cowboys trailed 13-6. James Washington, the Cowboys safety, recovered the ball and took it 46 yards for a touchdown. The touchdown brought the Cowboys even with the Bills and turned the momentum to their advantage. The Cowboys went on to win 30-13.

For Leon, the late-night and Saturday afternoon highlights never recall those great moments... only the bloopers...two of the top three greatest sports failures of all time according to both fans and experts. Not the victories. Not the success. Not the high-fives. Not the cheers. Just the jeers. Just the agony of personal defeat. Just the lonely specter of personal failure.

One can only wonder how bad Leon must have felt. How he might still feel.

I've been there. You probably have too.

Like death and taxes, failure is one of those things in life we all have in common. We may not have our failures splashed on TV screens, but we sure do know how Leon feels. Failure hurts. Failure brings misery. And, its brother, sorrow, is sure to arrive as well.

So, okay, we know that failing is the pits. The question we need to ask, however, is this: does failing mean that we are failures? To answer the question we need to shift our attention away from Leon to another man—a man called John Mark. If John Mark is any indicator, success and failure are not far apart and failing does not mean we cannot still be successful. John Mark is a testimony to one simple fact: failing does not necessarily make us failures.

So, let's do a little digging in the Bible to see just what John Mark's life teaches us about failure and how to recover from it. We'll begin in the New Testament book called Acts.

Read Acts 13:1-13 and Acts 15:36-41. Once you feel comfortable with the flow of events answer the questions on the following page.

Who was John Mark

1. In Acts 13:5, what do we learn about John Mark?
2. In Acts 13:13, what do we learn about John Mark?
3. In Acts 15:36-41, what were the results of John Mark's actions?
4. What does this tell us about failure?

Now let's ask some personal questions

1. Are there areas in which you have failed? If so, what are they?
2. Does this mean you are a failure? Yes or No
3. How about others? Are you holding their failures against them?
4. Do their failings make them failures? Yes or No

Now do some more reading. Read Acts 15:39-41 again along with 2 Timothy 4:11

What else do we learn about John Mark

1. Was this the end for John Mark?
2. According to Acts 15:39, who continued to serve the Lord with John Mark?
3. According to Acts 15:40, what did the Apostle Paul do?
4. Yet, many years later, according to 2 Timothy 4:11, what did Paul ask of Timothy?
5. What does this indicate about John Mark?

Okay, so failing at something does not mean that we are failures. Instead, failure is something we need to deal with, learn from and then move on. Perhaps the following suggestions may help in the process.

In 1 John 1:9 we read

If we confess our sins, he (God) is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The word *confess* literally means to “speak in agreement with.” In this context, then, it would mean that we should agree with God about anything and everything he believes about our sin.

He believes the sin was and is wrong.

He believes we are not in bondage to the sin.

He believes we have every spiritual resource to defeat the sin.

He believes we should never repeat the sin.

He believes that since we are forgiven we should put away the guilt of the sin.

And, he believes we will break his heart again should we allow the sin to reign in our lives.

In Matthew 5:23 and 24 we read

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Jesus said when there is failure between us and another we need to initiate reconciliation. Well, that is not too difficult to understand: if and when we fail others, we need to ask their forgiveness, heal the relationship, and press forward.

Finally, we need to accept the fact that while we do and will fail, Jesus Christ prevents us from being failures. While Romans 3:23 tells us that “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*” Romans 5:8 tells us that “*God demonstrates his own love toward us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us.*” Our part is to accept his work on our behalf. Romans 10:9 says “*that if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*” I don’t know about you, but that does not sound like failure!

Here’s some more study you can do on your own

Read Philippians 3:1-14. How can you apply this passage to your failures?

Read Proverbs 3:1-35. Can you list at least five items from this passage to help yourself and others avoid as well as deal with failure?