

Hey, it seems like national-level politicians on the campaign trail are always up for promising widespread financial prosperity for all citizens—especially in a large country like America! And you know, that’s not necessarily a bad thing! Happily, there *is* an *essential ingredient* that’s an absolute “must” for a nation’s populace to be widely prosperous. But unfortunately, many politicians don’t choose to believe what that ingredient is. And some ordinary citizens often don’t want to, either. Still, on the other hand, many citizens in America actually *do* foundationally believe in the necessity of that ingredient...even though it might strike them as wrong when they first hear it. That’s because it’s counter-intuitive for many folks!

Oh, so, just what *is* the essential ingredient for widespread prosperity in a country? Well, it’s *the freedom to fail*...for both companies and individuals! Yeah, you heard that right: the essential ingredient for widespread prosperity is the freedom and the opportunity for people to fail! Yes, to fail at the skills they’re not gifted at or not willing to work for! Hey, are you personally willing to undergo brain surgery by an incompetent surgeon because nobody ever bothered to tell that doctor that he sucked at brain surgery? Yeah, nobody ever gave him a flunking grade in medical school for fear of hurting his feelings and shattering his lifelong dream of being a brain surgeon!

The truth is, someone—his parents or especially his professors—owe it to the aspiring surgeon to recommend to him to take a different path...because, sooner or later, all of his prospective patients will wisely avoid his incompetence! Oh, but you think telling him that early on sounds heartless? No, it isn’t heartless at all—quite the opposite...because it would direct him sooner to a more fitting vocation!

So, tell me, when you loved playing soccer so much as a kid, why didn’t you become a pro soccer player? Well, you didn’t turn pro because you had the freedom to fail. Yeah, you might have thought you were going to be world-class when they gave you a “participation trophy” as a little kid—you know, that’s when everyone on the team gets a trophy. But even though you might have had success for several years after that, you ultimately realized over time that *nobody* was going to pay you to play pro soccer.

Here’s the deal: if you have lived in a country with its leaders relentlessly coercing everyone into the silly untruth that “nobody can fail,” then you lived in a relatively miserable economic system! And there are a couple of formal names for that brand of politics: Socialism and Communism. Do you remember the persecuting, miserable 70-plus-year history of Soviet Russia, named the USSR with the second “S” itself standing for the word *Socialist*? Living standards were rock-bottom. Millions died from forced famines.

The truth is, it’s easily observed that the countries in recent history which experienced years of socialism or communism have indeed reaped *widespread* results—but not *good* results...instead, they reaped *widespread misery*! Check out Cuba’s history in the last six decades or Venezuela for the last couple of decades—these two countries’ shameful results are the rule, not the exception, for socialist countries!

Here’s the underlying problem: embracing the mantra that “nobody can fail” flouts the realities of the diverse giftings and motivations of human beings. Some people fail in their chosen vocations because of their lack of gifting, while others fail due to their lack of work ethic. But socialism fosters victim-oriented beliefs that one person succeeds while another fails due to the sins of the successful. So socialist policy makers self-righteously work to force redistribution of the money of financially successful people.

The United Kingdom’s Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher lived through some interesting times. Thatcher grew up as a shopkeeper’s daughter in England, with their living quarters above the shop. After earning a university degree in Chemistry, she entered British politics and, during the ensuing decades of the 1960s and 1970s, Britain slid into a deep version of socialism. So, when she became Prime Minister in 1979, she led major changes towards free markets to help the little guy, including privatizing expensive government monopolies like British Airways, British Telecom, British Steel, and British Gas. After that, these companies could now fail! Thatcher’s thorough commitment to moving away from socialism to much freer markets foundationally fostered greater widespread prosperity in Britain. Yes, contrary to commonly-spouted rhetoric, in the long run, a nation is best served with free markets, not socialism!

Here's what Thatcher famously said about socialism and the redistribution of earned wealth: "The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people's money." And years before that, the incomparable UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill himself said this: "Socialism is...the creed of ignorance, and the gospel of envy, its inherent virtue is the equal sharing of misery." Powerful truths!

Yes, socialism may feel good to many at first, but the ultimate realities are inescapable. How about a thought experiment here? What if the U.S. government had redistributed much of Sam Walton's wealth in the early 1960s, thus keeping him from fulfilling his true destiny—which was to build a juggernaut company named Walmart that led the way for decades to much lower prices for key necessities of life for hundreds of millions of Americans? Amazingly, an ordinary shopper is able to fill a cart at Walmart with affordable luxuries like seafood, meats, spices and fresh produce, items that past kings of the world often could only dream of! But remember: *Sam could have failed in his Walmart adventure...after all, others who have tried to mimic Walton did fail!* Yes, it was the freedom to fail that allowed Sam's gifting and his work ethic to lead the way in incredibly bolstering the long-term financial prosperity of millions! The macroeconomic principles of finance matter! So, just what are *your* national government's policies?

Recently we discussed that *individual perfectionism* is debilitating for perfectionist-oriented individuals. Likewise, the *political perfectionism* that socialist governments try to inflict upon businesses and citizens is very debilitating, too...the socialist ideology of people-levelling and redistributed equity in the name of social justice is *observably* not a route to widespread prosperity! But observable experience *does* reveal the exceptional alternative: when nations truly work to facilitate free markets and equal opportunity for all, widespread prosperity results! *But, with human fallibility involved, we must never expect perfection!*

Hey, our personal route to becoming good at, say, math, is to make mistakes and correct our course of learning. Along the way, we find out whether we should become a math professor...or, mercifully, something else! The same with a rocket scientist...or an opera singer...or, sadly, to some of us, a soccer pro! Remarkably, the route to our personal greatness is, first, by making mistakes in potential vocational areas that we discover we have no aptitude for...and second, by actually making and learning from mistakes in our *true* vocational calling. That's how we gain true expertise! Hey, it's *the freedom to fail and the needed course-correction responses to mistakes* that bring people and enterprises to greatness!

And that's also true for a nation's policies. Everyone who's willing to work hard in an equal-opportunity society that's striving (but never perfect, of course)...well, then, they're living in a wonderful spot! Sure, every person can ultimately *claim* victimhood because others seem to be doing better than they. But the reality is, a society with *authentic* opportunity to succeed is built on the freedom to fail. *Yes, if you don't have the freedom to fail, you don't have an authentic structure to succeed!* But why is this type of talk needed? 'Cause the failed ideology of socialism is being taught and deployed in many places in America.

But you *do* remember where the thoughtful freedom for humans to fail was first instituted, right? Yeah, it was the Garden of Eden—*where God gave Adam and Eve the freedom to fail!* Frankly, that reveals the outworking of God's love: He created humans with the freedom to fail. *Yes, authentic, responding love requires freedom to fail!* So God knew people would fail, but He made provision for each person's redemption through Christ's death on the Cross...hallelujah, God's grace-filled response to our failures!

But sadly, many Christians don't really operate in God's gift of grace. They often expect perfectionism of themselves, perfectionism of other Christians, and even legalistic perfectionism of people far from Christ—even without telling them of the course-correction of the Cross! *Ironically, those perfectionist approaches...fail!* Instead, the right path is clear: to humbly acknowledge that we and all others fall short of the glory of God...yes, we all *do* fail...and after that, we are to gladly go forth, working toward the most meaningful, most widespread prosperity possible for all—reaching out to all nations with the triumphant gospel of the Kingdom of God! Yes, the true gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24)! But remember: the *initial, essential ingredient for that prosperity is our freedom to fail!* That's crazy good!

A&A: Application & Action

1. When you lead or manage people in your workplace, are you rightly excited about granting them the freedom to fail...and, therefore, the opportunity to succeed? Give examples.

2. Do you grant yourself the freedom to fail in the pursuit of greatness...or are you often debilitated by your personal perfectionism? Likewise, how about your handling of others and expectations of perfectionism in your church body? Discuss.

3. Does your understanding of your life in Christ move you to be more socialist...or more “free markets” in perspective? If you tend to be more socialist, do you routinely, sacrificially give from your personal resources to remedy the problems you see...or do you simply expect people richer than you (and the government) to solve it totally with their resources? If you tend to more “free markets,” do you routinely give from your personal resources to remedy the problems you see when some people do end up in real need? Discuss.