

Golf is dumb. That's why I'm trying it.

By [Eric Atcheson](#)

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On a nearby state road, there was a billboard from one of the golf courses in town that said, "When was the last time you tried something for the first time?"

The implication, of course, is that you should try golf.

And Lord have pity, for that is what I am actually doing.

I turned 30 last week, and my midlife crisis must have come a decade early, because as a birthday present to myself, I bought a set of golf clubs off of Craigslist for 90 bucks.

Did I mention that I've never actually golfed before? I've got a pretty good putt-putt game, and it wasn't very long before I was sinking 12-foot putts in our living room (the poodle makes a pretty good caddie when she waits until after the ball stops moving to fetch it, which is a 50/50 proposition).

The thing is, though, I know myself well, and I do not think that this is simply a nonsensical waste of money for me—something that in my family was meant to be avoided at all costs (FFS, my dad's nickname in our family to this day is Scottie McPinch).

I know myself, and I have come to understand just how colossally, monumentally, and irrationally afraid I am of failure.

Failure is something I really haven't had to experience much of outside of high school calculus exams. I got into a college I wanted, I got into a seminary I wanted, and I was called to minister to a church I wanted. I even somehow managed (I'm still not sure how) to successfully ask the woman I wanted to marry me.

And in recent conversations with my spiritual director, I've realized just how averse to failure I really am, how out of my way I go to avoid it if at all possible.

Or to put it more bluntly, this is how I know I need to try something new: one of my friends and colleagues in the region just commented to me on Facebook asking me when we would play a round together, and my knee-jerk reply was, "When I am reasonably confident that I won't make a complete ass of myself."

Bear in mind—there is no perfection in golf. It's not like throwing a perfect game or posting a clean sheet. There is always one more stroke you could shave off of your score.

I haven't even tried golf, and I'm already putting pressure on myself to be good at it.

That's how badly I need to fail at something.

I have come to think, then, that it is important for someone to always have a venue in their lives that they can feel free to fail at, in order to experience that paradoxical liberation of falling short and having it still be okay afterwards.

In other words—I need to be set free here. And so my tools of liberation will be 14 clubs in a bag with tees, balls, and a glove that was a birthday gift from a buddy who was one of the first to learn of how my premature midlife crisis expressed itself—in the form of taking up a sport I had previously only expressed disinterest in or mocking disdain for because of how monotonous it seemed on the telly.

Really, when you get down to it, golf, just like every sport, is dumb. In baseball, you're trying to whack a ball of leather and packed string with a wooden or aluminum stick, and in golf, you're trying to whack an even smaller ball with an even more difficult to handle metal implement.

It's dumb, and that's why I need something like it in my life. I need something dumb to help set me free.

It is not a setting free from failure, no, in fact, I am sure that for my first several rounds, it will be a surrender to failure.

But through that surrender, I will be free to move forward, past the initial bumps and hurdles, over the initial inclinations to put a stop to things, and, in a Zen-like way, I think that the vulnerability this surrender will inherently entail will make me more secure. More secure in myself, more secure in who I am, and more secure in all my inane, sometimes harmful, imperfections.

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