

OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF FAILURE

Genesis 4:13

Good morning! We're in a series called "Conquering Your Fears". Today, we've reached the end of our series. I hope this series has somehow helped you to deal with a particular fear you have in your life. Today, I want us to look at "Overcoming the Fear of Failure".

How many of you have failed at something? If you're like me, you may have failed a thousand times. Now, it's good if after you've failed you got back up and tried again. But truth be told, for some of us, we get stuck. We don't want to try again. We're afraid to fail again.

The fear of failure is nothing new. It's been around for ages. Who comes to mind when you think of someone in the Bible who was afraid to fail? Moses, perhaps? He's the poster boy for the fear of failure. In Exodus 4:13, we read, "But Moses said, 'Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.'" This is the last statement he said after the back and forth between him and God which you'll find in chapter 3 and then in chapter 4. He made a lot of excuses. Who am I? How would I introduce you to people? What if they don't believe me? I'm not a good speaker. I'm a stutterer, and so on. For every excuse he said, I picture in my mind a big neon sign flashing, "Fear of Failure". Because that's what it is. He was afraid to fail. He didn't want to do what God wanted him to do because he was afraid to fail again.

So, the fear of failure is quite common. A magazine said, (quote) "No one is immune to the little deaths of failure. Failure is universal, endemic, part of human experience. The fact is, we all are failures and will experience failure at some time. The reason for this is simple. Risk implies failure."

If we dare new things -- changing a job, creating a work of art, trying to get into school, falling in love, inventing a new product -- we risk failure. It is implicit in the striving for success. The only way to avoid failure is to never strive, to remain fixed where we are." (end of quote) That's no way to live.

Everybody experiences failure. And everybody experiences the fear of failure in different parts. Fear paralyzes millions of people. In fact, if you give in to the fear of failure, you'll never become all God wants you to be. You'll have many dreams -- recreational, vocation, spiritual, hobbies, things you've always wanted to do -- but you're afraid to try. It will paralyze your potential.

Today I want us to look at **how to overcome the fear of failure. There are six ways we can do.** Let me start with

1. REMEMBER EVERYONE FAILS.

The starting point to overcoming the fear of failure is to realize, it's no big deal! Everybody fails. It's universal. Nobody's perfect. We all make mistakes. As James says **"We all stumble in many ways." (James 3:2)**

Do you ever remember stumbling in public? Do you remember the terror you felt? The absolute fool you felt? Being a pastor, I've seen this happen lots of times. To other people and to myself. Do you know years ago I mixed up the names of the couple I was doing a wedding for? Very embarrassing. That wasn't in this church. You go to YouTube and you watch some epic fails, right? Many of us have seen "America's Funniest Videos". We laugh at those but in general, to fail is not a laughing matter especially when it concerns your marriage, your family, your career, your school, your friends, your finances.

It's interesting that the universal reaction when somebody fails is sympathy. Whenever somebody stumbles, the general reaction of the crowd is "Ohhh!" It's a feeling of sympathy because we can all identify. And rather than making fun of people we feel sorry for the person because we've all stumbled.

The Bible says in **Romans 3:23**, “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” We all sin. We all fail. Even Michael Jordan, great as he is, did not shoot 100% from the free throw line. He, too, failed. I’m sure he has failed also when it comes to keeping with moral standards. Just the same with each of us. Can anyone say with all honesty you never ever lied? If you can, you just lied.

Failure is universal. The second is

2. REALIZE FAILURE IS NOT FINAL.

In other words, failure is never fatal. It's not going to kill you. The fact is, the fear of failure is worse than failure itself. **Proverbs 24:16** “*...for though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again.*” Even the good guys stumble. So, don't take it so personally. Many times, there are factors out of your control that cause your failure. It's not always your character that's causing it. Sometimes it is. It says, “though righteous fall”, so don't take it so personally. It's not going to kill you. Many good guys have failed before succeeding.

History books are filled with biographies of failures who failed, got up, kept going and eventually made good.

George Washington won only 6 of the 17 battles he fought in the American Revolution. But he eventually won the war. And he became President.

Napoleon graduated 42nd in a class of 52 students. Near the bottom! He then went out and conquered Europe.

Babe Ruth hit all those home runs – how many? 831. But in his lifetime he struck out 1330 times. For years he led the league in the record for strike outs.

Tom Brady has won 6 Super Bowls. He’s considered the GOAT, the Greatest of All Time in football. Next Sunday is Super Bowl Sunday, btw, and Brady is playing again. This will be his 10th Super Bowl appearance. If he wins, that’s 7 out of 10. Not bad. But not perfect. He has failed as well. Btw, 2 of his 3 losses were at the hands of the New York Giants. 2 out of 2 for the NY Giants. Just saying.

Failure is not fatal. Galatians 6:9 *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”* I'm amazed at how quickly most people give up. They give up too soon.

You know, you learn through failure. You become a success through failure. That's the way to success. How did you learn to walk? You get up, you fall down, you get up, you fall down. Can you imagine a baby, he falls down three times and says, "I'm such a failure at walking! I'm not meant to walk! I'm not walking anymore." You keep on getting up until you learn to walk. You keep on, you be persistent.

When he was seven years old, his family was forced out of his home because of a legal technicality. He had to work to help support his family. At age nine, while still a backwards, shy little boy, his mother died. At age 22, he lost his job as a store clerk. He wanted to go to law school but his education wasn't good enough. At 23, he went into debt to become a partner in a small store. Three years later his partner died leaving him a huge debt which took years to repay. At 28, after developing romantic relations with a young lady for four years, he asked her to marry him. She said no. At 37, on his third try, he was finally elected to Congress. Two years later, he ran again and failed to be re-elected. He had a nervous breakdown at that time. At 41, adding additional heartache to an already unhappy marriage, his four-year-old son died. The next year he ran for Land Officer and lost. At 45, he ran for the Senate and lost. A few years later, he ran for the Vice Presidency and lost. At 49, he ran for the Senate again and lost. And at 51, he was elected President of the United States. Abraham Lincoln.

His life was one continuous failure. But he kept on going and became probably the greatest President in American history.

The fact is, failure is not the worst thing that can happen to you. So don't blow it all out of proportion. Everybody fails. It's no big deal.

3. RECOGNIZE THE BENEFITS OF FAILURE.

There are a lot of benefits when you fail. Romans 8:28 say, *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* Note - In all things" -- does that include failures? Yes. In all things God works for good.

What are the benefits of failure?

a. **It educates us.** It was Thomas Edison who said that he had 10,000 failures before he successfully developed his alkaline storage battery. He said he didn't call it a failure; he called it an education. He was quoted as saying "I know several thousand things that won't work!" Folks, there are some things in life we learn only through failure.

I read somewhere, (quote) “Smart people stand out as the ones who learn from failure.” (end of quote) To fail isn't special; everybody does that. But to learn from failure is special and the distinguishing fact about smart people is this -- smart people learn the lessons of failure.

b. **It develops our skills.** How did you learn to ride a bike? By falling down and getting back up. Roller-skate, the same way. To make a sale? By getting rejected over and over. Failure is a stepping-stone to success if you keep trying new approaches. You analyze "What did I do wrong this time?"

Someone said, "Without failure there is no innovation." Here at Fil-Am, we've done more things that didn't work than did. We're just not afraid to fail. I want every staff member in our church making at least one mistake in their ministry. It means they're trying new stuff. If you're not making mistakes, you're not trying anything new. If you make the same mistake every time, that's bad news. We're not afraid of failure on our staff because by failure is the way to succeed.

And later on, before we end the service, I'll announce an innovation that we'll all try together. Just promise me you're not afraid to fail.

c. It helps us discover our true talent. Nathaniel Hawthorne, probably the greatest American author, wrote the greatest American prose, The Scarlet Letter. He was a customs clerk and he hated his job. He wanted to write but he didn't have any money to write. One day he was fired as a customs clerk. He went home, said to his wife, "I'm a total failure! I can't even provide for this family. I'm washed up." Being a loving wife, she didn't say anything, brought him to the table, set him down, brought a piece of blank paper, an ink well and a pen and said, "You've always wanted time to write. Now you've got it. Go to it!" And he wrote the Scarlet Letter, probably the greatest single book written in American history. It became a bestseller in America and in Britain.

How many stories have you heard about people who were failing in one area and that motivated them to try a new area? Like these brothers who failed in the movie business who decided to start a thing called McDonald's. Colonel Sanders failed at everything in his life till he was about 70 and then he started doing what he wanted to do, cooking chicken under pressure!

When you fail at something, maybe God is trying to wake you up "You're wasting your talent in this area. I want you to do something different!" Many times God uses failure to direct us into a new area because you're in an area you weren't meant to be. Douglas MacArthur said, "We are not retreating -- we are advancing in another direction." We have a class -- 301 -- about how to discover what God wants you to do in life, based on the way He shaped you. The whole class is on that. If you're in a job or a ministry that you're not shaped for, you're going to fail at it, no matter how hard you try.

I think sometimes we live in such a perfection-oriented society that it's good to have a few failures early on in the game of life so you don't have to maintain the pressure of trying to keep an unbroken record. I read about a basketball team that had 42 victories in a row.

When they finally lost, the coach was asked, "How do you feel?" He said, "I feel relieved. Now we can start focusing on winning rather than focusing on not losing."

4. REDEFINE FAILURE.

Meaning, think of it in a new way. What is the world's definition of failure? Failure is the end of a dream. Failure is missing out. Failure is losing.

But the Bible says something differently. The Bible tells us to keep on going when we fail. In fact, over and over it tells us stories of people like us who have weaknesses and faults and failures but, nevertheless, tried and tried again. Like Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, Gideon, Samson, Joseph, Peter, Paul, and Mary. That's not the singing group. There are lots and lots of them in the pages of the Bible. So, you're in good company. It's like God is saying, "Are you afraid to fail? Don't! All these folks failed but it doesn't matter. What matters is you keep getting up. Because I'm here to help you succeed."

Friend you just need to keep on trying. I think when I die, I want four words written on my tombstone, "At least he tried." You see, if what you're attempting is ultimately for the glory of God you cannot be considered a failure because you're making the effort.

In 2 Timothy 4:7 Paul's saying, "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*" Will you be able to say that at the end of your life? I've run the race. I've done my best. I've gone the full distance. I've kept the faith. Notice Paul did not say, "I came in first." Only one person can come in first. The rest of us are just going to place. The issue is not whether you come in first or not. The issue is, did you finish the race? Did you go the full distance? That's what counts. Consistency.

5. STOP COMPARING YOURSELF TO OTHERS.

This is the root of a lot of the fear of failure. In America we live in a very competitive society. We've taken a competition overdose. Everybody competes with everybody else. Parents now are competing with each other through their kids by the way they dress them, sports, grades, etc. It's ridiculous the competition that goes on.

Galatians 6:4 (NLT) "Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else." It's saying, everybody ought to do their best. Compete with your own self. Stretch yourself so that you can say, "I've done my best. You see, when you compare yourself with others, you're setting yourself up for the fear of failure.

I'll never forget in 2006 when Anabel and I and one-year-old Ally went home to the Philippines for a vacation. When a friend of mine, Pastor Rene, learned that I was going home, he invited me to speak at a youth camp he had organized. I eagerly said yes. In my mind it was just his church that was involved. In the Philippines, I learned that it was composed of several churches and there were more than 500 students who were attending. I started to get nervous and began to compare myself to other speakers in the camp who have these letters and acronyms before and after their names. Then, I learned I was the first speaker and when I arrived at the camp, the guy who was actually running it, told me that I have to be animated in my preaching, pacing back and forth on the stage probably so I could connect with the youth and hold their attention. And I became terrified because I'm not that kind of preacher as you know and I felt like I wanted to run. I went to the bathroom several times. And I imagined myself collapsing on the stage because of nervousness, or the students just chatting with each other or making noises instead of listening, or some booing or hissing from the crowd. What if the students walked out on me? Worse, what if they threw tomatoes or their water bottles at me? My mind was running rampant with fears.

I imagined myself a total failure when I compared myself to the other preachers. Then I refocused. From others to God. I knew that God is faithful. And that night was a blessed one. How blessed it was, is another story.

The point is God knows you. He knows your weaknesses and your fears. If he calls you to do something, it is not to embarrass you but to show others that he can work through ordinary you. So that he gets the glory.

6. REPLACE MY FEAR WITH FAITH IN CHRIST.

Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

Notice it doesn't say that I'm going to have the power to face my failures and face the future and face the fear of failure through Oprah, Dr. Phil, Feng Shui, transcendental meditation, crystals, bio-feedback, horoscope, yoga, using drugs, snorting crack. How do I have the power to cope and face certain situations? Not through smoking a cigarette and getting drunk.

All these things are to build you up so you can feel good about yourself. Really what you need is just a relationship to God who loves you and wants to know you, and wants to give you the power to face every situation.

Friends, the answer to overcoming your fears is a person. The person is Jesus Christ.

I know what I'm talking about. As I've mentioned many times here, I've always been a worrier, a pessimist, a negative person. Couple that with setbacks and failures and what you get is a mental and emotional basket case. Did I mention I used to get panic attacks almost every day since I was in my teens? I was so depressed in the past I had to see a psychiatrist, took medication, did yoga, tried various religions, read different philosophies, did TM, boozed up, name it, I did it. In fact, I was a Christian already when these things happened. If you met me during my lost years, you wouldn't think I was a Christian.

In fact, it came to a point I hated Christianity because I thought it was a sham and that Jesus wasn't real. Well, I experimented with all those things and...nothing worked. After 10 years, in the quiet of my bedroom, I finally gave up and said, "Lord, take control". That's it. And things changed for the better after that. Slowly, the cloud of fear and anxieties lifted. I'm not saying I'm totally whole. But I've experienced Jesus enough in my life to know he is faithful. And that he can come through always for me when I'm fearful and anxious.

I applied the things I'm talking about today—this is not theory. This is right out of my own life that God has implanted. I replaced my fears with faith in Christ.

In Matthew 9:29, Jesus says to two blind men, "*According to your faith it will be done unto you.*" He is saying to you, too, "You get to choose what I do in your life."

You see, you can program yourself with either of two things -- faith or fear. Faith in God or fear of failure. The problem is that many people rather than being God-driven, success seekers, they are fear-driven, failure avoiders.

Leaders by Warren Bennis is an outstanding book. If you're in business you ought to read it. Bennis says, (quote) "Perhaps the most impressive quality of the leaders we studied was the way they respond to failure. Like Karl Wallenda whose life was at stake each time he walked on the tightrope, these leaders put all their energies into their tasks. They simply don't think about failure. They don't even use the word 'failure'. It's not a part of their vocabulary. They rely on such synonyms as 'mistake', 'glitch', or 'bungle' but never 'failure.'" (end of quote) He's saying eliminate the "F" word from your vocabulary. Don't use "failure" any more.

Now, in an article I read, it said, (quote) "Shortly after Wallenda fell to his death in 1978, his wife recalled 'All Karl thought about for three straight months prior to his death after years of walking the tightrope, was falling.

It was the first time he'd ever thought about that and it seemed to be he put all of his energy into not falling rather than walking the tightrope.'" (end of quote)

"According to your faith it will be done unto you."

What are you afraid of failing at? Afraid in that new job interview? Afraid you're not going to keep the job you've got when the economy's tightening up? Afraid of failing in your marriage? Afraid of getting married again because it might fail? Afraid that you'll never get married? Afraid of being a single? Afraid of being a bad parent and failing there?

Some of you have some spiritual fears. God wants to do so much in your life. He wants to bless your life so much. I wish I could just show you and yet you are afraid to really commit yourself to God. You want just a little bit of God, not the whole thing. Some of you are afraid of committing your life to Christ. You say, "If I commit my life to Christ, I'd probably blow it and fail as a Christian." You will! Count on it! But fortunately it doesn't depend on you. Once you place your life in Christ's hands, He carries you. It's not up to you to keep it up.

Some of you have been afraid of committing to a church. What does that commitment mean? Some of you are afraid to commit to a home group and you miss so many blessings because of the fear of failure. Some of you are afraid of tithing. You say, "I know God wants me to tithe. It's real clear in the Bible. But if I did I might not have enough money and I'd fail at paying my bills." You miss so much of God's blessing because of the fear of failure. Don't miss the blessing. *"According to your faith it will be done unto you."* You cannot play it safe and please God.

Folks, fear is like a virus that when it enters your system, it will weaken your faith. If left unattended, it can cause physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual failure. But it can be defeated when you get a vaccine called faith. Faith will destroy fear in your life.

Nik Wallenda is the great-grandson of Karl Wallenda. If you remember, he walked across the Grand Canyon some years back and you might have seen achieved that death-defying stunt on TV. Wallenda performs without a safety net or harness. He explains that his great-grandfather taught that safety nets offer a false sense of security. He notes that a safety net is no guarantee – an uncle was killed while performing despite falling into a safety net. However, he says he does not have a death wish in any way. In an interview he says, “I plan on living and dying a natural death when I’m old.” Asked about fear, he remarked, “I would say the only thing I fear is God”. He adds that his Christian faith allows him to (quote) “know where I'm going to go when I die ... I'm not scared of dying.”

Wallenda is a believer in Jesus. That allows him to practice his faith for all the world to see. He has chosen a career that may sound crazy but that is what he is trained for and he is good at. His faith in Jesus allows him to overcome his fear of death.

Will you put your faith in Jesus today? Earlier, I mentioned that we all sin. Committing sin is our greatest failure. The things is, it’s a failure we cannot overcome ourselves. We are condemned to die, the Bible says, because of sin. There’s only one way out. Through Jesus. He died for you and me. He shed his blood on the cross so that our sins may be forgiven. He died on the cross to save us from our sins and death. Then, on the third day, he rose again. To let us know that he conquered sin and death forever and anyone who puts their faith in Jesus will rise from the dead as well and live for all eternity in heaven.

Friend, Jesus will vanish all your fears if you just put your faith in him today.