

When I Feel Like A Failure

On Sunday we continued our sermon series on “Managing Our Moods” by asking how we should respond when we feel like a failure.

1. Warm-up Question: Jeff began Sunday’s sermon by telling about the first time as a child he remembers feeling like a failure. When was the first time you remember feeling like a failure in your life?

2. We all experience both moral and circumstantial failure – failing a class, getting cut from a team, being rejected for a date, failing in a marriage, getting fired, spiritual failure, financial failure, personality flaws that we just can’t seem to overcome, etc., etc. To be human is to fail. For guidance as to how we should respond, we looked to a Gospel passage where Simon Peter failed. It’s a story that occurred right after Jesus multiplied loaves and fishes and fed over 5,000 people. We divided the story into three parts. Let’s begin with the first part. Read Matthew 14:22-34.
 - a. Imagine what the disciples must have felt while on that boat in the storm. Have you ever found yourself in a life-threatening situation? What happened? How did you feel?

 - b. The storm that swirled around the disciples raises the age old question: why does life have to be so hard? That question, Jeff suggested, is where we have to begin if we want to understand the role of failure in our lives. We won’t be able to understand failure until we understand the meaning of life. Revelation 11:15 tells us that Jesus is destined to reign forever and ever. II Timothy 2:12 tells us that, “If we endure, we are destined to reign with Christ.” Note that the verse doesn’t say we are destined to “rest” with Christ. It says “reign.” What does that suggest about our roles and responsibilities in the life to come?

 - c. I Corinthians 2:9 says, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined the things that God has prepared for those who love God.” When we hear that verse, we usually think of all the amazing things that will surround us in heaven. But the verse is not limited to that. It’s about our entire heavenly experience, *including the roles we will play there*. Jeff said, “You have not even begun to imagine the role or roles God desires for you when you reign with Christ.” Can you imagine yourself playing some significant role in the governance of the cosmos in the life to come? How do you feel about that?

 - d. C.S. Lewis said, “Remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day [in eternity] be a creature which, if you saw it now, you’d be strongly tempted to worship, or [that person may someday be] a horror and a corruption such as you now [see] only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinies. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one

another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.” Your thoughts?

- e. To help us gain perspective on eternity, Jeff pulled out his “eternity timeline.” For any who didn’t see the sermon, describe what Jeff did. What impact, if any, did the example of the “eternity timeline” have on you?
3. If all we’ve talked about is true, that means we are eternal beings in the earliest stages of our development. The hardships of life, including our failures, are training exercises meant to refine and shape us into the incredible eternal beings we are destined to become. This, Jeff suggested, is the predominant meaning of our earthly lives – we are being tested, refined, and developed. Viewed this way, failure is a normal and necessary part of our training process.
- a. Do you agree that the predominant purpose of our earthly lives is training and development? Does that make sense to you? Why or why not?
 - b. Michael Jordan once said, “I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions, I’ve been entrusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that’s precisely why I succeed.” Jeff urged us to “normalize failure.” Instead of freaking out when we fail, we should see it as an inevitable necessary part of life. Do you feel you have “normalized” failure in your life? Why or why not?
 - c. Back to our Gospel passage. Read Matthew 14:25-30. In the midst of the great storm on the sea, Peter attempted to walk on water and failed. Do you think God is more pleased with someone who plays it safe or someone who takes risks? Is fear of failure holding you back from trying something in your life right now?
 - d. Someone once described the Bible as “a veritable Museum of Failed Discipleship.” What should we learn from that?
4. If failure is a normal and necessary part of our process of becoming, that means we are meant to “fail forward.” In other words, when we fail, instead of getting discouraged, we’re supposed to get better – to learn, grow, and overcome. Let’s read the end of our Gospel story: Matthew 14:28-33.
- a. Peter failed, sinking under the water. But when he cried out for help, Jesus took his hand, lifted him up, and together they walked back to the boat on top of the water. What do you think Peter may have learned from that experience? How might it have changed him?
 - b. Tell us about one of your life’s greatest failures. What did you learn from it? How has it helped you grow?
 - c. What do you think makes the difference between people who encounter failure and give up versus people who encounter failure and get better?