

The Decision to Start

1. Warm up: What's something you do that gives expression to your creative side?
2. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God created. . . ." So, the very first thing we learn about God in the Bible is that God is a creative Spirit. Not just a creative Spirit, but a restlessly creative Spirit, because the next verse says that "the Spirit of God moved [*i.e.*, brooded] over the face of the waters." God was anxious to turn the primordial chaos into something beautiful. But God's creative work didn't end in the book of Genesis. The very end of the very last book of the Bible tells us that at the end of the age, when time is no more, God will say, "Behold, I make all things new!" Revelation 21:5. So that from the beginning to the end and into and throughout eternity, God is a restlessly creative starter of new things. And remember, the Bible says that we are created in God's image – Genesis 1:27. Which means, we too have been infused with that same spirit of restless creativity. As we move through life, there will be many times when God will call us to start something new, *i.e.*, to create (or help create) a new reality. In the third chapter of her book, *How We Learn to Be Brave: Decisive Moments in Life and Faith*, Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde tells us the story of several people who felt called to start new things. On Sunday, Jeff tried to draw a formula from those stories, and from the Scriptures, that can help us get better at creating change when God calls us to do so. There are three key elements in that formula: **Vision – Failure – Recalibration = Success**. Let's discuss each element, starting with Vision.
 - a. In Habakkuk 2:2, the prophet says, "Then the Lord answered me and said, 'Write the vision and make it plain on tablets that they who read it may run. For the vision is yet for an appointed time. . . . Though it tarries, wait for it.'" By volume, almost half of the Bible is devoted to prophets painting a vision for the Israelites of what their future could be, if only they would rise to meet it. Why do you think God invested so much time in laying out a compelling vision of the future for Israel?
 - b. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Without a vision, the people perish." How would you explain that verse to a child? Why is vision so important?
 - c. Looking back over your life, when have you ever experienced the power of a compelling vision to motivate change in yourself or someone you know or some group you were part of? If so, what was the vision?
 - d. In your life right now, do you sense God calling you to create a new reality (or help create a new reality) in some aspect of your personal life, in your family, in a relationship, in our church, or in your workplace, neighborhood, city, or the world? If so, describe for us the vision God is giving you? What will that new reality look like?
3. Jeff said, "Suppose God gives us a vision, and we embrace that vision, develop a plan, and act on it. And guess what happens next? Failure. Whenever we try to start something new in our lives, the odds are stacked against us." The Jeff shared some

statistics, such as: over 75% of all venture-capital startups fail, 99% of all new patents never earn a penny, and 88% of all New Year's Resolutions fail. Then Jeff added, "But that's ok. In fact, it's better than ok. Because, more often than not, the necessary first step toward ultimate success is failure. If you want to succeed, you have to be willing to fail."

- a. Do you buy that? Why or why not? Why is failure virtually inevitable in any attempt to create something new?
 - b. Jonas Salk said, "I never failed 200 times at anything in my life. . . . I simply discovered 200 ways how not to make a vaccine for polio." What does that tell us about how successful people see failure?
 - c. Jeff said, "Successful people are not successful because they're better at succeeding than us; they're successful because they're better at failing. When we start something new and fail, we have two choices. Accept defeat and give up. Or recalibrate and try again. We've got to stop thinking of failure as a bad thing and start realizing it's a natural part of the process of succeeding." In your formative years growing up, how did key influencers in your life teach you to respond to failure? Are there any lessons you need to unlearn? Are you too risk adverse?
4. Let's read together Sunday's Scripture, I Kings 18:41-45, as printed on p. 3. This story takes place after a long, severe, life-threatening drought in Israel, as God calls Elijah to create a new reality by praying-in a rainstorm.
- a. After about the 5th time Elijah asked his servant to check again to see if there were any signs of rain on the horizon, what do you imagine his servant was thinking and feeling? And what do you imagine Elijah was thinking and feeling?
 - b. Why do you think Elijah had to go through seven cycles of prayer to get to success? Why didn't it happen the first time, and what are we supposed to learn from this?
 - c. Why do you think Elijah persisted, rather than giving up?
5. Jesus himself lived and taught the change process described above and diagram on p. 4. Take a look at the diagram, then discuss the questions below.
- a. Shortly before his death, Jesus told his disciples, "Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." John 12:24. What do you think Jesus meant?
 - b. Here are some quotes about Jesus and failure:

Pastor Gordon MacDonald: "I think we need to be constantly reminded that Jesus, by the standards of cultural success models, was a miserable failure."

Pastor James Martin: “By human standards, Jesus’ ministry at the point of his death would have been judged a failure.”

Professor Cheryl Forbs: “[Somehow] we never see God in failure, but only in success – a strange attitude for people who have the cross as the center of their faith.”

What are your thoughts about the foregoing quotes? Do they challenge how you think about God and how you think about failure? If so, how?

6. Take another look at the diagram on p. 4. On Sunday Jeff told us about a time in his young adulthood when he and others in his church in Washington DC walked the path of the diagram when trying to create a coffee house community center for the LGBTQ Community that would double as a church building. When in your life have you lived the diagram on p. 3. Tell us about it – especially focusing on how you recalibrated to finally reach success.
7. Harken back to Question 2.d. above, where we asked, “In your life right now, do you sense God calling you to create a new reality (or help create a new reality) in some aspect of your personal life, in your family, in a relationship, in our church, or in your workplace, neighborhood, city, or the world?” Remind us what kind of new reality you’re feeling called to embrace. What is your plan to start making that change? What kind of failures might you encounter? When/if you fail, are you prepared to recalibrate and try again as many times as necessary?

I Kings 18:41-45

41 Elijah said to Ahab, ‘Go up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of rushing rain.’⁴² So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; there he bowed himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees.⁴³ He said to his servant, ‘Go up now, look towards the sea.’ The servant went up and looked, and said, ‘There is nothing.’ Then Elijah said, ‘Go again seven times.’⁴⁴ At the seventh time the servant said, ‘Look, a little cloud no bigger than a person’s hand is rising out of the sea.’ Then Elijah said, ‘Go and say to Ahab, “Harness your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.”’⁴⁵ In a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind; there was heavy rain.

Starting Something New
How to Create Change Successfully
(John 12:24; I Kings 18:41-45)

