

Fear of Failure

On Sunday, we launched a new sermon series called “Fear Less,” in which we will explore five of our greatest fears, beginning with fear of failure.

1. Warm up question: Some people are afraid of heights, others of roller coasters, etc., etc. Tell us about something you’re a bit phobic about.
2. II Timothy 1:7 says, “God has not given us a spirit of fear. . . .” So where does fear come from – and why is it so powerful?
3. From the time we were kids, people have told us, “Don’t mess up. Be good, work hard, succeed, and make us proud!” That’s a lot of pressure – pressure that can distort our lives in all kinds of ways.
 - a. Jeff told how he got his first big lesson in failure in 7th grade when he got cut from the basketball team, and had to go home and tell his family – and his professional-basketball-playing uncle – that he got cut from the team. His dreams were dashed and he felt like an embarrassment to his family. What was one of your early lessons in the pain of failure?
 - b. As an adult, what has felt like one of your greatest failures?
 - c. The pain of failure can be so bad, we’re tempted to become risk adverse people who refused to take chances and always play it safe. Looking back across life, has there been a time when (with the benefit of hindsight) you feel you chose to play it safe when your heart told you to go bold? Do you regret it?
4. On Sunday, we studied a Bible passage that offers powerful insights for how to tame fear of failure. Read Judges 6:33-35, 7:1-8, and 7:19-21.
 - a. Gideon began with 32,000, but God told him that was too many. So Gideon told all who were “fearful and trembling” that they could go home, and 22,000 left! Even though they were living miserable lives, surrounded by Midianites who stole their crops and livestock, and were threatening to kill them, rape their wives, and take their children captive, 22,000 decided it was better to lay low and take their chances. The implication is that 2/3^{rds} of all people are controlled by fear. Do you think that’s true – that most people live lives controlled by fear? Why or why not?
 - b. Though only 10,000 remained, God told Gideon that was still too many. So Gideon took them down to the river and gave them a water break. Virtually all the soldiers knelt, cupped their hands, and brought water to their mouths. But there were 300 who they fell on their bellies, stuck their face in the water, and lapped water like dogs. God chose the 300, and sent home the rest. Why? What should we make of this?

- c. Jeff described how he and his nephews responded to the Ice Bucket Challenge. Jeff was anxious about having wet clothes all afternoon and about how unpleasant it would be to get drenched in ice-cold water. But Jeff's nephews were "all in" – spontaneous, excited, enthusiastic about the adventure. Jeff suggested that was the difference between the 300 and the 9,700. The 300 were uninhibited, a-little-bit-crazy, reasonable risk takers, whereas everyone else was conventional, cautious, and restrained. God needed some bold reasonable risk takers. Do you buy that interpretation of the story? Why are bold risk takers so valuable to God?
 - d. Gideon's 300 were crazy enough to be enthusiastic about taking reasonable risks in hopes of accomplishing great things. When in your life have you acted in the spirit of Gideon's 300? What happened? Do you regret it?
5. I Corinthians 4:2 says, "It is required of stewards that we be found faithful." It doesn't say that God expects us to be successful, only faithful. That's a liberating way of looking at success and failure. Take look at the diagram below. The conventional definition of success puts all the emphasis on Outcome. If the outcome is bad, we fail. God takes a different approach, placing all the emphasis on Action. If we act boldly and faithfully, taking reasonable risk, we're already a success in God's eyes regardless of outcome. In this view, real failure is to not try; real failure is playing it safe.

Problem-----Action-----Outcome

- a. Does your own internalized definition success place more emphasis on Outcome or Action? How has that affected you?
 - b. Why do you think God cares more about Action than Outcome?
6. Gideon's 300 used the weapon of faith to overcome fear of failure. They dared to believe that if they acted boldly, God could take the little they could offer and make much out of it. They understood that, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move and nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20. Some call this "possibility thinking." Why is "possibility thinking" so powerful?
7. Ed McManus refused to pray for his son to be safe from demons. Instead he prayed that his son would be so "dangerous," demons would flee from him. Would you rather be safe or "dangerous"?
8. Where in your life today do you do you sense God calling you to act boldly to take reasonable risk in pursuit of a great possibility? Are you acting or instead choosing to play it safe?

Next week we tackle "fear of rejection."