

“kNOw Fear; Facing Life’s Phobias—The Fear of Failure”

We’re in the middle of this series of messages called, “kNOw Fear; Facing Life’s Phobias.” So far we’ve talked about fear of the future, which kind of touches on all of our fears in some way. We’ve talked about fear of commitment last week. If you couldn’t be here for that one get it on line. And this week, we’re going to look the fear of failure.

Most of us, if not all of us, have dreams, plans, and aspirations that we would all tackle today if we knew we would succeed. Things we would do, go after, take on if we were guaranteed success. But a lot of the time we don’t go after them. What’s holding us back? What’s keeping us penned in? It’s the anxiety and the fright of failure, trying something and messing up, attempting something and falling flat on our face. Giving something a try and looking like a fool, a failure.

All the time economists put a number on intangibles. They quantify the cost of things that really can’t be measured. Like the cost of stress in the workplace—billions of dollars. Or the cost of bosses **not** appreciating their employees—billions of dollars. Or the cost of people not using their vacation time—billions of dollars. But in getting ready for this message I began to wonder what the cost of the fear of failure is. Not on our economy, although it has to have an impact. I wonder what the cost of the fear of failure is on our souls; on our minds; on our relationships; on our direction and purpose in life. How many adventures never get lived out? How many great ideas never get discovered? How many cures never get found? How many awesome friendship never start? How many good books never get written? All because we fear failure.

One of the main reasons we struggle with this fear is because most of us have a skewed view of success. We don’t understand success. When you think about it, success, as far as our culture is concerned, is more or less relative, it’s circumstantial. When I cook a good meal at home, my famous pork chops, or fettuccini, or tuna meringue pie, relative to what Emeril might make, it might not be seen as a success. In our culture who is deemed more successful? An Olympic athlete who is a champion, or the physically-challenged boy who feeds himself for the very first time? Or in our culture who is deemed the success, the woman who hits it big in the stock market and becomes a millionaire, or the single mom who scrimps, and sacrifices, and saves \$5 a week to pay for her kids piano lessons? You see what I’m getting at. Our culture says that success is relative to your fame, fortune, prestige, power. The more of these you have, the more successful you are. But in God’s economy, success has a different dynamic. So before we get into the fear of failure, I want to define true success. To do it, I am just going to let the Bible speak into your life and mine about success.

First of all, **in God’s economy success is relational, not circumstantial.** Success is relational, not circumstantial. Jeremiah 9:23-24, **“This is what the Lord says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me...’” (Jeremiah 9:23-24, NIV).** There is the relationship thing going on. Real success is about a personal relationship. It is about knowing God’s word, understanding it, living it out. And it is about having an interactive connection with Him.

Jesus put it this way, **“What good is it for a person to gain the whole world, yet forfeit the soul?” (Mark 8:36).** It’s real important to get this: Jesus defined success not as money, power, prestige, but in a relationship with him. Money, power, prestige are not bad things, but by themselves, in God’s eyes, they do not define success. It’s all about the relationship you have with Jesus.

So, do you know God through Christ? Do you? If you don’t, open up to him, invite him in, and see what happens. You want to find success, it’s relational, not circumstantial.

Enough about success, let’s talk about our fear of failure. I think that our fear of failure stems from our fear of stepping outside our comfort zone. I’ve got some pretty strong opinions about this, so bear with me. And it’s been too long since I talked about this.

You see, God didn’t put you on this earth, just fill up space. He put you here for a reason and that reason is to shine his light into the darkness, to spread his good news, to lead people to an active faith in Jesus Christ, to live out your purpose.

In my life I'm always praying something like, "Lord, I want to serve you completely, I want to serve you more. Lord I want to do more for you." Some of you pray prayers like that. Some of you don't yet. My hope as your pastor is that you get the courage to start praying prayers like that at some point in your spiritual journey, because when you do things begin to happen.

You might be thinking, "Aaron, are you crazy?! Why would I even **want** to pray a prayer asking for more to do?! I can't get done what I feel like I need to do already! I'm afraid what life would like if God gave me more to do!" I understand those feelings. I find myself saying, "My plate is full." That means I can't take on anything more. I don't have time or space in my life to do one more thing for anybody, let alone, for God! So many of us think of our lives as a plate, don't we? We look at our plates and say, "This thing is overflowing with stuff and if anybody puts one more bean on this plate, my life is going to come crashing down!" When we look at our lives like that, we don't want to ask God to let us do more for him. We're afraid; we're afraid of failing.

But here's the thing, when you tell God that you want to serve him more. When you tell God that you want to do more for him, he doesn't just add **more** onto your plate, God does something to your plate and your plate gets bigger! Don't worry about the pile on your plate, worry about your plate. When you ask God to let you do more you're not asking him to pile more beans on top, you're asking him to change you, and that's the key. You can do more for God because you are bigger inside.

You see, you and me, we're the same. We love establishing and staying in our comfort zone. Let's pretend that this area up here is my comfort zone. Our comfort zone is the place that we know, the things that we know, the people that we know. We know how to do life in the comfort zone. That's how we are as people and that's how we are as a church. It's safe and comfortable. There's an overstuffed couch here, there's a cold beverage and a remote control here. But when you say to God, "Please give me more to do for you," you're saying, "God would you pull me out of the comfort zone that I live in." We love our comfort zones. I want to be comfortable and so do you. It's a natural drive to want to feel safe. But when we ask God to help us to do more for him we're asking him to take us out of the comfort zone we're in.

When that happens, the further you move from where you're most comfortable, the more distress you feel, the more fear you feel, the more overwhelmed you feel. And here's the snag: For some reason we believe that if what we're about to do is really God's will, then we won't be afraid. I ask God to do more through me, I walk to the edge of my comfort zone and I start to feel uncomfortable, uneasy and afraid and I think, "This can't be what God wants me to do! If God wanted me to do it, he would have taken away my fear." But that's the way everybody feels! The prophets who were doing God's will were afraid at times! Moses was afraid when God told him to lead the people out of Egypt. God told Joshua not to be afraid...because he **was** afraid! The apostles were afraid when they moved outside their comfort zones. Jesus was so afraid before his crucifixion that he sweat blood! I don't want to smooth over the truth. If you get to the edge of your comfort zone, if you ask God to do more in your life, to enlarge your heart and your impact, sometimes it's hard! Sometimes it feels like it isn't worth it! And it will make you feel afraid.

As for me, I feel fear every time, I feel inadequate every time, I feel overwhelmed every time. Anytime a man or woman wants to do more for God they have to face fear. If you are afraid of fear, you'll always run back to the center of safety and security and you'll never know the power of God. Why? This is very important! Because the power of God doesn't dwell inside the comfort zone. The power of God lives outside the comfort zone. That's why so many people, so many ministers, never have anything miraculous happen in their lives, because they're staying where they can do it all themselves, in their comfort zone. If you can do it by yourself, you're not going to see God's power in action!

So as long as you're asking God to do more through you, time after time, you're going to feel the fear. But you know what, the people that I admire the most, the ones I look up to and emulate in life, they're the ones that are constantly asking God to do more through them and they are constantly going outside their comfort zones, and they are constantly feeling the fear of doing so. But their desire to do more for God is so overwhelming that they will pay the price and face the fear.

The truth is that God never said that he would take the fear away when you step out for him. He won't take away the fear. He **will** give you peace. And he will give you courage. But the fear will be there too.

Now it's real important to know that in your life when you get to the edge of your comfort zone, there are some people who live there at the edge of your comfort zone. They're called the Border Bullies. You know what they say? "You can't do that, we've never done that! How are we going to pay for that? You're not smart enough? You're going to fail! You're too young, you're too old, you're too fat, you're too skinny, you're in Joplin!" The border bullies can be tough! And they can be people you love and respect. They can be a parent or a spouse or an employee, or an employer, or a church member, or a staff member. You can't blame the border bullies though. They do what they do because they know that if you go outside your comfort zone, they're probably going to get dragged along! And they want to stay comfortable!

I love my mom and dad, but when I came home one day and said to them, "Mom, Dad, God wants me to become a minister." The first words out of my mom's mouth were, "That's fine Aaron, but keep your options open." I love you Mom!

I'm a leg-shaker. I'm always moving my legs. I was a super-hyper active kid and I still have to keep moving all the time. My great aunt told me I couldn't become a pastor because I shook my legs all the time! Border bullies mean well, and they're very convincing. You have to listen to them because they're good people, with good intentions. You listen to them, you love them, but then you move past them.

Another thing that makes us afraid to leave our comfort zones and do more for God is called **inhibition**. It's something inside of us, not outside of us. It's the fear that we've never been to that other place before and we can't picture ourselves there. Inhibition. "I can't do that, I'm not comfortable."

You know, when I started in ministry, I remember being afraid all the time. I came out of seminary and I was thrown out of my comfort zone into serving two small rural congregations. I didn't know squat! My comfort zone was so small. I had just enough room in my comfort zone to curl up in the fetal position. I didn't even want to **see** outside my comfort zone! I had very little vision of what God could do. My vision for ministry was simply to not mess up (and make sure that my fly was up when I preached!) I had no vision beyond my comfort zone. But I started to pray. Not a whole lot, but I started. "God, I see you doing things in the lives of other people, please do more through me."

I have never considered myself a visionary, but I started to pray, I ended up here. I learned to pray some more. I began to ask God to do more through me. I began to tell God that I wanted to do more for him. And scary things began to happen. The church started to grow! More people started showing up. People started having ideas, "Let's start a preschool. Let's do this mission trip. Let's help these people in need. Let's go to Russia. Let's go to Nicaragua. Let's start another church in Alba." Crazy stuff! More people came. "We need more room. Let's build some buildings. Let's start an off-site ministry. Let's put on a conference for other others churches."

I stepped out of my comfort zone with every one of these things. We as a church stepped out of our comfort zone. And listen, every single one of these things caused a great deal of wondering and discomfort and fear and still does. Yes it's exciting. Yes, it's exhilarating. Yes, it is amazing! But it has also been frightening!

Every step of the way we've had to face our fears of failing. And along the way we've embraced the saying, "Fail forward." If we're going to fail, to fail by doing something not by doing nothing. Along the way, to face our fear of failure we've embrace the word of God in Philippians where it says, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

Over the years, we have stepped outside our comfort zone in ways that I never thought possible. We are operating in that area that is outside of our power to do. God is doing it. God is raising up the resources, the people, the vision. These have been the most exciting years of ministry for me and at the same time the scariest. Because the leadership, the people, of the church has been willing to go outside the comfort zone.

So what does this mean for you and me? How is God calling you to face your fear of failure and get close to the edge of your comfort zone, and then step out? What adventures is God putting in front of you? What ideas? It may be something small like hosting some kids from the African Children's Choir. It might be something big like spending 6 months in Romania. How is God calling you to the edge of your comfort zone? What books could be written by you? What people could be transformed by you? What plans, what businesses, what organizations are waiting to be created? What people will be encouraged? What light might be shed in the life of an individual? What servant ministries, small and large could be done? If you will just step to the edge of your comfort zone, face the border bullies, and cross over.

Oh, and once you've done it, be ready to do it again. You see, the temptation is once you've expanded your territory to go right back into the middle of your comfort zone and say, "Hey, I did it! I faced the fear! God was present! It was awesome...and I never want to do that again!" But God continually invites us, never forces, he invites us to come out to the edge of our comfort zones again, face the fear again, listen to and love the border bullies again, and cross into the place where he really operates.

I want to end with a story from scripture. It comes from Matthew chapter 14. This happens after Jesus had fed the 5,000 and told the disciples to go back to their boat and set sail. Jesus stayed behind to dismiss the crowd then he went to find the disciples who were in the boat in the middle of the lake. **"During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.' 'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.' 'Come,' he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'** (Matthew 14:25-31, NIV).

Peter gets a lot of flack for sinking. But he's my hero because at least he got out of the boat. He got out of his comfort zone when Jesus asked him to. He walked toward the one thing that really matters in life. He walked toward Jesus. He walked toward meaning and hope.

Let me ask you, do you think Peter was afraid? You bet he was! Did he get scared and lose his focus and sink? Yup. **But he took a few steps!** And I bet he never, ever forgot those steps. Peter was willing to get out of the boat and later Jesus said that he would build his church through Peter.

Are you willing to get out of your boat? Are you willing to ask God to do more through you? He is waiting for you to ask, and when you do expect to feel some fear. Feel the fear and do it anyway. When you ask be ready to face some opposition, but also expect to see supernatural things occur. Supernatural things will occur because you are in a place where you can no longer do it--God has to do it through you.

It's time to stop camping out in your comfort zone. It's time to stop worshipping comfort. It's time to face your fear of failure and be mobilized by it, rather than paralyzed by it. Do not be afraid!

What do you think? I think that for today that challenge is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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