Did anyone ever tell you that you were a failure?

When I was a little kid I went to baseball try-outs. I don’t remember the adults telling me I was a failure, but I remember the other kids tell me. I couldn’t hit the ball, I couldn’t throw, and I couldn’t catch. Maybe that’s why I’m not much of a fan of the sport today.

Did anyone ever tell you that you were a failure? Check out these famous failures…

[Blue Fish TV – Famous Failures]

If you’ve never failed, you’ve never lived.

Lucille Ball, The Beatles, Grant, Jordan, Edison, Disney and Lincoln; we think of them as successful but before success came failure- and in some cases multiple, life-altering failures.

If you’ve never failed, you’ve never lived. To be fully alive means taking a risk! Stepping out of the safety and comfort in which we exist to attempt something that is beyond the ordinary for us is accepting the fact that failure is an option. That’s why faith always carries with it some measure of risk, because real faith is stepping beyond what we know we are capable of so that any real success is attributable to God and not our own human efforts!

Take Peter for example. He had spent years on the Sea of Galilee and in all those times he never once stepped foot over the edge of the boat without getting his head wet. Now what he saw was beyond reason, beyond logic, beyond what he could imagine- Jesus was walking on the water!

Peter and the other disciples had battled wind and waves all night long and now this ghost appears from the sea walking on the water. They were scared, frightened! Listen to how Matthew describes it:

At about four o’clock in the morning, Jesus came toward us walking on the water. We were scared out of our wits. "A ghost!" we said, crying out in terror.
Fear of Failure  
June 1, 2008

But Jesus was quick to comfort us. "Courage, it's me. Don't be afraid."

Peter, suddenly bold, said, "Master, if it's really you, call me to come to you on the water."

Jesus said, "Come ahead."

Jumping out of the boat, Peter walked on the water to Jesus. But when he looked down at the waves churning beneath his feet, he lost his nerve and started to sink. He cried, "Master, save me!"

Jesus didn't hesitate. He reached down and grabbed his hand. Then he said, "Faint-heart, what got into you?"

The two of them climbed into the boat, and the wind died down. We disciples in the boat, having watched the whole thing, worshiped Jesus, saying, "This is it! You are God's Son for sure!" Matthew 14:25-33 The Message

Fear Keeps Us In the Boat

Many people never get out of the boat because they are afraid of failure. Remaining safe in the boat is what they are focused on. But the real failure is: FAILING TO TAKE THE RISK ALTOGETHER!

To have tried and failed, is one thing. To have never risked failure is another. Counselor and Author Norm Wright says: “When we allow the fear of failure to dominate us, we are demanding a guaranteed outcome in a situation. But a guarantee takes away the opportunity to live by faith and trust God for the outcome.” (Afraid No More, p 95)

When Peter got out of the boat he put faith to work and as a result he walked on the water. But many people stay in the boat because they are not guaranteed they will not fail.

We have to recognize that fear of failure will hold us back. It kept the other 11 disciples in the boat while Peter risked it all.

So what keeps us in the boat? It is the thought, “What will others think of me?” If we are too concerned about the opinions of others if we fail we will stay in the boat. We don’t like others to think of us as failures.
But herein lies the problem; we’re worried about the wrong opinion. What we should be asking is, “What does God think of me sitting in the boat?” God has used failures throughout time to accomplish his purposes. God doesn’t use perfect people who succeed at every attempt. And God will not be disappointed with our failures if we attempt great things for his glory.

In the church and in our homes we need to create an environment where it is safe to fail; where failure is not met with criticism, but with approval for taking the risk. I’d rather see someone try and fail than to go through life wondering if they could have succeeded.

Whereas fear keeps us in the boat; **Focus Gets Us Out of the Boat.**

Peter was focused on Jesus. Peter saw Jesus, heard his words and acted in obedience to Jesus’ invitation to join him on the rolling, wind-tossed sea.

Sometimes we fail because we lack focus. In Peter’s case, he got out of the boat and started walking on the water because he was focused on Jesus. He saw his goal and he kept his eyes on Jesus. He didn’t even notice the distractions of wind and water lapping over his toes!

When he lost focus on Jesus and started instead to observe the wind and water he started to sink.

Remember the Old Testament story of the twelve spies who went into the Promised Land. They were sent ahead of the people that God had rescued from the hand of the Pharaoh in Egypt. When they returned they told of a land flowing with milk and honey just as God had promised. But ten of the spies also told of the giants that lived in the land. These men described themselves as grasshoppers and their fate would be the same as a grasshopper under the foot of a giant. They lost focus.

Joshua and Caleb never lost focus on the God who had defeated the mighty Pharaoh and his army. They believed that if God had led them to this point, God would lead them all the way. But as is often
the case, the minority report failed to pass muster with the people. As a result they spent another 40 years going in circles in the desert.

Sometimes we see our attempts as failures because we are focused on the wrong thing. When we judge whether or not something was a success, we are often focused on numbers. Numbers have a way of convincing us that something was a success.

But the better way to determine success is not by numbers but by faithfulness to what God called you to attempt. Just because Peter went under would you say he was a failure? While he may have taken some good natured ribbing when he got back in the boat, I imagine that Jesus gave the other eleven a look that said, “I didn’t see any of you out there!”

Success for a Christ-follower is obedience, not results. The opposite of failure is not success but faithfulness. Until we learn to focus on the right thing, focusing on the wrong stuff will keep us afraid of failure.

Not only do we need to change our definition of success, we need to see the Positive Side of the Fear of Failure.

Failure doesn’t have to mean disappointment. Thomas Edison, one of those famous failures is always remembered for saying he didn’t fail in pursuit of the light bulb; he just learned 10,000 ways that won’t work.

Nothing is a failure if we learn from it. Edison did and we can thank him for learning otherwise we’d still be burning kerosene lamps. Fear of failure as one author notes “leads me to explore the depth of my disappointment, which has the potential of bringing me to a place of personal and spiritual growth. John Ortberg agrees: “When I allow myself to experience the pain of failure, it can drive me to make the changes that will lead to new learning.”

I’ve learned a lot in my life by failing first. Thankfully on my first —and last- attempt at bungee jumping I didn’t fail!
Erwin McManus writes: Failure is part of God’s environment for shaping our character. Allowing us to fail is not a punishment from God, but a part of God’s process for shaping who we are.” God uses not only our successes in life but also our failures to create more and more godly character in our lives.

Peter must have learned something from both his walk on the water and his time in the water. Most likely a lesson he remembered when he denied Jesus; only to be lifted up again when Jesus restored him following the resurrection. If Peter learned nothing else from all his time with Jesus, Peter learned that Jesus is faithful to lift us up when we fail.

Peter sank. You and I will fail. But here’s the good news: **Jesus will lift us up when we fail.** Jesus wasn’t about to let Peter sink. Jesus was thankful for the obedience and faithfulness that got Peter out of the boat. So when Jesus saw Peter going under Jesus reached out his hand and lifted him to safety.

One of the failures that God used wrote an encouraging word to us in the Psalms. David said:

*The steps of the godly are directed by the Lord. God delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand. Psalm 37:23-24 NLT*

If you knew Jesus was holding out his hand in invitation, would you step out of the boat? Of course you would. So why are you so afraid of failing?

Look at the end of your sermon outline. There you will find some scripture and questions to keep this lesson going throughout the week. You’ll also find a challenge to do an outrageously courageous act- something that is beyond the boundaries of what would normally seem reasonable to you. My challenge to you for this week is to get out of the boat, focus on Jesus, and find the positive side of your fear. Who knows, you may actually enjoy every minute of it!

Remember: If you’ve never failed, you’ve never lived.
Sermon Outline & Follow-up
Did anyone ever tell you that you were a failure?

If you’ve never __________ , you’ve never __________ .

Matthew 14:22-33

F_______ Keeps Us In the Boat

Real failure is ______________ to take the _________ altogether.

“When we allow the fear of failure to dominate us, we are demanding a guaranteed outcome in a situation. But a guarantee takes away the opportunity to live by faith and trust God for the outcome.” (Afraid No More, p 95)

Factors that Keep us in the Boat

What will ________ think of me?

What will ________ think of me?

An environment that limits risk?

F_______ Gets Us Out of the Boat

Lack of Focus

Not Success, but ________________

Positive Side of the Fear of Failure

“When I allow myself to experience the pain of failure, it can drive me to make the changes that will lead to new learning.” John Ortberg

Failure is part of God’s environment for shaping our character. Allowing us to fail is not a punishment from God, but a part of God’s process for shaping who we are. Erwin McManus

Jesus Will Lift Us Up When We Fail

Psalm 37:23-24

Next Week: Fear of Financial Insecurity
Follow Through – Fear of Failure

1. Psalm 34 - Make a list of all your fears. What is the promise in verse 6?

2. Psalm 37:23-24 - Read Psalm 37 and note the characteristics of the two kinds of people that David contrasts in the Psalm.

3. 2 Samuel 11-12 - David stumbled and fell. Was God able to use David following his ‘failure’?

4. Matthew 14:22-33 - Did Peter intend to fail when he stepped out of the boat?

5. 1 Samuel 17:1-50 - Goliath brought fear to the Israelite army and they were paralyzed. Based on verses 34-37, why was David not afraid of failing?

6. Matthew 25:14-30 - In the parable, the man with one talent failed to take a risk. What was the reaction of his master?

The Challenge

In the spring of 1994, Michael Jordan retired from basketball to play baseball. He was at the top of his game. But he was not afraid of failure, so he attempted to play a game that required skills with which he was unfamiliar.

The fear of failure paralyzes many people. People never try new things because they might fail. Better to stay safe and avoid the risk! But that is not the example we find in scripture. Risk-takers are found throughout the scripture! This week, do- or plan- an outrageously courageous act- something that is beyond the boundaries of what would normally seem reasonable to you. You may fail, but you may learn from that. What can you attempt for God?

Ask yourself, “Where have I felt prompted to do something before, but was afraid?” Witness to a friend? Get to know someone in your neighborhood? Volunteer? Teach Sunday school?

What scares you about this thing? What preparations can you make that will help you be less afraid? Share your experience with others as an encouragement to them.