

THE VERDICT IS IN:
FEAR IS NEVER YOUR FRIEND

by
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Failure Often Is the Beginning

*Thank God for your present limitations or failure...
for you now occupy a status from which
nearly all success stories originate.*

—Jim Rohn

The Seasons of Life

If you are concerned about the possibilities of successes and failures in your life, you are not alone. Many struggle with the same concerns. We all tend to be painfully aware of our own limitations—so much so that we sometimes limit our potential. But we can't live a life of faith in some safe place. The life of faith is a life of risk, one that requires us to take action.

Laurence Shames, a writer for *The New York Times*, once wrote:

John Milton was a failure. In writing *Paradise Lost*, his aim was to “justify the ways of God to men.” Inevitably he fell short and wrote only a monumental poem. Beethoven, whose music was conceived to transcend fate, was a failure, as was

Socrates, whose ambition was to make people happy by making them reasonable and just. The surest, noblest way to fail is to set one's standards Titanically high. The flip side of that proposition also seems true.

The surest way to succeed is to keep one's striving low. Many people, by external standards, will be "successes." They will own homes, eat in better restaurants, dress well, and, in some instances, perform socially useful work. Yet fewer people are putting themselves on the line, making as much of their minds and talents as they might. Frequently, success is what people settle for when they can't think of something noble enough to be worth failing at.

Most of us have a desire to make a meaningful difference in our world and in the lives of those around us, but too often we are not quite sure how to make that happen. We know that God has a "perfect" plan for our lives, and we long to know that plan. We thoughtfully seek to define our vision and passion, but can't seem to bring it into focus.

If you have a sincere desire to know God's plan for your life, there is no need for you to worry about knowing all the specifics. Fear will keep pushing you to find all the answers, but faith and trust in God will help you to relax and enjoy the everyday experiences of life, knowing that God is in control.

We worry about making a decision and taking action because we are afraid of making the wrong choice and finding out later—with the benefit of additional information—that a different choice would have served us better. Even people who have had a lot of successes say that they some-

times have a nagging feeling that they might have made a better choice.

Think about this for a minute. What kind of sense does it make to beat yourself up for decisions you made yesterday, based on the information you had at that time? Today you have additional information and would make a different choice—but that isn't an option...so forget it and move on.

God can make something positive out of situations that we see as being negative. Romans 8:28 (NIV) tells us “that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” God even uses your failures to bring about good.

I'll even go on record as saying that you might be surprised at how often your perceived failure is actually your friend. Look back over your life at the situations you believed to be failures—yet today you can see how the beautiful hand of God brought good from them. This should convince you not to allow the fear of failure to keep you from enjoying life.

The fear of failure blocks success in many areas of life, preventing people from living up to their God-given potentials. And what a shame, because failure is not all bad—it is not the end of the world.

In fact, I say that failure is just the beginning. Failure is nothing to fear; rather it is something we should *enthusiastically* embrace because it provides a great deal of important information.

Has anyone ever faulted a baby for falling as he or she is learning to walk? Of course not. It would be unthinkable to fault a baby for “little failures” on the road to success. So

it is with God's children. We must accept that failures are a normal part of experiencing life.

Once we have experienced failure, tripped and fallen on our faces, and then picked ourselves back up, we're left with a new level of understanding—a new mastery—that is truly valuable. We have earned a degree of confidence that cannot be easily shaken. When we choose to look at failure as a beginning of something, a way to learn, grow, and develop, we will view our inevitable failure as a necessary part of the whole. Once we relinquish the anxiety about our fear of failure, we can begin to joyfully and enthusiastically focus once again on our goals.

We often fear failure because of our arrogance and pride. We think that we are somehow entitled to achieve success without paying its market price. It usually doesn't work that way. It is when we set out knowing full well that failure *is* a part of the journey—that falling short of the mark only tells us the distance left to go—that we begin to comprehend the value that each failure brings to our lives. Only then can we enjoy our life experiences to the fullest.

What we perceive as failures will always be disappointing in the beginning. They can be painful and frustrating. That's why we often think that we dislike them. But when we allow ourselves to understand that they are simply building blocks of experience—bricks in the wall of our success in walking out God's plan for our lives—we realize that with each one, we move closer to making His dreams and goals for our lives a reality. When we choose to rid ourselves of our fear of failing, we find that we are willing to risk more, do more, give more of ourselves, and be more. That is when real success is waiting for us just around the corner.

I recently read about a survey that was taken among retired people in the United States. They were asked this question: “If you had your life to live over again, what would you do differently?” Interestingly enough, the number-one answer given—by a sizable margin over the second most-popular answer—was, “I would take more risks.” I find that very interesting.

Let’s speculate for a moment about why that was their answer. I would say that in looking back over their lives, they realized that they had not really experienced life to the fullest. They could see how fear had robbed them of the opportunity to really get out of life all that God had meant for them to have. In retrospect, they realized that they had allowed fear—the very thing their Creator had warned them against—to rob them of many beautiful life experiences.

Since you are reading this book, I can assume that you want to deal with the issue of fear and the control it has over your life. I encourage you to take the necessary steps now to rid yourself of the fear that would cause you in your old age to look back over your life and say, “I wish I had taken more risks and lived a more fulfilling life.” As you examine your own life, you will realize that all your fears have been based on falsehood, a lie of Satan. You will discover that displacing the false with truth is the essence of the healing of all things, both visible and invisible.

Some say that 90 percent of the things we fear never happen. Zig Ziglar shares an acronym that also helps us look at fear in a positive way:

False

Evidence

Appearing

Real

Too many people wear fear like a badge of honor, as if it is an appropriate excuse for not facing the challenges, opportunities, and adventures life has to offer. This thought-provoking acronym should encourage you not to pass up opportunities for potential success simply because you are afraid you will fail.

In his book, *The Best of Success*, Wynn Davis tells us that the law of failure is one of the most powerful of all the success laws because you only really fail when you quit trying. When we accept the reality that failure is only the beginning of something great, we will learn to persevere.

Sharing a Dream

One of my favorite stories is about Cyrus W. Field, a man who insisted on seeing failure as a beginning. Although you may not recognize his name, he was one of the greatest entrepreneurs of the 1800s. His story began in 1853 when he gathered a small group of men at his home to share a dream. His proposal was to manufacture a communication cable that would cross the Atlantic Ocean from the New Americas to the continent of Europe. The line was to run from Nova Scotia, St. Johns, Newfoundland across the Atlantic. Cyrus believed that this cable had the potential of bringing two great worlds together, which would foster greater commerce. He even believed that his cable could

possibly work toward averting the tragic kinds of miscommunication that often led to wars.

At the close of this meeting, six individuals married their sense of will to his. They agreed to attach themselves to his dream, his vision. They were not experts, oceanographers, or telegraph wire communication experts. Again, they were men who were willing to buy into Field's vision and dream. They went to work, and five years later, in the fall of 1858, they finished laying the cable. Because of erosion difficulties caused by the salt water, the cable only worked for

fragments of a message over a few seconds, and the entire effort was deemed a disaster and a hoax. It was considered to be the biggest folly of the eighteenth century.

The errors to avoid are those that eliminate opportunities to try again.

—Lazar Goldberg

People grew suspicious of Cyrus Field's dream. They began to doubt, and that doubt lasted for the next eight years. We know much of this story because Cyrus kept a detailed journal of the experience. This is one of Cyrus's entries: "After the failure of 1858, these became my darkest days."

It was an extremely difficult time for Cyrus. He learned what many of us have learned—that when our efforts appear to have failed, it is very difficult to raise our dreams to life again. But Cyrus was determined.

Facing Failure

Cyrus Field lived these words. For the next seven years, he and his companions pleaded with others to find a solu-

tion to the saltwater erosion. Finally, on July 15, 1865, they set sail. This time they would skip the problems of laying cable on land and lay the cable directly over the Atlantic. After 1,200 miles of cable had been laid, with only 600 miles left to go, a fault was spotted on a portion of the line. As they stopped to reel in the damaged section, a large wave lifted the boat and snapped the cable. For nine days and nights, they dragged the bottom of the ocean, searching for the sunken cable—with no success. Finally, they returned to England, defeated, yet Cyrus wrote that he was “full of resolution to start the battle anew.”

Isn't it true that many men fail because they decide to quit too soon? When things start going wrong and it looks like everything is against them, they begin to lose their faith. Because they fear that the circumstances are insurmountable, they lose their courage to keep on fighting. And it is all

*Success is going from failure
to failure without losing
enthusiasm.*

—Winston Churchill

because of how they choose to think. They choose fear instead of faith—and that really is the only way to fail.

If we would learn to step out in faith to attempt the impossible, we would quickly experience the truth of Mark 9:23 (NIV), where Jesus himself says, “Everything is possible for him who believes.” By choosing faith over fear, we can accomplish anything.

One year later, after raising only enough money to replace the section of damaged cable, Cyrus and his crew sailed back out. This time they faced horrible weather con-

ditions. They experienced dense fog, raging storms, and squalls. They felt as if they were fishing for a jewel at the bottom of the ocean. Many people believed it was not only ridiculous to try to find the lost cable but also completely impossible.

Cyrus's odd attack was simple yet gigantic. He would do his best to get to the general vicinity of the previous year's debacle, and then begin casting huge grappling hooks on the end of rope twisted with steel wire that was capable of lifting an estimated thirty tons. It took two hours for the cable to drop to the bottom of the ocean and up to thirty hours to reel it in. It was a very slow process.

On August 17, 1866, the ship's line hooked something, and twenty-eight hours later, the cable broke the surface of the sea. The crew had it in sight for almost five minutes. But, as if frightened, the cable broke away and sank once again. The crew was devastated but determined, so they lowered the hook once more.

Success At Last!

Two weeks later, they hooked something again. Forty-eight hours later, they saw their precious cable. No one uttered a single word. It was as if all life and death hung in the balance. They could hardly believe their eyes. It was only when the cable was brought onto the ship that a word was spoken. Some of the men turned their heads and wept. Some ran and celebrated with joyous screams. Thirteen years of anxious watching and ceaseless toil had finally come to a successful end. The true greatness of Cyrus W. Field was the immeasurable force of determination in his head, and the passion in his heart. He had the necessary will and knowl-

edge to get the task done, and he refused to see failure as anything but a new beginning.

Life is an adventure. Cyrus's life took on a transcendent purpose when he refused to release the dreams of his heart. This is a good lesson for all of us. Only when we marry what is in our hearts and our minds with the courage to persevere do our dreams have a chance of becoming reality. Make the decision today that you will not allow the lies of Satan to keep you from accomplishing God's will for your life.

Try, Try Again

On a similar note, in February 2004, there was a story in the *California Bar Journal* that opened like this:

“For those 3,940 lawyers who failed last July's bar exam, Maxcy Filer has some advice: Try, try, again.”

Maxcy Filer took the California Bar Exam for the first time at the age of 36 in 1966, and he failed. He took it again and failed. He took it many, many more times, and each time he failed. He took it in San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Riverside, and anywhere else it was offered. Over and over, he failed.

He started taking the exam when his children were still living at home. He then took it with each of his sons as they successfully earned their own law degrees. He took it again after he started working as a law clerk in the law offices of his sons, and he continued taking it even as he reached an age when most people are seriously considering retirement.

Finally, after twenty-five years, \$50,000 in exam fees and review courses, and 144 days in testing rooms, Maxcy Filer took the exam for the forty-eighth time, and passed. He was 61 years old.

Maxcy never saw each failure as the end of his dream. Instead, he saw each failure as a step toward what he believed to be the inevitable—the fulfillment of his dream.

I wonder how many of us stop one step shy of realizing our dreams because of fear. Too often, insecurity and fear—being unstable, uncertain, and lacking confidence—keeps people from persistently pursuing a dream that could enrich not only their lives but also the lives of others. But that is not God’s plan. Jesus tells us in John 10:10 (AMP) that Satan comes to steal what is best for us [many times through fear], but, He goes on to say, “I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows).” I don’t see any room for fear in that formula!

God wants us to stop depending on our own abilities alone and start confessing the truth of Philippians 4:13 (NIV): “I can do everything through him [Christ] who gives me strength.” God wants us to have faith not only in His abilities but also in what He can and will accomplish *through* us.

Do It Afraid

Believing that and having faith will not always immediately take away the fear, but we shouldn’t let that stop us. When we feel God urging us to try something new and different, we must step out and do it. Doing something new always requires a measure of faith. We must learn to confront our fears, and sometimes that means we must begin doing things while we are afraid.

Joyce Meyer relates an interesting story she read several years ago. She tells about a woman who was sharing with one of her Christian friends that all of her life she had been afraid. She was afraid to go out. She was afraid of people.

She was afraid to drive. She told her friend that because she had been in such bondage to fear, she had never gone anywhere or done anything. She said, "I just have all these fears, and I don't know what to do." Her friend looked at her and said, "Well, do it afraid!"

Joyce says:

Reading that story was life-changing for me. I had a misconceived notion that I had to pray my fearful feelings away...and that I had to keep praying for God to deliver me until those feelings were all gone. But that story helped me. And I have since learned that I don't have to bow down to those fearful feelings. I learned that I could do the things God wanted me to do...even while I was afraid. If I hadn't learned that lesson, I wouldn't be teaching and preaching today.

When you learn to trust God and step out even though you're afraid, God will provide the courage and boldness you need to overcome your fear. Just remember that there are no failures in Christ. If you make a mistake, God will just lift you up, teach you something from it, and send you on your way. You have not failed until you stop trying. So stop babysitting fear and make a decision to make some courageous and bold moves...even if you have to do it afraid!

God Is Perfect but We Are Not

As Christians, we know that it is God's plan for us to walk according to His good plan for our lives, without being encumbered with fear or doubt. However, so often I hear double-talk from some Christians, which indicates that they

haven't really bought into who Christ is, who we as Christians are, and how Christ works in our lives.

Some say they believe that God is perfect, makes no mistakes, and is all-knowing, yet they turn right around and make statements or show by their actions that they don't believe that at all. For example, they say, "How can God call someone to a specific ministry and then later change His mind?" He doesn't!

Do you believe an all-knowing God works that way? Does He not know the purpose for each one of us? Does He make mistakes? The answer is a resounding NO! We, as human beings, are the ones who make mistakes. And the mistakes we make begin with our thinking.

There are two things that may have happened when it appears that God has changed His mind. Sometimes people may mistake their desire to do a certain thing for God as His calling. In their zeal to be His servants, they may choose to work in specific areas that are not a part of His perfect plan for them. In these cases, God not only will use these times as building blocks for these individuals, but He will gently prod them onto a path that leads them into His perfect plan. He uses His divine influence to direct them toward the position where they can be most effective. These people should never feel like a failure or be deterred from living God's perfect plan, because, as I mentioned earlier, He has a way of making everything "work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (Romans 8:28 NLT). If you really believe this, it will change the way you feel about some of the things you have done in the past.

The other thing that sometimes happens is God will use people for a time in certain positions to accomplish specific purposes. When those purposes are accomplished, He will move them into another area. If they are sensitive and obedient to God's leading, they will allow Him to use them wherever and however He desires. They will become confident that they can trust Him because they know He *never* makes a mistake. He cannot because He is truly God.

At some point in these scenarios, the individuals may begin to doubt their spiritual discernment, and be fearful about "trying again." But when those fears and doubts flood in, they must remember that God can guide them toward His will for their lives.

If you have had such an experience in your own life, the truth presented here should restore your confidence in the God who never makes mistakes.

It is good to remember how God worked in the lives of men like Jonah, Moses, Paul, and others. I'm sure you would agree that He did what *He* chose to do in their lives to accomplish His God-created purposes for them. "Free will" and "free choice"—which we hear so much about today—were not options for these men...nor can they be for those who are passionate about following God's call for their lives today.

Think about it—our loving Creator, the all-knowing, all-inspiring, ever-present, perfect God, cares so much about us that He offers His divine influence to help us make right decisions. Skeptics might argue that if that were the case, we would be perfect and make all the right decisions. But I don't agree.

God could have created us that way, had He chosen to do so, but I don't find any scriptural basis that leads me to believe that was His intention. The Bible tells me that as human beings we will fail and make bad decisions that will cause us to despair. But we also find that through those experiences, we will learn and grow.

God is more interested in us becoming more like Him than in our successes. Do you think a life full of successes would make you more like God? Or is it more likely that

enduring some failures in life would make you more like Him? The answer is pretty obvious.

*Far better is it to dare
mighty things, to win glorious
triumphs, even though
checkered by failure, than
to take rank with those poor
spirits who neither enjoy
much nor suffer much,
because they live in the gray
twilight that knows neither
victory nor defeat.*

—Theodore Roosevelt

If God's plan had been for us to have lives without failure, He could have made that happen. But instead He gave us the freedom to choose, knowing that we would make some bad choices and experience failures. But He also knew that we would discover our need for Him because of those failures—and that through that

process we would become more like Him.

Get this straight in your thinking—we do have the “freedom to choose,” but not “free will” or “free choice.” There is a big difference. When we exercise our “freedom to choose,” there are consequences for wrong choices.

However, if we had “free will” and “free choice,” there would be no consequences for any of our choices. When we accept salvation, we give up our will—what we want—in order to serve our Savior and live in His perfect will. And that’s the only truly fulfilling choice.

Did God make a mistake by not creating us this way? No. God is perfect. He always has been and always will be. As Christians, He calls us to become like Him, but it is a process that happens as we learn from our mistakes.

In his perennial Christian bestseller, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers says, “Joy comes from seeing the complete fulfillment of the specific purpose for which I was created and born again, *not from successfully doing something of my own choosing.*”

God knew from the beginning that we would be imperfect individuals—He created us, and He is all knowing. He knew we would make mistakes—that’s why He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. Through His sacrifice, we can be made righteous as we surrender our will to Him and are born again. Then we can have confidence that God is always with us. He is with us whether we believe it or not, so we may as well believe it and enjoy life!

As we submit to God and allow Him to have complete liberty in our lives, He will lead, guide, and direct our steps.

If you have allowed your dreams to be buried by your fear of failure, it is time to make a change. Thousands of years ago, the philosopher Seneca said, “If we let things terrify us, life is not worth living.” And that is still true today. So don’t let fear rob you of being a success in life. As you submit to God and allow Him to have complete liberty in your life, He will lead, guide, and direct your steps.

In his book, *Wild at Heart*, John Eldredge quotes fellow author Howard Macey: “The spiritual life cannot be made suburban. It is always frontier and we who live in it must accept and even rejoice that it remains untamed.”

That word “untamed” is a powerful adjective, especially when used to describe our potential. It is not the future that is untamed; it is really the present. Are we willing to see our present failures as the future successes they are meant to be?

John Eldredge says, “The greatest obstacle to realizing our dreams is the false self’s hatred of mystery.”

The good news is that failure is not a mystery; it is predictable, dependable, and consistent. But the most important thing for us to remember is that it is not the end; instead, it is *only the beginning*—the beginning of an exciting opportunity for us to grow.

Chapter Three

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think people fear failure?
2. Why does the author say failure is something to enthusiastically embrace?

*The problem is never how to get
new, innovative thoughts into
your mind, but how to get old ones out.*

—Dee Hock
