

# Fear of Failure

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 05-03-20

At Crossroads United Methodist Church

Waunakee, WI

J. K. Rowling, author of the wildly popular and beloved children's book series, Harry Potter, has said, "By every usual standard, I was the biggest failure I knew." After conceiving the idea for the books, Rowling's mother died, her marriage ended, and she was left to raise a baby with no job and no family. She applied and received welfare benefits.

After struggling with depression, poverty, and numerous setbacks, she eventually finished her first novel, only to be rejected over a dozen times. Her first publication even came with a warning to "get a day job," because no one thought she could make a living as a children's writer.

But she disproved them by becoming one of the best-selling authors of all times! According to Rowling herself, "It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all - in which case, you fail by default."

So, what about you? Do you ever fear failure? What kind of impending personal defeat keeps you awake at night? What did you do when the voice in your head said that you should give up?

In his book, *Unafraid*, Adam Hamilton writes, "The fear of failure - along with all the awful accompanying scenarios we imagine of shame, the inability to provide for ourselves and those we love, and the stigma of losing - is one of the most prevalent human fears. In our congregational survey, it loomed as the number one fear of those under fifty."

"Do you ever fear failure?" he asks. "What kind of impending personal defeat keeps you awake at night?"

You may remember when God calls to Moses from out of the burning bush. God says, "I've heard my people's cry in Egypt, and I'm going to lead the Israelites to freedom. And I am sending you to rescue them from Pharaoh."

In response, Moses immediately begins outlining to God all of the reasons why he will fail at this mission. It's a great passage, because God is so patient with Moses, responding to every excuse with a path forward.

"I don't know your name." "People won't believe me." They'll say I'm making it up." "I don't speak well. I stutter."

And then Moses just says outright, "Please God, just send someone else." No matter what God says, Moses knows he's not good enough for this task. He's a failure, not a leader.

God is a bit annoyed, at last, at Moses' continued reticence, but God still smoothes the way for Moses, offering Aaron, Moses' brother, as helper and mouthpiece for the tasks ahead.

There have been and are times in my life when I feel that I've failed. Things that I may have done or said; or things I didn't do that I should have. There are times when I've felt very inadequate to the task, even when I believe God is leading me.

You may feel like a failure sometimes too. Maybe you feel that anybody other than you, would be a better choice to do the work of God - or to do your work.

Please hear this friends: God's love for you doesn't depend on your being "successful." God loves you immeasurably even when you fail - and you will fail. And, God has just as much use for people who fail as for people who don't seem to fail. In fact, maybe when we've failed, we're a little more ready to hand ourselves over to God.

Another thing: Just as God's love for you doesn't depend on your "success," so it is with true friends and loved ones on this journey of life. The best people to have as your friends and confidants are

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those whose love is, like God's, not conditional. Who is still standing with you when your life has been an utter disaster and you've screwed everything up? These are the folks that are embodying Christ for you - the ones who will sit in the rubble of failure for you and help you get up again.

Moses doesn't get to the promised land himself - he just sees it from a distance. But his intern, Joshua, gets to take the people into the land. And as they stand ready to end their years of wandering, God gives Joshua a blessing. Listen for the repeated words of encouragement in this short passage:

"No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous ... Only be strong and very courageous ... Do not turn from [my law] to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go ... For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful ... I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

We may fail. We've done it before. Probably, we'll do it again. But we can be strong and courageous, because God's love never fails. And God is with us wherever we go, choosing us, always. Amen.