

Natalie W. Bell
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Facing Our Fear of Failure
Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹² He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

I think we can relate to Moses more than we realize,
because, some of this story is about that universal fear of failure!
Moses was so afraid he might fail God....that he was full of excuses!

Once I found an ad for www.officialworkexcuse.com.

It's a website devoted to writing people official 'excuses'
for a day off of school or work.

No joke. They'll say you are sick, grieving, out of the country, you name it!

Do you have a favorite excuse? like...

1. I forgot.
2. No one told me to do it.
3. I don't know how to do it.
4. That's the way we've always done it.

And my all time least favorite:

5. That's not my job.

Moses had a lot of excuses for God.
What excuses do we bring to God?

Moses had a right to be afraid.

He had failed, big time--- he killed an Egyptian who was abusing an Israelite.
After that, he ran away to Midian, started a new life, married Zipporah, and had a son Gershom, while working as a shepherd for his father-in-law Jethro.
He ***didn't feel qualified*** to do anything else,
nor ***did he want*** to do anything else!
But ***God had other plans.***

So, while he was minding his own business,
The voice of God told him in a ***burning bush----***
to go free the Israelites—in Egypt!

God was ***insistent*** (God can be VERY insistent, by the way)
But Moses has ***one excuse*** after another.
Followed by God's rebuttal (God has those too!)

Moses says ***who am I to go***, and God says I will be with you.

Moses says ***what will I say to him***,
And God says tell him that I sent you—I AM—God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

When Moses says ***he cannot speak well***,
God says I will give you the words. I MADE your mouth for Pete's sake!

When Moses says ***send someone else***, God gets mad.
He agrees to let Aaron go and speak, but tells tells Moses, 'you're going'!!!
So get over it!

We know the rest of the story—
Moses ***does go and plead for his people.***

He performs signs and wonders,
 he **leads the people** out of Egypt and through the Red Sea,
 and through the wilderness for forty years, as an amazing leader!
 The one who went up on Mt. Sinai and received the 10 commandments.
 Who advised the people, and he put up with them and their excuses!
 Moses **had talent he didn't even know** was in him.

But it all began with his **fear of failure**.
 After all, it is harder to fail,
 if you **just keep doing** what you've always done, right?
 Or, if you **ignore the burning bush** in YOUR life, right?

In Adam Hamilton's **Unafraid**, he offers **3 powerful principles about failure**.

1. Things are not usually as hard as you fear.
2. Successful people are willing to do the scary things that others won't.
3. Often the harder, riskier, less convenient path is the right one.

Hamilton calls this 'discernment by nausea'.

If it makes you a bit sick to your stomach, it might be right!

Adam Hamilton, *Unafraid*, Convergent; New York, 2018, pg. 89-90

Remember **Robert Frost's** "*The Road Less Traveled*",
 Remember **Jesus**—take up your cross and follow,
 The road to the kingdom of God is **narrow, and the way is hard!**

Unfortunately, the fear of failure can **literally PARALYZE** us, right?
 It can keep us from doing anything,
 and **prevent us from finding true joy** in life!

If we allow our **fear of failing or disappointing others to control** us,
we will probably never start a business, take a new job,
 go into rehab, start some therapy, try a new medicine,
 or take any plunge into something new!

So, what do YOU do when you're afraid of failing?
Give up? Ignore it? Crawl away slowly?

One wise pastor told me,
 that as pastor you will have **over 100 people, with over 100 opinions**,
 about how you **are** doing your job,
 How you **should be** doing it,

how you are *failing*, where you *fall short*...
and sometimes *they will share that* in the foyer of church!

But it's *not just pastoring*, right?
It's your job, too---whether in the workplace, the home, the community.
We cannot avoid criticism and disappointing people, no matter what we do!

Every morning *we risk failing, and disappointing* someone, for some reason!
And that thought can make you *crazy and stuck*—
Or, it can *send us into the arms of Jesus!*

Jesus made people mad,
he *failed* in the eyes of religious leaders, by not following each Jewish law.
He *disappointed* so many, that they crucified him,
The one who they expected to be a king and warrior to save them!
Many followers turned away and left Jesus (see John 6:66), but he kept going!

How? Why?
It all came down to *following his call*.....and having *love and grace* for people!
What about us?
Do we follow? And have that *love and grace* when we fail and disappoint others?

Disappointing people is just *part of being human!*
(Just Ask your kids!)
Failure is part of human life.
which is actually great news---
because failure is how we *learn and grow and find the joy* of life!

Did you know that the author of the Harry Potter books, *J.K. Rowling*,
submitted her first manuscript 12 times before it was begrudgingly accepted?
She was told to keep her day job!
She wisely said that *it's IMPOSSIBLE to fully live without failing at something!*
Adam Hamilton, *Unafraid*, Convergent; New York, 2018, pg. 87

My list of failures is so long...
Some funny, some heartbreaking.
I cannot ride a bike anymore.
Upon receiving one, I took out a mailbox!---Embarassing, painful, and expensive!
No *bikes* for me, at least with only 2 wheels.
No *horses* either, after too many times thrown off as a kid.

And *No Zumba* class!
 After one attempt years ago, I laid in bed after
 with an arthritis flare for days!

How have *you failed*?
 When have you learned your *limits*?
 When have you *disappointed* someone?

Welcome to the human race, and life with God!
 You are in *great company*!
 With Moses, and *all of us*!

But--have you ever let this lead you to *REFUSE God's call*—
out of fear of failure?
 Or to *ignore* it, or close our eyes to the burning bush and God's voice?

What are we *most afraid of failing*?
 A presentation? Caring for a sick loved one?
 Leadership? Using your gifts in church?
 What about people knowing what you really struggle with inside?

How many of you are afraid of failing at love?
 At parenting?
 At trying to get clean and sober?
 At getting a new job or career?

As a Pastor in the fishbowl, *my failures are well known*.
 My first two marriages fell apart—before your eyes.
 I failed my children through divorce, with scars that last, forever.
But, just like all followers of Jesus—I am FORGIVEN!

What about you?
 How have you failed, or disappointed others?
And do you realize you too are FORGIVEN?

Pastor Mark Batterson, wrote *All In*, he says we should take risks--
Faith is embracing the uncertainties of life. ...
 recognizing a divine appointment when you see one.
 Embrace *relational* uncertainty. It's called romance.
 Embrace *spiritual* uncertainty. It's called mystery.

Embrace *occupational* uncertainty. It's called destiny.
 Embrace *intellectual* uncertainty. It's called revelation.
 Mark Batterson, In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day (Multnomah, 2006), pp. 88-89

The courage to face our fears,
 and risk failure,
 comes from ***JUST DOING IT!***
 It comes from failing, and letting God pull you up again!
When has God done that for you?

Poet Maya Angelou said the most important lesson she learned from her mother was: to *develop courage*....by being courageous.
 And after years...I realized that one isn't born with courage.
 One *develops* it....by *doing small, courageous things*,
 in the same way that one wouldn't set out to pick up 100 pound bag of rice.
 [first you pick up a five pound bag, and then a ten ...and so forth,
 until one builds up enough muscle to actually pick up 100 pounds.
 And that's the same way with courage.
 HBR IdeaCast, "Maya Angelou on Courage and Creativity," Harvard Business Review (5-29-13)

The 2011 film ***We Bought a Zoo*** was based on the true story of a British man named Benjamin Mee who bought a zoo, and many times thought, .
 "What have I done?" In the film about his life, Mee says,
***"Sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage.
 Just literally twenty seconds of embarrassing bravery.
 And I promise you, something great will come of it."***

In 1997 basketball star ***Michael Jordan*** did a NIKE ad called "***Failure***"
 In it, he says: *I've missed over 9,000 shots, and lost over 300 games.
 I have missed 26 opportunities when I was supposed to get the winning shot!
 I have failed, over and over again in life, and that is WHY I SUCCEED!*
 Adam Hamilton, Unafraid, Convergent; New York, 2018, pg. 90

Courage is not the absence of fear, or the avoidance of failure.
 It is doing what we've been called to do by God....
 and realizing that the ***only person whose opinion really matters...is God!***
 And God is always on our side, cheering us on, and picking us up when we fail!

The ***fear of failure is very powerful.***
 But ***God is more*** powerful!

God's perfect love casts out fear!

The people I know with the *most JOY* in life?
 Are the ones who just *do it*. Even when terrified!
 They take that the *leap* of faith, the *20 seconds* of insane courage,
 the road *less traveled*, the thing that *others refuse to do*....

And they discover that it *wasn't as impossible* as it seemed...
 and *GOD was actually right beside* them!
 Because truth is--our Savior is with us through all failures of life!

Moses was a stuttering, murderer shepherd---turned preacher and leader!
 He saved hundreds of lives!

We don't have to trust what *WE CAN DO*,
 We just have to believe *WHAT GOD CAN DO THROUGH US*,
 even if, even when, we fail!
Ephesians 3:20 says this "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than
 all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us"
Romans 8:31 says "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

What is God asking *YOU to do* in your life right now?
 Are you afraid to fail?
 Are you paralyzed by fear?
 Do you have *lots of excuses*?
 I'm telling you—with God, **take the plunge!**
GOD IS WITH YOU!

I love NRSV Bibles, but lots of other translations too.
The Passion Translation, newly available, is paraphrased, but manages to keep
 the beauty and poetry of things like the Psalms.
 Easy to understand, yet really beautiful and lyrical.
 Listen to *Psalms 62:5-8*—something I meditated on all week:

*I am standing in absolute stillness, silent before the one I love,
 waiting as long as it takes for him to rescue me.
 Only God is my Savior, and he will not fail me.
⁶For he alone is my safe place.
 His wrap-around presence always protects me
 as my champion defender.*

*There's no risk of failure with God!
 So why would I let worry paralyze me,
 even when troubles multiply around me?
⁷ God's glory is all around me!
 His wrap-around presence is all I need,
 for the Lord is my Savior, my hero, and my life-giving strength.
⁸ Join me, everyone! Trust only in God every moment!
 Tell him all your troubles and pour out your heart-longings to him.
 Believe me when I tell you—he will help you!*

And it's so important to be *reminded of God's truth every day*.
 In quiet time with God.
When do you make time for that?
 And isn't it refreshing?

Every time I share the Word of God,
 I want to share how we can *live it out—TODAY!*

For those who have a smart phone (or a computer),
 I want to strongly encourage you to download the app called
ABIDE: Christian meditation and prayer. Google or Apple Store.
 Basically it's great reading aloud of scripture and prayers,
 and solid teachings on faith, emotions, anxiety, and other topics.
 It's *peaceful, and uplifting*. And, right there on your phone.
 I have enjoyed it so much at night to help me *get to sleep!*
 Go to: <https://abide.co/>

I always recommend the app or kindle version of *Streams in the Desert*
 And the **BibleGateway** website, or app!

You know, we believe that we encounter the actual presence of Jesus:
 In the Bible, prayer, worship, preaching,
 and the Sacraments of communion and baptism.
 Here we find the *living presence of Jesus----*that helps us
 when we are afraid to fail, or disappoint others.

You know what helps us get beyond that fear?
 A new perspective—*God's perspective*.
 We look ahead to how *God sees and knows it will end*.
 The way may be rocky,

We will fail, we will disappoint people.....
 But ultimately—God grace and mercy wins!
 God’s love is victorious through Jesus’ death on the cross!
JOY is the end of our story, not fear!

Remember how often the Bible says ‘***Do Not Fear***’---keep Googling that!

Each week I receive an email devotional from Proverbs 31 ministry. Hear this:
People hurt us, the past haunts us, co-workers mistreat us, parents don’t love us, friends don’t consider us, spouses leave us, children don’t appreciate or respect us, finances fail us, and our health doesn’t sustain us. And when life gets hard, it’s difficult to avoid letting our negative thoughts result in a serious case of bad attitude....which robs us of joy and peace..... but my attitude is a choice.

What and how I allow myself to think is my choice.

“A Seriously Bad Attitude”, by Tracie Miles, Monday March 18th, Proverbs 31 Ministries.

We COULD all live in a ***constant state of panic and fear***, right?
 OR, we can live in the ***presence of God who takes away that fear***,
 By walking beside us (see Isaiah 43).

We can read the ***Bible to find courage and strength***, like in ***Philippians 4:8***:
Finally, beloved,^[e] whatever is true, whatever is honorable, just, whatever is pure, pleasing, commendable, if there is any excellence and anything worthy of praise, think about^[f] these things.

What is ***scaring you*** right now,
 where are ***you afraid to fail***, or ***disappoint?***

Now close your eyes and do this with me:
Hear God say your name---do not fear....I am with you.

Now answer these questions in your head:

Whatever is ***true***.....*what is true about your situation?*

Whatever is ***honorable***.....*what good can come from your circumstance?*

If there is anything ***worthy of praise***.....*what IS worthy of your praise even now?*

As you keep your eyes closed, imagine ***setting aside your fears***,
 and ***hearing what God just said to you.***

Now, when you leave this place---KEEP THINKING ABOUT THESE THINGS!

Why? Because that's when the *peace of Christ*,
beyond all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds!
Taking away our fear of failure, of disappointing....
And *replacing* it with the *mercy and grace and love, of Jesus*.

That is the *Good News of the Gospel* today,
And to that, All God's people said, Amen.