

Facing our Fears #4

When Sam and Nancy's 7th and last child was born, they decided to name him Tom. Tom was only 7 years old when his father took a position as a lighthouse keeper on the Fort Gratiot Military Post up near Port Huron so the family lived in a state of semi-isolation. Tom went with his brothers and sisters to school, but he didn't do as well as the others. Tom had a hearing impairment. When he couldn't hear the teacher's lesson or instructions, he would take off in many different directions with his imaginative mind that often brought disciplinary actions to him. Seeing that her son was failing in his classes, Nancy decided to homeschool Tom. Tom's insatiable appetite for reading whatever he could get his hands on helped to develop his imaginative mind.

At the relatively young age of 12, Tom struck out into the working world, getting a job as a trainboy between Port Huron and Detroit. Four years later, he began to learn more about the communications field when he became an apprentice telegraph operator. After he finished his work for his employer during the day, Tom would spend the evenings working on a variety of experiments in a laboratory that he had made in his home. The vast majority of Tom's experiments failed, but that didn't discourage him. By the time he was finished, Thomas Edison would be credited with over 1,300 different inventions. He would hold 389 patents for electric light and power, 195 patents for the phonograph, 150 patents for the telegraph, 141 patents for storage batteries, and 34 patents for the telephone. Thomas Edison would make such an impression on Henry Ford that the automotive genius would bring the house where Edison was born and the laboratory that he had developed board by board to be showcased in Greenfield Village where it still can be seen to this day. Few people have affected the quality of our lives today as much as Thomas Alva Edison, the man who is credited with bringing to us the age of electricity. In fact, our utility companies still bear his name. The reason why Edison was so successful as an inventor can be found in one conversation that he had with a reporter who was interviewing him for a newspaper article. Recognizing the known fact that the great inventor had failed in over 2,000 different experiments before he finally got the light bulb to glow, the young reporter asked Edison how it felt to have failed so many times. Without a moment's hesitation, the inventor smiled and replied, *I never failed once. I invented the light bulb. It just happened to be a 2,000 step process.*

People who have achieved extraordinary success in every arena of life have consistently shared the common attribute of seeing failure as part of the process in their successes. They have not been defeated by failure. They have not been discouraged by a fear of failure. Rather they have learned the lessons of life needed to persevere through failures in life.

*When Lucille Ball began studying to be an actress in 1927, the head instructor of the John Murray Anderson Drama School told her, *Try any other profession. Any other.*

*Malcolm Forbes failed to even make the staff of his school newspaper. He went on to become the editor-in-chief of one of the most successful business publications in the world.

*After Alexander Graham Bell had invented the telephone in 1876, he made a demonstration call to then President Rutherford Hayes, thinking that this would open unlimited doors for him. President Hayes burst his bubble by saying, *Yes this is an amazing invention, but who would ever want to use one of these?*

*Chester Carlson took his idea from corporation to corporation for 7 straight years receiving rejection after rejection until a tiny company in Rochester, NY called the Haloid Corporation finally agreed to test his electrostatic paper-copying process. Haloid soon changed its name to the Xerox Corporation.

*the late Louis L'Amour wrote over 100 novels that have over 200 million books in print. My wife, Sandy, has read almost all of his books. He became the first American novelist to receive a special congressional gold medal in recognition of his distinguished career as an author. Yet Louis L'Amour received 350 rejections before a publisher would print his first book.

*General Douglas MacArthur was turned down for admission to West Point. So he applied again. He was turned down again. So he applied again – and he marched into our history books.

*After having lost both legs in an air crash, British fighter pilot Douglas Bader rejoined the British Royal Air Force with 2 artificial limbs. During World War 2, Bader was shot down and captured by the Germans 3 times. And 3 times he escaped.

*In 1952 Edmund Hillary attempted to climb the tallest mountain in the world – Mount Everest standing over 29,000 feet. He didn't make it. It was after his failed attempt that he was speaking to a group in England. As he approached the podium, he said in a loud voice, *Mount Everest, you beat me the first time, but I'll beat you the next time because you've grown all you are going to grow . . . but I am still growing.* One year later, Edmund Hillary succeeded in becoming the first person to climb Mount Everest.

The list could almost be endless. For every person who has ever succeeded in any field in life has learned to overcome the fear of failure. Yet despite the example after example that could be given, the fear of failure remains one of the greatest enemies that most people face today. Why is this the case? Why do we seem to have so much trouble with this fear of failing? Following our pattern for the past several weeks, we would like to ask the Apostle Paul to help us find some principles to deal with the fear of failure in our lives as we look at the letter he wrote to the church at Philippi.

It would have only been natural for this great church leader to ask himself some serious, soul-searching questions as he was isolated in his prison cell in Rome. Had he been successful in his service for the Lord or was he in danger of ending his life as a miserable failure? Paul reveals his victory over the fear of failure in his life by the perspective that he reveals about life and his walk with the Lord in Philippians chapter 3.

Now the first thing that Paul helps us with is seeing the true nature of success in the spiritual realm. This is critically important. For in order to understand what failure is, we first have to understand what the nature of true success is. From what are we failing to be successful?

And the nature of success is different in every field, isn't it?

*For an author, success might be seen in finishing the novel or maybe getting the work published.

*For a businessman, success might be seen as making a quality product or getting the projected share of the market.

*For an athlete, success might be seen in winning a championship or getting voted on to the all-star team.

*For a mountain-climber, success might be seen in reaching the pinnacle of the mountain.

*For every discipline, there is a different definition for success. And that accepted definition, whatever it might be, also determines what would constitute failure.

Paul realized that there was a goal in the spiritual realm that was far more valuable than those that were commonly accepted as even the highest of this world's values. This spiritual goal was most precious because it had eternal benefits. Paul used this goal as the measure of his success or failure. He had come to realize that this goal was so valuable that he was willing to accept apparent failure in many other areas so that he might achieve success in this highest realm.

Paul begins this chapter by recalling some former assets of his life that he had deemed to be most precious to him – areas that he had considered most critical to his success. And we understand exactly what Paul is saying here, for the values that he recounts are those that many people would consider to be the highest priorities in life. Paul lists for us 7 assets that he had. They fall into 2 major categories- those that were inherited and those that he earned.

First Paul speaks of his national heritage, that which he had inherited:

*he was circumcised the 8th day of the people of Israel. Paul's parents had followed the covenant which God had given to Abraham. The significance of this, of course, was that it made Paul a child of the O.T. covenant. It sealed his identity with the nation of Israel, the covenantal people of God.

*But he also says that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was a very special tribe. Benjamin along with Joseph were the only 2 sons of Jacob who were born of Rachel- Benjamin was a favorite son of Jacob. We are told that in O.T. times, when the army of Israel was waning in the midst of battle, someone would cry out "On Benjamin", and the warriors from this tribe would pick up their fighting a notch bringing new life and vitality to the entire Israeli army. Benjaminites had a tremendous reputation for courage and leadership. The first king of Israel was of the tribe of Benjamin. Benjaminites were proud of their heritage.

*Paul goes on to say he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. This phrase indicates the purity of his Jewish blood. Paul was not a proselyte, a Gentile who had become a Jew. He was a pure-blooded Jewish man, born of a

Jewish mother and father. He had been a Hebrew from the cradle. And among Paul's circle of influence, this was something that people held to be very valuable.

But then Paul goes on to speak of those assets that he had earned for himself:

*In regard to the law, a Pharisee. The Pharisees were recognized to be the most faithful of all Jewish sects in their adherence to the O.T. law. They had even set a hedge about the law constructed of additional commandments- kind of as a buffer so that they might not get close to breaking the law. Such was their philosophy.

*Moreover, Paul was not only a Pharisee, but he was a zealous Pharisee. His zeal was seen in the fact that he had been a persecutor of the church. Paul was committed to what he believed to be true.

*Paul sums up his assets by saying that he was without fault. In the eyes of his fellow man, those of his specific heritage, his circle of greatest influence, Paul could not be blamed. Everyone looked at Paul and admired him for his morality and courage to defend it.

It's very clear from this passage what Paul had formerly considered to be keys to a successful life. But as he had grown in his relationship with the Lord, Paul had realized that these priorities, as good as they had appeared to be, paled into insignificance compared to a new measure of success that he had found. Simply put, if Paul would have continued to value those former priorities as his standard of success, the Apostle would have felt like a miserable failure as he was writing this letter. Here he was sitting in a Roman jail cell. What kind of Benjaminite was that? He easily could have felt that he had totally let down his race and humiliated his heritage. He certainly wasn't very respected and admired within the class of the religious elite at this time, was he? In fact, the Pharisees were part of the crowd responsible for his imprisonment at this time.

No, if Paul would have continued to cling to those temporal measures of success, he would have felt like a miserable failure. He would have feared failure because he would have had the wrong measure of success. So it is in each of our lives. If we maintain a wrong standard for success, then we will continue to be plagued by the fear of failure. Overcoming the fear of failure begins by adopting a proper and realistic standard for success.

Well, what was Paul's new standard of success that he had adopted as his walk with the Lord had matured and grown? We find this outlined for us in verses 7-10:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes

from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. (Phil. 3:7-10)

Paul first of all says that knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord was most precious to him. The term that Paul uses here that is translated "knowing" is an important one to note. It means more than just knowing facts about Jesus Christ. There was another Greek term that he could have used for this type of knowledge. No, this term indicates a very personal knowledge, an experiential knowledge, a knowledge that which could only come from having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

It is one thing to know about a person. It's quite another thing to really know a person. I am a happily married man. I have a wife who is very loving and kind and gentle. Now I don't know this because I read it in a book somewhere – that being married is a good thing and that wives are loving and kind and gentle. I have read many books on marriage in my lifetime. But my reading about marriage is not why I am happily married. No, the strength of my marriage is found in the relationship that I have with Sandy. This relationship has grown and developed through years as we have gotten to know one another better and better. It's this kind of knowledge, personal and experiential knowledge, that Paul speaks about here when he writes of his measure of success in knowing Christ. It is one thing to know all about Jesus, to study his life, to examine his teachings, to be able to recall all the miracles that he performed, to even be able to put the doctrines that he taught down in a systematized theology. But it is quite another thing to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ - to have the assurance that we are family members together. To know that he lives with us, in our hearts, to have fellowship with him every day as we walk and talk with him. This latter type of knowledge was what Paul wanted to have- and he says that knowing Christ Jesus in this way had become such a priority in his life that it made everything else that he had formerly considered to be valuable in life seem like rubbish, garbage in comparison.

But Paul goes on to say that he wanted to be found in Christ's righteousness. The term "righteousness" means pure or just in the eyes of God. It indicates a state whereby God can declare us to be not guilty of any fault in his sight, that we perfectly satisfy his standards.

Now Paul refers to 2 kinds of righteousness that a person can have in this passage. There is the righteousness of our own that comes from what we earn. This type of righteousness is satisfactory to other people, they will accept this and admire us for having it. When we strive to be good moral people as best we can, others will see our efforts and admire us for them. Paul had this type of righteousness even before he was saved. He says that he was faultless before his colleagues. But it was still only human righteousness.

The accumulation of human righteousness is like playing the game of Monopoly. The game has properties to buy and money to buy them with. And the game is challenging and enjoyable. But a person would be

foolish to take his Monopoly earnings and property deeds and try to make them valid in the real world. Can you imagine the look in a clerk's eyes if you tried to buy groceries with Monopoly money?

So it is with human righteousness. Whereas on the human level, our efforts in righteousness are of some value, in God's eyes these human efforts are not valid, because the best that we can do just can't measure up to his perfect standards. Paul realized that God's righteousness that comes only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is of far greater value than human righteousness that comes from our efforts to obey the laws that we know to be good. For while we certainly do benefit from human righteousness in the relationships and respect that we gain from it here upon this earth, one day, when we each stand before God on his throne of justice, the only righteousness that will be critically important to us is his righteousness that is imputed to us by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because that event is of such critical, eternal significance, Paul says in comparing the 2 kinds of righteousness that our earned righteousness is like rubbish compared to God's righteousness.

But Paul not only wanted to know Jesus Christ and to be found in his righteousness, but Paul also wanted to know Christ's resurrection power. The fact of the Scriptures is that Jesus Christ is a living savior. Yes, he was crucified on a cross as he paid the ransom to redeem us from our sins in the sight of God. And, yes, he was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a tomb that was carefully watched and guarded by the Roman soldiers. But after 3 days, just being long enough to fully prove the reality of his death, that grave could no longer hold him. Jesus Christ rose from the dead in power and victory. He today remains a living savior.

Now this truth is critical to know and experience. The fact that Jesus Christ is alive means that we can have that intimate knowledge of fellowship with Him. The fact that Jesus Christ is alive means that He can dwell in our hearts and lives, and that we can talk with Him and walk with Him thru life. And the fact that Jesus Christ is alive means that He has conquered the greatest and most powerful enemy that the human race has ever known- that is death. Now if we know this resurrected power in our lives, there is not one enemy that we face in a defenseless manner. Logic alone tells us that if Jesus Christ has defeated the greatest of all human enemies, and that if he makes that resurrected power available to us in our lives, then we will never face any enemy in life without the power to be victorious over it- that is, if we know Christ's resurrected power.

Paul set forth as his goal to know that power – and he achieved that goal as he was born again into God's family through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This confidence gave him the power to be freed from the fear of failure in his life. Even though he was sitting in a jail cell, he was not obsessed with his life being a failure because the values of success that he formerly had that would lead to that conclusion Paul had dismissed a long time ago in his life. Now he considered knowing Christ personally to be his measure of success – and he had achieved that through his personal relationship with his savior. Paul knew that he could never lose this

relationship because he was now kept safe in the hands of God. Now he considered personal righteousness as a measure of success – and he had the confidence that God’s own righteousness had been credited to his account giving him the ability to grow daily into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now he considered the power of Christ’s resurrection to be a measure of success – and he had the assurance that just as the Lord Jesus Christ had been raised in bodily fashion from the tomb so one day all of those in Christ will be raised as well to eternal life. So Paul was released from all of those human measurements that would condemn him as a failure in life and, therefore, he was freed from a fear of failure even though he was in the most humiliating circumstances.

What Paul learned in his life, we can also learn in our lives. If you want to be freed from the fear of failure, you must first adopt the correct measure of success. We all were created for intimate fellowship with our creator. We all were created to give glory and praise to our creator. As the famous Westminster Confession of Faith states, we have been created to give glory to God and to enjoy him forever. This is the ultimate measure of success for any human being. When a follower of Jesus Christ commits his or her life to the Savior and is born again into God’s family, that Christian is guaranteed a personal relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, the imputed righteousness of God Himself credited to his account, and the promise of resurrection to eternal life. With ultimate success already secured, why should any Christian ever fear failure? It’s no wonder that Paul wrote:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any power, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37, 38)