

Courage to Fail
As Presented by Lisa Bishop
Air Dates: May 22-26, 2023

Day One

What do you do in the face of failure?

All of us will face varying degrees of failure throughout our lifetime and when we do, it takes courage to get up and go again; to give something another shot, and as the saying goes “if at first you don’t succeed, ...to try, try, again.” When you experience failure, how do you respond? Do you give up and throw in the towel? Maybe you’re tempted not to even take on that daunting challenge because the fear of disappointing, not measuring up, being made fun of, or looking like a fool, holds you back.

Whether it’s speaking up in a meeting, going for that promotion, or pursuing the dream God put on your heart, fear can stop you dead in your tracks. So in the face of fear, what you need is courage. I recently heard a definition of courage that resonated with me.

“Courage is the ability to face and overcome fear while prioritizing a greater objective. It is not the absence of fear but rather the determination to act despite its presence, guided by a strong sense of purpose and a commitment to achieving a higher good.”

Courage is the determination to act in spite of fear because there is something greater at stake.

It reminds me of the well-known story of Peter in Matthew 14:22-31. It’s the scene where Jesus walks on water as he makes his way towards the disciples who are in a boat a considerably far distance from land. The waves are crashing, the wind is blowing furiously, and the disciples, thinking they are seeing a ghost, cry out in terror and fear.

“But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:27-31).

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and began to sink. Fear will try to sink you. Don’t let fear of failure keep you from stepping out of the boat. When you hear that voice telling you to back off and shrink back, be determined to act anyway. And when you find yourself failing at something (because you will) your first instinct may be to give up but resist the urge and instead press on! Push through the fear for the greater objective. Don’t let fear define you. You may fail from time to time but you are not a failure.

Is there something you have been avoiding doing up until now because of fear? What fear is gripping and controlling your decision making? Instead of letting fear pin you down, take that first step, press on, persevere, and learn to put fear in its proper place. And if you fumble, get back up and try again. Jesus will reach out his hand and help you get up and go again.

Day Two

When you are facing a difficult situation and you don't know what to do, who or what do you turn to? Is your first instinct to cry out to God? Do you attempt to figure things out on your own? Or perhaps you turn to a friend, relying on their advice? For the record, seeking the advice of wise friends is a sound thing to do as Proverbs 12:15 reminds us, "The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice." The thing to consider is, do you run to people before turning to God? I know I can be tempted to seek counsel from friends before sitting with the Lord. After all, it takes patience and courage to cry out to God and trust that he will hear and that his Holy Spirit will be your guide.

When I am facing uncertainty in life, one of my favorite verses to meditate on is 2 Chronicles 20:12. Here we find the story of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, facing war being waged against him by the Ammonites and Moabites--Judah's enemies. In the midst of a vast army coming against him, we read that Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord before seeking the counsel of men.

"“Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. Our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying, ‘If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.’...For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” (2 Chronicles 20:6-9, 12).

In the midst of uncertainty, Jehoshaphat acknowledges God's power and authority and recalls his faithfulness as he courageously cries out, "We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

When you face uncertainty, how do you make God your first go-to? First, be in the Word of God daily so that you are more and more convinced of the truth of God and his character. We tend to seek advice from people we trust. Do you trust the Lord? That can be a tough question. Maybe your trust wavers. If that is the case, you are not alone. That's part of being human as you seek to grow more in your knowledge of God and encounters with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. But before you seek counsel from friends, discipline yourself to sit before God. Talk to him. Cry out. Be vulnerable and mirror the words of Jehoshaphat. "Jesus, I don't know what to do but my eyes are on you." As James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

Seeking counsel from godly people in your life is wise. Just be mindful that you are not cutting God out of the equation. Have the courage to go to him first. He is the one who sees all, knows all, and whose counsel you can always trust in.

Day Three

Have you ever found it difficult to forgive someone? I'm guessing the answer is, "yes." The ability to forgive, especially when you have been betrayed, mistreated, or are the victim of a heinous act can seem impossible at times. Forgiving someone when you have been deeply hurt takes courage. Courage is, "The ability to face and overcome fear while prioritizing a greater objective. It is not the absence of fear but rather the determination to act despite its presence, guided by a strong sense of purpose and a commitment to achieving a higher good."

So, what does overcoming fear have to do with forgiveness? When someone has caused harm or hurt in our lives, we may find forgiveness difficult because we fear if we forgive them that person will in some way be off the hook for their actions. Or perhaps if we forgive, we fear that will invalidate the

unsubstantiated pain someone has caused us. But when you have the courage to forgive, you are overcoming that fear for a greater objective and the greater objective is to refuse to allow unforgiveness to cause bitterness and to extend the same grace to others as Jesus extends to you for your misgivings. I know that can be hard to hear but it's the Gospel.

I was listening to a book on forgiveness the other day and it was convicting. I squirmed a bit but also concurred with what the author was saying, even though it was hard. The author talked about how forgiveness is the absence of self-righteousness. That we tend to have no objectivity for ourselves in our own misgivings and when we see ourselves as we really are, we will realize that we are just as capable of committing any sin that others commit. I don't want to believe that, but I will sit with it long enough to see what truth God wants to reveal to me and I invite you to do the same.

The truth is, we are saved only by God's intervening grace. When we choose to have the courage to forgive, we don't exact payment from other people because God didn't exact payment from us. He gave his one and only Son to die on the cross and take on the penalty for our sins. Jesus' ultimate forgiveness is an example for us.

When I think of an astounding example of forgiveness I think of Joseph whose brothers, out of extreme jealousy and animosity towards him, plotted to kill him in the wilderness. Ultimately Joseph's life was spared, but he did end up getting sold into slavery in Egypt. While Joseph was eventually named supervisor of the high-ranking Egyptian Potiphar's household, Joseph's life was not smooth sailing. Over the course of the months ahead, he would be falsely accused of seducing Potiphar's wife and thrown in jail and forgotten about for years until he was released and restored to a position of authority over Egypt.

He endured a lot of pain and hardship but ultimately Joseph forgives his brothers for their evil doings and all of the distress it caused him. In Genesis 50:19-21 he says, "But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children."

Joseph was clearly guided by a commitment to achieve a higher good, demonstrating the ultimate courage to forgive. Who is God calling you to courageously forgive? Ask him to show you and help you. Submit your hurt to him and thank him for the grace he extends to you.

Day Four

Being a part of a healthy body of believers is essential to your spiritual growth. And when I say healthy, I do not mean perfect. One thing that can tempt you to withdraw from Christian fellowship is imperfect people. Well, we are all imperfect. You are imperfect; I am imperfect. Lord knows we are all in the process of being transformed as 2 Corinthians 3 tells us: *"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit"* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Being more and more transformed into the image of Jesus is a lifelong process. We are all works in progress. People will disappoint you and cause hurt and you will do the same, because we are all human as we strive to live in the new self that we are created for, in Christ.

And here's the deal. God designed you for connection, you are created for community. You cannot grow in isolation. You need friends and mentors; you need companions along the journey. Being in community takes courage because relationships, deep and intimate relationships, call us to demonstrate transparency and authenticity. They require going below the surface and opening the door to vulnerability. Sharing our deepest joys, dreams, and desires and exposing our insecurities, disappointments and even our sin.

Finding genuine community will take time, so resist getting discouraged and throwing in the towel too soon. Developing enduring connection will require you to be patient as relationships form, to keep showing up and leaning in.

As you seek to build relationships, the thing to ask yourself is, "Are you the friend you're looking for?" In other words, you can't expect things from friendships and community that you aren't willing to give and be yourself. If you want to be with people who are generous, selfless, kind, loving, trustworthy, reliable, or loyal, do you embody those same qualities? Sometimes we have high expectations of others when we aren't willing to raise the bar on ourselves. And don't wait for people to reach out to you. Make the first move! Invite someone to grab coffee or lunch. Ask them to meet up at church and sit together. It can be tempting to wait until someone seeks you out and initiates getting to know you but if everyone takes that posture...well, you get the point.

I know being in community takes courage. Maybe you have been hurt in the past. Perhaps you consider yourself to be shy and stepping out is hard. I get it. If you are not participating in Sunday worship services weekly, that is your first step. If you have been attending (and that does not mean watching online), find a way to serve; get in a small group, and look for ways to connect. Show up, contribute, participate, and pray. Have patience and ask God to bring some solid believers into your life and see how God provides. You were made for community.

Day Five

Do you ever find your confidence in God wavering when life catches you off guard or things just don't seem to make sense sometimes?

We all face times throughout our lives when trusting in God is hard. We can be tempted to wonder if God really cares about us when the circumstances we are facing are perplexing. Whether it's a sudden loss of a job, a friend who turns their back on us, or a relationship that seemed promising goes sideways, the truth is life's twists and turns can be confusing and they can cause you to doubt God's faithfulness.

You can be tempted to fear that God has forgotten you and doubt that his plans for you are good. That's when your courage to trust God needs to kick in. That may sound funny: courage to trust God? Courage has often been described as the determination to act despite the presence of fear. When I think about that definition of courage as it relates to faith, it goes something like this, "In spite of my current circumstance, I will not give in to fear. I will be determined to believe God is for me and live in such a way that shows I trust him."

Sometimes you need to remind yourself that even when you cannot see it, God is always working in your best interest and on your behalf because he loves you.

When it comes to the courage to trust God I am reminded of Job. In the story of Job we learn that he was "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1). He had ten children and was a man of great wealth. One day Satan accused him of honoring God only because God had blessed him. So, God allowed Satan to take away Job's wealth, his children, and his health, leading Job to utter devastation and loss.

Stunningly we read that Job grieved deeply but did not accuse God of any wrongdoing (Job 1:22; 42:7-8). The life of Job demonstrates that we are often unaware of the many ways God is at work in the life of every believer. Job, even during his suffering and crying out to God, knew that God was in total control. Though he had no way of knowing why so many terrible tragedies were occurring in his life, Job never lost his faith in God, even under the most heartbreaking circumstances that tested him to his core, he demonstrated determination, courage, and trust, despite his circumstances. It's hard to

imagine losing everything we own in one day—property, possessions, and even children and not wavering in understanding that God is still in control.

What difficult and perhaps confusing circumstances are you currently facing? How will you choose to demonstrate the courage to trust God? Proverbs 16:20b says, “Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.”

Put your confidence, hope, and security in Jesus. He will come through.