Fear of Failure

In December, we discussed the feelings of doubt and fear, what they mean, and how to overcome them. One common and, sometimes, paralyzing fear is the fear of failing. Nearly everyone experiences this fear at some time in their lives due to the uncertainty how trying some new task or venture such as a new job or occupation, schooling, or business opportunities. The list can also include fear of taking on new roles such as in marriage, motherhood/fatherhood, new relationships, repentance, and being a Christian. Thankfully, God understands our makeup and encourages us to come to Him with our fears about all of these issues.

Psalm 34:4 "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears."

A very simple definition of failure is: not measuring up to an intended objective; the opposite of success. The fear of failure is often linked to a fear of criticism or rejection. Those who fear failure may also consider all critical feedback as validation for their fear and may establish their sense of self-worth on that feedback. They may consider any criticism as a very personal attack on who they are as a person rather than as a simple description of how their behavior could be modified to reach a specific goal. This can further lead to an increase in their fear of rejection because they feel that their failings may make them unfit to be included in their desired group.

Focusing on the fear of criticism often takes our eyes off of our true focus: God and His plan for us. Therefore, when our emotions are wracked by uncertainty and fear of failure, we must refocus our sights on Christ and ask Him to give us strength. As a loving and faithful Father, He is willing to give us the wisdom and strength that we need. *Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."*

Let's look at the example of Mary: If we consider how utterly impossible it was by human standards for Mary to bear a Son without knowing a man, and realizing how ostracized she would be for being pregnant and unmarried, we can understand a little how afraid of failing she could have been. However, her commitment to trust in God was unwavering and, although she did not fully understand, she accepted His will for her life. *Luke 1:37:38 "For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her."* Likewise, God will help us work through the difficulties and challenges we face as long as our endeavors are in accord with His will.

For someone struggling with a fear of failure, coping can be very difficult and anything new can bring about feelings of despair. Breaking down new or difficult tasks into smaller, more manageable parts can be helpful in coping with a fear of failure. Additional pieces of the activity can be added once a level of comfort is attained with each part. For instance: Starting a new job is stressful for most people, but having a great fear of failing in that job can be debilitating. Setting reasonable expectations for how quickly you should be able to feel comfortable in the job is key. If, as a new employee, you negatively compare yourself to a worker who has been in the job for 15 years, then you will feel like a failure. However, if your expectations are that over time, new duties and parts of the job can be added and that you will grow in your role gradually, then fear of failure is reduced to a much more manageable level.

James 4:10 "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."

It can be difficult for us to admit our fear of failing because we don't want to appear incompetent to others. This bit of pride may limit our success because others may have no idea of our struggle. What's more, we may not learn that our perceptions of their expectations for us are incorrect, or we may choose not to undertake anything new that might help us overcome our fear. The Apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers in chapter 3 verses 4 and 5, *"And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."* He reminded them that of themselves they didn't have sufficiency but only in God. That is true for everyone whether we fear failure or not. Remember, your self-worth and identity comes from Christ. He set your worth.

Satan would like to convince us that we cannot succeed in our Christian walk and therefore it is unwise to even begin. *John 8:44 "...He (Satan) was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."* The Bible tells us that Satan was brazen enough to try to tempt Jesus in the wilderness. Therefore, we should not be surprised if he tries to do the same with us. Satan loves to use the fear of failure in people's lives because it is a way for him to limit their effectiveness for Christ. If he can keep someone from reaching out to a neighbor because the person fears not getting the words to come out just right, then he can potentially keep God's love from impacting others.

2 Timothy 1:7 "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."