

BIBLE STUDY

DR. DAVID JEREMIAH

WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

FACING DOWN YOUR FEARS WITH FAITH

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Dr. Jeremiah's commitment to teaching the complete Word of God makes him a sought-after speaker and writer. His passion for reaching the lost and encouraging believers in their faith is demonstrated through his faithful communication of biblical truths.

A dedicated family man, Dr. Jeremiah and his wife, Donna, have 4 grown children and 11 grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

If you struggle with fear, you're not alone. Fear is no respecter of people. It strikes the weak and the powerful. It haunts the young and the old, the rich and the poor. Even those who seem to have it all, including celebrities and “fearless” leaders, have confessed to ongoing struggles with fear.

Take George Washington, for example. Although he served as one of America's founding fathers, he was scared to death of being buried alive. Richard Nixon was terrified of hospitals, and Napoleon Bonaparte—the military and political genius—was afraid of cats. Those examples are somewhat humorous, but in reality there's very little to find funny about fear and the way it affects our everyday lives.

To be frank, I didn't write this study to address the kinds of isolated phobias that affect tiny percentages of the population. Instead, I wrote this study because I see fear as a real and present danger in the body of Christ.

Many Christians are besieged and enslaved each day by a wide variety of fears, including the following.

- Defeat: the fear of failure
- Depression: the fear of mental breakdown
- Disconnection: the fear of being alone
- Disease: the fear of serious illness
- Death: the fear of dying
- Deity: the fear of God

Those are the most common fears I've encountered through my decades of ministry, both personally and in the lives of church members. I encourage you to examine those fears throughout this study in the weeks to come. I also encourage you to take a deeper look at these fears—and explore several others that aren't addressed here—by reading my book *What Are You Afraid Of?* (Tyndale, 2013; ISBN 978-1-4143-8046-9).

As you engage with these resources, I pray you'll grow in your conviction that God is the answer to all your fears. I pray when you look into the future, you'll see God's power and love guarding your every step. I pray you'll open your heart and mind to receive biblical truth that sets you free to live the fearless life God created you to enjoy.

WEEK 1

DEFEAT: THE FEAR OF FAILURE

WELCOME TO THIS SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION OF WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

Because fear is a universal human experience, it's something everyone can relate to and talk about. To facilitate introductions and highlight the primary theme of this study, spend a few minutes answering the following questions about your experiences with fear. If possible, create the appropriate atmosphere by turning down the lights.

- What fears kept you up at night when you were a child?
- What fears have kept you awake at night in recent years?
- Describe the emotions and physical reactions that typically accompany your experiences with fear.

After everyone has had a chance to share, work as a group to identify the fears you've most commonly experienced, both as children and as adults.

This session will focus on defeat: the fear of failure. To prepare for the DVD segment, read aloud the following verses.

Fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

JOSHUA 24:14-15

WATCH

COMPLETE THE VIEWER GUIDE BELOW AS YOU WATCH DVD SESSION 1.

A person who is afflicted with the fear of failure considers the possibility of failing so intense that he chooses not even to take the _____.

OVERCOMING YOUR FEAR OF FAILURE

1. The principle of divine _____

2. The principle of divine _____

The more there is to _____ on, the less there is to fear about.

The less there is fear, the less there is _____.

3. The principle of divine _____

4. The principle of divine _____

Turn to the Word of God and find in it the strong words that will lift you up and set you _____ from your _____.

5. The principle of divine _____

6. The principle of divine _____

Whatever we're afraid of, whatever we're afraid to tackle, if _____ is with us, we don't have to be afraid.

God's commandments are God's _____.

USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS THE DVD SEGMENT WITH YOUR GROUP.

What did you appreciate most in Dr. Jeremiah's teaching? Why?

How would you summarize the fear of failure and its effect on people's lives?

In what situations do you most often experience the fear of failure?

How do you typically encourage friends and family members who feel inadequate about themselves or their abilities?

When have you felt called by God to pursue a goal or engage in a task? How did you respond?

Dr. Jeremiah listed six principles through which God often helps us overcome the fear of failure: divine perspective, divine purpose, divine persuasion, divine priority, divine presence, and divine prosperity. What are your initial reactions to these principles?

What other factors have helped you overcome the fear of failure in the past?

APPLICATION. Intentionally take a risk this week that will force you to confront the fear of failure. This doesn't have to be a major risk or a life-altering event. Simply commit to pursue a goal or seek an achievement at which you're not guaranteed to succeed.

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE MEMORY. Use the memory card at the back of the book to memorize this verse:

*Fear not, for I am with you;
Be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you,
Yes, I will help you,
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.*
ISAIAH 41:10

ASSIGNMENT. Read week 1 and complete the activities before the next group experience. Consider going deeper into this content by reading chapter 4 in Dr. Jeremiah's book *What Are You Afraid Of?* (Tyndale, 2013).

OUR FIGHT AGAINST *MIGHT*

Do you realize how scary the word *might* can be? One primary source of our fear is the unknown quality of the future—the threat of what *might* happen. That’s because fear trades in the market of possibility. It’s the tyrant of the imagination, imposing itself on us from the shadows and from the hazy mirror of maybe.

My friend Don Wyrzten knows what it’s like to fear the unknown:

The elusive monster of fear lurks in the shadows waiting to claw my soul to shreds. As one prone to melancholia, I see its ugly face often: when I’m struggling with the emotional stress of a difficult relationship, when I’m afraid failure is just around the corner, when success seems too hard to handle, and on days when free-floating anxiety is getting the best of me.¹

I’m guessing you also understand the fearful potential of what *could* happen and what *might* be. I certainly do. Each week in this study, we’ll focus on a specific element of that fearful potential—a specific threat of what *might* happen either today or in the future.

This week we’ll look at the fear of failure. Or, in Don’s words, we’ll explore what to do “when I’m afraid failure is just around the corner.”

This is a vital issue for today’s culture. We live in a society that constantly defines us by our successes and continually drives us toward greater and greater accomplishments. How terrifying, then, to fail. How frightening to know that someday soon we’ll trip and fall on our faces—and that everyone around us will see our defeat.

Here’s the good news: we’re not alone in our fear. This week we’ll encounter a number of biblical characters who were forced to confront their fear of failure by turning to God as the guarantor of their success. Then we’ll begin to understand what it takes for us to do the same.

1. Don Wyrzten, *A Musician Looks at the Psalms* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004), 101.

DAY 1

FEAR NOT?

What are you afraid of? If you think that's a simple question, think again. Our fears are intricately connected with our deeper selves—our values, desires, and dreams. So evaluating what we're afraid of is a great way to learn more about who we really are.

To see what I mean, think for a few moments about the way you and your fears have changed over the years.

What were you most afraid of when you were a child? Record at least three answers.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are you most afraid of now?

What do your past and current fears reveal about your values, desires, and dreams?

Although some people actually like to feel afraid in controlled settings, such as a movie theater or a theme park, the vast majority of our experiences with fear are negative. Fear holds us back. It can defeat us before we even get started. It prevents us from achieving our goals and moving forward in both the short term and the long term.

So when I ask, "What are you afraid of?" I'm essentially asking, "What immobilizes you? What keeps you from experiencing a greater degree of success in life? What steals your joy and destroys your hope? What robs you of sleep night after night?"

On a spiritual level I'm asking, "What prevents you from entrusting your life wholly to a loving God who wants nothing but the best for you?"

I think I have a good idea of how you'd answer those questions—at least in part. That's because I've lived shoulder to shoulder with mature Christian people my entire life. I've also been a pastor for nearly five decades, and in that time I've discovered that everyone, myself included, is hindered by fear to one degree or another.

To what degree are you hindered by fear in your day-to-day life?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

A small degree

A large degree

The good news is that we don't have to settle for paralysis. We can move beyond the fears that so often anchor us to mediocrity and stagnation in our Christian lives. And the first step in doing so is to understand what the Bible has to say about the specific fears that drag us down.

FEAR AND GOD'S WORD

The Bible has a lot to say about the subject of fear. At first glance, what the Bible says about fear can seem a little confusing—or at least a little contradictory.

On the one hand, the Scriptures command us more than three hundred times not to fear as we live our everyday lives. The phrase “fear not” is repeated throughout God's Word, including here:

*Fear not, for I am with you;
Be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you,
Yes, I will help you,
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.*

ISAIAH 41:10

What's your initial reaction to this verse? Why?

In what ways have you seen God uphold you in times of fear?

On the other hand, the Scriptures are filled with men and women described as being afraid. And these weren't just the bad guys. Even biblical heroes like Moses, David, and Paul were afraid and were hindered by their fears. For example, look at what happened when Peter accepted an invitation to walk on water with Jesus:

When Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

MATTHEW 14:29-30

**When have you recently encountered a fearful situation?
What happened?**

There's an easy way to resolve this apparent contradiction. The heroes of the Bible were ordinary human beings who had to learn the same things you and I have to learn about fear. Specifically, they learned—

- to drive out fear by increasing their knowledge of God;
- to shift their focus away from their present fear and toward the eternal God;
- to trust God through faith instead of worrying about the future.

These are the practices we'll focus on in this study as we confront many of the major fears that often paralyze followers of Christ. We'll start this week with the fear of failure.

THE FEAR OF FAILURE

Some people suffer from a crippling fear of failure. I've known men and women who were so afraid of making a mistake that they were unable to take virtually any risks. And without taking risks, they were already defeated, unable to achieve ultimate success.

Most of us are affected by a less extreme version of this fear, but it still hinders us. All of us have had chances to leap for the brass ring and achieve something truly significant. But the fear of failure can keep us from even trying for success because we're afraid of what might happen—and who might see—if we miss the ring and fall.

When have you recently experienced failure while trying to accomplish something?

What emotions do you experience when you contemplate that failure?

Failure is by no means a modern invention, and neither is the fear of failure. Many people in the Bible experienced this fear, especially in the context of the call narratives.

If you're not familiar with that term, a *call narrative* is a passage of Scripture in which God called a person to engage in a particular task or assignment. For example, during the miraculous encounter with the burning bush, God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. But Moses was so afraid of messing up that he almost missed the opportunity to join God's purpose:

Moses said to the LORD, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue. Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."

EXODUS 4:10,13, ESV

Fortunately, God was patient with Moses and helped him overcome his fear. Indeed, one of the things I like about the call narratives is that they provide multiple opportunities for us to see how God responds with love to our fears and weaknesses.

Read Jeremiah 1:4-10. What do you learn about God from this passage?

Nowhere is God's concern for a fearful servant more evident than in the way He prepared Joshua to lead the children of Israel after the death of Moses (see Josh. 1). As we explore this account together this week, we'll see that God's encouragement of Joshua offers a clear, step-by-step strategy for dealing with the fear of failure in our lives today.

Moses was a spiritual giant in his day, and Joshua was an eyewitness to everything Moses accomplished. Is it any wonder, then, that God felt it necessary to specifically encourage Joshua once he took Moses' place as the leader of God's people?

Read Joshua 1:1-9. How would you summarize these verses in a single sentence?

How do these verses contribute to your understanding of God?

I'd like us to dive deeper into these verses over the next couple of days. As we explore, we'll uncover six principles God used to help Joshua overcome the fear of failure. These principles are invaluable for helping us overcome our fear as well.

1. THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE PERSPECTIVE

God's words in Joshua 1:5 must have been very comforting to Joshua as a young leader:

As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.

JOSHUA 1:5

God reminded Joshua of all the ways He'd led and provided for Moses, both during the exodus and throughout the wilderness. God promised to support Joshua as well and never to forsake him.

When have you felt most encouraged and supported by God?

At the same time, God reminded Joshua that He was the true source behind everything Moses accomplished. It was God who rescued the Israelites from the Egyptians. It was God who parted the Red Sea. It was God who brought the Israelites manna in the wilderness. God worked through Moses to accomplish incredible things, and He promised to do the same for Joshua.

How can you regularly remind yourself that God is the source of all your accomplishments?

Keeping that perspective in mind will encourage us when we might otherwise be overwhelmed by fear.

2. THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE PURPOSE

Having a purpose in life is one of the most wonderful feelings you can experience. Even if that purpose is temporary—even if it lasts only for a season—knowing what you’re supposed to do in life brings tremendous comfort and focus.

That’s the gift God gave Joshua:

Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory.

JOSHUA 1:2-4

What are your initial reactions to these verses?

What ideas or images come to mind when you hear the word *purpose*? Why?

God blessed Joshua with a specific, achievable goal. He told His servant to go throughout the land of Canaan, an assignment that would require military confrontations and battles. Every place Joshua set his foot would be given to him and his people forever.

In essence, God helped Joshua focus on the task at hand. It's as if God said, "Even though Moses is gone and it seems as if the odds are stacked against you, I simply need you to commit to walk where I lead you. I'll take care of the rest."

When you encounter the fear of failure, combat that fear by regaining your God-given focus. The more focus, the less fear. And the less fear you experience, the less you'll experience failure.

How would you describe your purpose in this season of your life?

What steps can you take to focus more closely on that purpose in the coming weeks?

3. THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE PERSUASION

In addition to perspective and purpose, God knew Joshua needed some persuading. He needed to be prodded to move in the right direction. So God intentionally identified the character qualities His servant would need to fulfill his task:

Be strong and of good courage. ... Only be strong and very courageous. Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

JOSHUA 1:6-7,9

These verses are the heart of God's motivational speech to His young servant. God knew strength and courage would be necessary for Joshua to persevere when times got tough. The good news for Joshua was that he'd already demonstrated strength and courage in the past.

Read Numbers 14:5-9. How did Joshua demonstrate strength and courage in these verses?

Whom among your friends and family would you describe as strong and courageous?

Remember Joshua's strength and courage when you're confronted by the fear of failure. You can possess these qualities, just as Joshua did, if you take your fear to God and ask Him for what you need. Then put them into action on God's behalf, even if that leaves you in the minority.

When have you recently acted courageously in the face of opposition?

How did that experience change you?

How will you actively demonstrate courage when you feel afraid?

None of us like to be defeated while pursuing our goals, and each of us has been attacked by the fear of failure at one point or another. The key is to focus on God and seek His help in the midst of our fear, as Joshua did.

By maintaining a divine perspective, focusing on our divine purpose, and allowing God to point us in the right direction through divine persuasion, we can avoid paralysis and even gain ground when we're confronted by the fear of potential failure.

DAY 3

MOVING TOWARD SUCCESS

Probably the worst thing about the fear of failure is the way it subtly and surreptitiously prevents us from even attempting to reach our goals. The fear of being defeated sits quietly in the back of our minds, telling us over and over that we'll never win, and so we may as well not even try.

For that reason our first phase in combating the fear of failure is to shake loose from that paralysis and refuse to be stalled. Yesterday we examined three principles that can help us in that effort: the principle of divine perspective, the principle of divine purpose, and the principle of divine persuasion.

How can following the previous principles help us break free from the paralysis caused by the fear of failure?

But shaking loose from our paralysis is only the first step in fighting the fear of failure. We also have to actively move toward success. It involves taking risks and taking action to accomplish what God expects of us each day as servants in His kingdom.

With that in mind, let's look at the final three principles God used to point Joshua toward success after Moses' death. As we do so, let's keep an eye open for specific ways we can use those principles to strive for success in our own lives.

Review Joshua 1:1-9. What are some actions God commanded Joshua to take as the new leader of His people? Record at least three.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

4. THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE PRIORITY

As God prepared Joshua for a difficult leadership role, He didn't ask him to adopt a military strategy as his main concern. He didn't ask Joshua to focus on financial backing or bilateral relations with neighboring countries. Those skills certainly have a place and may have been helpful for Joshua, but they weren't his God-given priority.

Instead, God commanded Joshua to focus on His Word:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

JOSHUA 1:8

What does it mean to meditate on God's Word?

What does it mean to observe God's Word?

How do you currently meditate on and observe the Bible during your normal routine?

Joshua's main priority was to contemplate, proclaim, and apply God's Word, which at the time was known as the Book of the Law. It included Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Those five books were Joshua's main path to taking action and achieving "good success" (v. 8) in his new role as the leader of God's people.

The same is true for us. The Bible is our launching pad for both encouragement and instruction when we want to throw off our fear of failure and strive for success.

How satisfied are you with your current efforts to study God's Word?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not satisfied Satisfied

What steps will you take to improve your study of the Bible in the coming weeks?

5. THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE PRESENCE

One thing that characterized Moses' life and ministry was the incredible level of access he had to God. Moses constantly sought and entered God's presence, and his time in God's presence changed him in profound ways:

Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him. So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.

EXODUS 34:29-30

Moses' time in God's presence gave him more than a face that glowed in the dark. It made him secure in the knowledge that he didn't have to face any challenge or fear alone, because God was on his side.

It must have been deeply comforting, then, for Joshua to hear these words from God:

As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

JOSHUA 1:5,9

What emotions do you experience when you read these verses? Why?

How do you currently spend time in God's presence?

It's important for us to understand that God didn't grant His presence only to Moses and Joshua. In fact, God consistently promised to remain with and support all of His servants, no matter what He called them to do or where He called them to go.

Read the following passages of Scripture and record God's promises.

Judges 6:16

Isaiah 41:8-10

Jeremiah 1:7-10

Here's the great news: this assurance extends to us as well through the incredible promise of Jesus after His resurrection from the dead:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

MATTHEW 28:19-20

How will you intentionally rely on God's presence to deal with your fears in the coming weeks?

6. THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE PROSPERITY

God's final principle for Joshua includes two of the boldest and most encouraging statements in the entire Bible:

No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life.

JOSHUA 1:5

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

JOSHUA 1:8

The Hebrew word translated *success* means *to be prudent* or *to act circumspectly*. So in a religious and ethical sense, people who experience success are those who allow God to guide and direct their lives. Now notice the phrase “For then” in verse 8. The kind of success mentioned in this passage results from our willingness to value God’s Word (the Book of the Law) so much that we read it, talk about it, meditate on it, and apply what it says in our everyday lives.

Joshua experienced that kind of success and prosperity throughout his time as the leader of God’s people. Sure, he encountered hardships; sometimes he failed. But his journey through life was prudent, wise, and focused on serving God. Therefore, in God’s eyes he was a success.

How do you define *success* in terms of your life and legacy?

How has God’s Word influenced your understanding of success?

One of the best ways to combat the fear of failure is to take a risk, pursue a dream, and succeed. Once you get a taste of that kind of joy—that kind of accomplishment and affirmation of your purpose—you’ll refuse to allow anything to hold you back.

What obstacles are currently preventing you from making further strides toward that kind of success?

What steps will you take in the short term and the long term to overcome those obstacles?

God offered six principles to help Joshua deal with and ultimately overcome the fear of failure. I know these principles work, because I’ve made them the core of my own walk with God. On many occasions, as I’ve faced the challenges of ministry and everyday life, these powerful words of God have given me the shot of courage I needed to push away from my paralysis and strive for the success God desires for my life. I pray you’ll use these principles to do the same.

DAY 4

FEAR PROFILE: GIDEON

Fear strikes all types of people in the modern world. Old and young, large and small, wise and foolish, rich and poor, strong and weak—all of us face a wide variety of fears as we live, work, and play each day. This is true even for those of us who seek to advance the kingdom of God by serving Him.

Fear plagued many biblical characters as well. That's why I've chosen to include a fear profile in each week of this study. These profiles will help us focus on a specific servant of God and examine his confrontation with a potentially debilitating fear.

This week we've already concentrated on Joshua's fear of failure. We can also benefit by learning about Gideon, another man tasked with leading God's people through a difficult, dangerous situation.

GIDEON'S FEAR

Gideon was one of the judges who led the Israelites between the rule of Joshua and the reign of Saul, their first king. It's surprising, then, that Gideon is introduced in Scripture as a man frightened enough to literally hide from his enemies as part of his everyday routine.

Read Judges 6:11-16. What are your initial impressions of Gideon from these verses?

What do these verses teach us about God?

The Israelites had achieved stunning military and political success under the leadership of Moses and Joshua, but their situation had regressed in the years since they'd taken possession of the promised land. In fact, during Gideon's time the nation of Israel experienced heavy oppression at the hands of the Midianites. Things were so bad that Gideon was forced to thresh wheat inside a winepress, which prevented Midianite soldiers from seeing him and stealing his food (see v. 11).

Indeed, the situation was grim for Gideon and his fellow Israelites. But things seemed sure to change when God showed up with a promise of rescue:

The Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, “The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor! Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?”

JUDGES 6:12,14

What are the similarities between Gideon’s call and the calls Moses (see Ex. 3:1-12) and Joshua experienced (see Josh. 1:1-9)?

This was an amazing opportunity for Gideon. Not only did he experience God in a unique and powerful way, but he was also offered an opportunity to achieve the kind of life-altering success modeled by Moses and Joshua—historical figures Gideon would have recognized and revered.

As we read this account, however, it’s immediately clear that Gideon was driven not only by his fear of the Midianites but also by an overwhelming fear of failure:

[Gideon] said to Him, “O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.”

JUDGES 6:15

**When have you recently felt unqualified for a task assigned to you?
What happened next?**

In what areas of life do you feel weak or underequipped? Record at least three.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Gideon was so afraid of defeat that he asked God to wait around while he prepared an offering as a test to determine whether he was actually talking with God (see vv. 17-18). Then, when God passed the test by consuming the offering with fire (see vv. 19-22), Gideon was afraid he was going to die because he'd really seen God! Gideon was a man driven by fear.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Fortunately for Gideon, God was faithful to support him through his many fears, including his fear of failure. Interestingly, God encouraged Gideon with many of the same principles and methods He'd used to help Moses and Joshua work through their fear of failure. For example, God used the principle of divine purpose to clearly and succinctly inform Gideon about his primary responsibility in what would become the most exciting season of his young life:

The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"

JUDGES 6:14

In addition, many of God's statements to Gideon reflect the principle of divine presence, including this one:

The LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."

JUDGES 6:16

God was incredibly patient with Gideon as the young leader adapted to living life in God's presence. Indeed, God chose to endure a *second* series of tests Gideon devised to determine whether God would really support him as the leader of the Israelites.

Read Judges 6:36-40. What do these verses teach you about Gideon?

What do these verses teach you about God?

What obstacles prevent you from trusting God to a greater degree?

It's important for us to understand that God didn't force Gideon into blind trust. He'd already given Gideon ample evidence of His power and faithfulness, and He still had more evidence to give:

It happened on the same night that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp."

JUDGES 7:9-11

Notice God's emphasis on the principle of divine prosperity. He promised Gideon success and victory in the upcoming battle. Also notice that God was aware of Gideon's continued fear. That's why He encouraged Gideon to take his servant to the enemy camp and listen to what the enemy soldiers had to say.

Here's what happened next:

When Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: To my surprise, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed." Then his companion answered and said, "This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp."

JUDGES 7:13-14

With this final burst of assurance, Gideon was able to overcome his fear of failure and achieve the level of success God desired for him. Will you do the same?

DAY 5

HOW TO PRIORITIZE GOD'S WORD

We've covered a lot of information this week about the fear of failure, and we'll cover a lot more over the course of this study as we explore many of the major fears that afflict people today. But information goes only so far. Learning is only the first step in the process of transformation. That's why I've set aside the last day of each week to focus on practical application. Once you've explored what the Bible says about a specific fear, I'd like you to make a plan or commit to an action step that will help you retain what you've learned and apply that information to eliminate your fear.

We've explored six principles this week, and each of them will be helpful in your efforts to overcome the fear of failure. But I want to focus on the principle of divine priority as our practical application today. That's because nothing will help you fight the fear of failure more than making the Bible a major priority in your life.

Of course, that's easier said than done in our world of busyness and constant change. So I'd like you to make a plan for prioritizing God's Word, and I'd like you to start by identifying the primary way you're currently hindered by the fear of failure.

What's your primary struggle with the fear of failure right now?

Keep that struggle in mind as you work through the following pages and create action steps to fight the fear of failure through a proper prioritization of God's Word.

1. READ THE WORD OBEDIENTLY

The first step in prioritizing the Bible is to read it consistently. That's a vital discipline for anyone who chooses to follow Christ and live by the truths in God's Word. I love the way God phrased this discipline when speaking to Joshua, His servant:

*Only be strong and very courageous, that you may **observe to do** according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you. ... This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may **observe to do** according to all that is written in it.*

JOSHUA 1:7-8, EMPHASIS ADDED

3. MEDITATE ON THE WORD CONTINUALLY

God wanted the Book of the Law not only to permeate Joshua's conversations but also to regularly penetrate Joshua's inner thoughts:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.

JOSHUA 1:8

What images or ideas come to mind when you hear the word *meditate*?

To meditate on something is to think deeply about it—to concentrate your mental energy on understanding and absorbing deeper truths. This discipline is vital for Christians today because we're constantly bombarded by cultural content ranging from trivial to dangerous.

To be frank, it's impossible to live in the world today and not have things spilled on us that we want no part of—images, ideas, and words. But those things don't have to affect us permanently. The Word of God acts like a stain-resistant coating for our hearts and minds. Meditating on the truths of Scripture helps us avoid the snares present in what we never meant to see or hear.

Action step 3: Spend some time meditating on the verse you've chosen to address your fear. What is God teaching you through this verse?

4. FOLLOW THE WORD EXCLUSIVELY

Joshua 1:7 gives the next practical step for prioritizing the Bible in your life:

*Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; **do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left**, that you may prosper wherever you go.*

JOSHUA 1:7, EMPHASIS ADDED

When you commit to make God's Word a primary priority in your life, you must also commit to follow it exclusively. Don't turn to the right or left, allowing yourself to be influenced by false teachings and ideas. Rather, stay focused on the truth of Scripture.

Practically, that means we don't allow cultural or generational "wisdom" to influence our decisions when such wisdom contradicts the core truths of the Bible. That also means we don't compromise our interpretation of God's Word; we don't seek to make it politically correct on the one hand or overly judgmental and legalistic on the other. We don't proof-text by using isolated Scripture verses to justify our individual point of view. Instead, making the Bible a priority means submitting to God's law as our first and foremost source of authority.

Action step 4: Identify steps you will take to focus on God's truth in addressing your fear of failure this week.

5. ACCEPT THE WORD TOTALLY

Making the Bible a major priority in your life requires making the *whole* Bible a priority in your life. Every page of God's Word is equally God's Word, and therefore every page of God's Word is vital to your life as a follower of God.

That's why God told Joshua not to observe and meditate on portions of the Scriptures in his day but on "all that is written in it" (Josh. 1:8). The same is true for you. Don't settle for lingering exclusively in the passages of Scripture with which you're most familiar. Rather, branch out. Explore. Experience the whole truth of God's Word.

Action step 5: Use a concordance or this week's study to find other verses that address your fear of failure. When will you intentionally study one of these passages to work against your fear of failure?

It was no small thing that God called Joshua to focus on His Word, and it's no small thing that He calls us to do the same. The Bible is the greatest source of encouragement available today. When we read its truths, we're changed by its truths. We need His Word firmly implanted in our hearts and minds if we truly want to follow Him.

So whenever you experience the fear of failure and whenever you feel like a failure, turn to the Word of God. Find in the Bible the strong words that will lift you up and set you free from your fear, both now and in the future.

FIGHT YOUR GREATEST FEARS IN THE POWER OF YOUR GREAT GOD

Everybody's afraid of something—spiders, heights, public speaking, even clowns. And then there are the big fears that constantly haunt our minds, undermine our sense of well-being, and paralyze us with dread and worry:

- *The fear of failure*
- *The fear of depression*
- *The fear of being alone*
- *The fear of serious illness*
- *The fear of dying*

In this Bible study pastor and best-selling author David Jeremiah applies the truth of God's Word to each of these common fears. The biblical teachings that he introduces will help you break free of paralyzing fear through God's power and presence. In addition, you will learn how to replace the unhealthy fear of circumstances with the healthy fear of God.

No matter what you're afraid of, God is bigger than your fear. Let Him set you free to live fearlessly as you serve and follow Him.

ALSO AVAILABLE

- *What Are You Afraid Of? Leader Kit includes resources for leading a six-session group study: one member book, one What Are You Afraid Of? trade book, and two DVDs with Dr. Jeremiah teaching the study. Item 005641765*
- *E-book and video downloads available at www.lifeway.com/afraid*

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