

FREEDOM FROM FEAR

Overcoming Worry & Anxiety

DR. NEIL T. ANDERSON
& RICH MILLER

MONARCH
BOOKS



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Published in the USA by Harvest House Publishers,
Eugene, Oregon 97402, USA
First published in the UK 2000 by Monarch Books

ISBN 1 85424 469 8

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Concorde House, Grenville Place,
Mill Hill, London NW7 3SA.

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British Library Cataloguing Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Designed and produced for the publisher by
Gazelle Creative Productions,
Concorde House, Grenville Place, Mill Hill,
London NW7 3SA.

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The Fear of Failure

The danger is not that we should fall... but that we should remain on the ground.

John Chrysostom

His sons and his brothers are Mel Farr's best friends, but worry is his most constant companion. It's what made him go to the University of Detroit at night back in the 1960s after practising all day with the Detroit Lions [American football team]. It's what made him spend his off-season in training to become one of the first black auto dealers in the United States. It's what wakes him up at three o'clock some mornings.

'Guess what I do then? I get up and go to work. It's not work that kills the man. It's worry that kills the man. I'd much rather work than worry.'

Farr, fifty-two, is the most successful black auto dealer in America and owner of the nation's second-largest African-American-owned private business. His fourteen franchises in five states gross more than a half-billion dollars in sales annually. In the not-too-distant future, he envisions that his dealership will take in more than a billion dollars each year.

Everything about him spells success. Yet, while he is clearly proud of all that he's accomplished since leaving high school in Beaumont, Texas, thirty-four years ago, it is the prospect of failure that keeps Farr driving as well as flying.

'The minute you think you're there is when you stop trying. It's very difficult to stop something once it starts going down. My motivation is the fear of failure.'

Mel Farr is the epitome of what many would call a successful man and yet his driving force is the fear of failure. He is not alone. I once heard a denominational leader say, 'As I travel and talk to our pastors I have come to the conclusion that their number-one motivation in ministry is the fear of failure.'

Irrational fears either compel us to do that which is irresponsible or prevent us from doing that which is responsible. The fear of failure motivates some to be successful and others not to risk trying anything at all, thereby avoiding any possibility of failure. Fear has an object, but in this case what is it? Everybody has their own criteria for judging success and failure. One person's success is another person's failure. One student could fear the possibility of getting a 'B' on an exam, and another student would consider that the ultimate success. You could be a complete success in the eyes of God and a total failure in the eyes of the world.

A biblical definition of success

Who is more successful, a forty-year-old pastor of a 200-member church, or a forty-year-old pastor of a 2,000-member church? Which parent is more successful, the father of a corporate president or the mother of a retarded child? Who is the more successful student, the one who gets a perfect report or the one who needs a tutor after school? You can't answer these questions because no two people have the same opportunity or potential.

God has not equally distributed gifts, talents, or intelligence to His children. Suppose two people were created exactly the same. One was born in Connecticut to wealthy parents. The other was born in a remote jungle to parents who couldn't read or write, nor have they even seen modern civilisation. Both children have a certain potential for life, but how would you define success for either one? They cer-

tainly don't have the same opportunities or desires to accomplish the same educational or material objectives.

Paul said, 'We are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding' (2 Cor 10:12). You lack understanding if you determine your success or failure by comparing yourself with others. There must be some other standard of evaluation for success by which we can motivate our lives. The first instruction in the Bible on success is given in Joshua 1:7,8 just before they were about to go into the promised land:

Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

First principle of success

The Israelites' success did not depend on favourable circumstances in the promised land, nor on the cooperation of the Philistines. They would be successful and prosperous if they understood God's Word and faithfully lived it. To be successful in life, you have to first know God and His ways. That is the first biblical principle of success. 'Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for

I delight in these things," declares the LORD' (Jer 9:23,24; see also 1 Corinthians 1:31).

Nobody set the standard for success higher than the apostle Paul. He had intelligence, social status, favourable circumstances, and drive. He was the ultimate achiever and leading candidate for theologian of the year when Christ struck him down. Listen to how he describes his before and after drive for success:

If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ (Phil 3:4-8).

Paul is not the only person to climb the corporate ladder only to find out it was leaning against the wrong wall. The feeling of success that comes from winning the race, getting the promotion, graduating at the top of the class is very fleeting. What happens when you get there? Does it satisfy? Do you need to climb one rung higher? 'For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' (Mk 8:36,37). What does satisfy? Take your highest standard of success in terms of appearance, performance, status, and possessions and then ask yourself: 'If I were able to accomplish or possess it, would I be forever satisfied?'

I accomplished my educational goal when I got my second doctorate. Talk about anticlimactic! I was just happy it

was over with. By that time in my life I knew I was a child of God the day before, and I was a child of God the day after. I'm sure nobody put a 'Dr' in front of my name in the Lamb's book of life, and I don't believe that achievement caught the attention of any angels in heaven. But what happens in heaven when one sinner repents? 'I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents' (Lk 15:10).

There is only one thing that completely and continuously satisfies. Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied' (Mt 5:6). Nothing else can satisfy like living a righteous life and being intimately related to our heavenly Father. Loving relationships satisfy, but the satisfaction that comes from titles, degrees, possessions, and accomplishments is fleeting at best.

Second principle of success

It took three years in the desert for Paul to move his ladder over to the right wall. He couldn't stay on the top rung and just push it over to the right wall. He had to start on the bottom rung as we all do. But with new focus he set out in the right direction and, with a determination to succeed, proceeded to climb:

Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:12-14).

Paul was again motivated to succeed, but with a new goal. He pressed on to lay hold of whatever Christ wanted

for him. Christ had chosen Paul for a purpose, as He has chosen all of us. To be successful we have to become the people God created us to be. This is the second principle of success. It is also God's will for our lives. The fact that nobody and nothing can keep us from being the person God has created us to be is the good news. Only we can keep that from happening.

We may not have enough time to accomplish what we want in life, but we have precisely enough time to do God's will. We may not be able to reach the position we hoped for, but what position is higher than being seated with Christ in the heavenlies? We can try to make a name for ourselves in the world, but what name could we make for ourselves that is better than being called children of God?

Scripture doesn't provide any instruction on career choices. I don't think God cares whether you become an engineer, carpenter, or plumber, although He will provide guidance for such career choices. Career choices are dependent upon our God-given capabilities and reasonable opportunities. God does care what kind of engineer, carpenter, and plumber you are. It is part of our calling to serve in certain roles, but the roles do not determine who we are. It isn't what you do that determines who you are, it is who you are that determines what you do. So who are you? 'Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure' (1 Jn 3:2,3).

Neither does Scripture provide any instruction on setting career goals. Biblical objectives for personal performance are all related to character and righteous living. Suppose your goal to become successful was to have your own small business, be a good witness in the community,

live in a comfortable home in the right part of town, and have a nest egg set aside for retirement. Sounds like the ideal dream. With a lot of hard work, your business is showing a good profit and you are well on your way to achieving your goals.

Then one day you discover that your trusted bookkeeper has been stealing money from the business. Instead of prosperity, you find yourself facing the possibility of bankruptcy. To save the business, you mortgage your home and borrow money from your retirement savings. About the time your creditors have been paid off, the market goes bad and you have to lay off employees. Finally you sell the business and seek employment elsewhere. Your house is mortgaged, your retirement is gone, and your business has failed. Despite your best efforts, what you feared the most has happened. Are you a failure?

Did those trials and tribulations keep you from being the person God created you to be? Did those circumstances, which you had no ability to control, take away your hope for the future? The apostle Paul wouldn't think so. He wrote, 'We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us' (Rom 5:3-5). It is hard for us to envision that God may actually thwart our career goals in order to make us the people we are called to be. The worldly idea of success can ruin a good person.

The trials and tribulations of this world can add to our fear of failure if we have the wrong definition of success. But they actually contribute to the right goal of proven character, and that is where our hope lies. Trials or tribulations cannot destroy us, but they do reveal who we are and they

help us become who God created us to be. There is no crisis we can't come through as better people if that is our definition of success.

Fred was an estate agent who had the goal of selling two houses per week. His average last year was one-and-a-half homes per week, so he thought he would give himself an additional incentive. He wanted to be the salesperson of the year, and the added income would enable him to buy the house he dreamed of. After one month he sold only three houses. Fear of failure motivated him to try harder, but his efforts didn't bear fruit. The pressure he put on himself started to show up in very negative ways. He became irritable and controlling because he needed to get others to cooperate with him so he could accomplish his goal.

Then the unthinkable happened. He was sacked for being a disruption at the office. How could he tell his wife? All their dreams went up in smoke. He became so depressed that all he could do was sit around the house. All he could think was, 'I'm a failure!' Finally he called his pastor for an appointment.

After hearing his story, his pastor said, 'Fred you're a good person, but I think you had the wrong goal. All God asks of us is to be the people He created us to be. There is nothing wrong with being the salesperson of the year and winning a trip to Hawaii, or buying a better house to live in, but that alone wouldn't satisfy you nor would it mean you were successful. To be successful, all you had to do was be the salesperson, husband, and father God wanted you to be. During this time did you put the needs of your customers, wife, and children ahead of yours?' Paul said, 'Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.'

The western-world definition of prosperity — material-

ism — led to the 'prosperity gospel': 'If you believe, you can achieve, and the evidence of that is prosperity.' There is some truth to that because God does want us to prosper. He certainly has not called us to fail. But what is our definition of doing well? John wrote, 'Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers' (3 Jn 2). *God wants our souls to prosper.* We ask again. What would you exchange for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, which is the fruit of the Spirit?

Third principle of success

Under the inspiration of God, the apostle Peter wrote, 'As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behaviour; because it is written, "You shall be Holy, for I am Holy"' (1 Pet 1:14-16). Who we are is far more important than what we do, because what we do flows from who we are. The scriptural order is character before career and maturity before ministry. Eventually this should lead to accomplishing something 'for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them' (Eph 2:10).

We can't just sit around in holy piety. Jesus said, 'Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven' (Mt 5:16). We have all been given by God a certain life endowment that He expects us to use to His glory. Paul wrote, 'Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy' (1 Cor 4:1,2).

To be successful, we must be good stewards of that

which God has entrusted to us. This is the third principle of success. In the parable of the talents, we learn that God has given some five talents, others two, and still others only one. In the parable, the one given five talents gained five more and the one given two talents gained two more. The one given one talent dug a hole in the ground and buried it. On the day of accountability, God ordered the worthless slave, who did nothing, to be cast from His presence and what he had was to be given to those who were faithful with what had been entrusted to them.

God has not equally distributed gifts, talents, or intelligence, and He knows that we don't all have the same opportunities. Therefore, we will not be required to produce the same fruit. But He does require us to use what we have been given. Our potential for success does not lie in opportunity but in faithfulness. What we want to hear is, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master' (Mt 25:21).

A biblical definition of failure

In addition to being the authoritative Word of God, the Bible is a book of failures. Moses struck the rock in anger and failed to reach the promised land. Elijah slew 450 prophets of Baal, but ran from Jezebel. David slew Goliath but also slept with Bathsheba and brought great pain on his family. Peter told the Lord to His face that he would go to prison and even be willing to die for Him, then he turned around and denied Him three times.

Even Jesus failed to accomplish what His disciples had hoped for, but He perfectly fulfilled His calling. Failure by our standards is not sin, but faithlessness is. Many of the heroes mentioned in Hebrews 11 would be considered flops by modern-day standards. But they weren't mentioned

because of their accomplishments; they were commended for their faithfulness. 'And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect' (Heb 11:39,40).

The book of Proverbs says, 'For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again' (24:16). To stumble and fall is not failure. To stumble and fall again is not failure. Failure comes when you say, 'I was pushed,' and then fail to get up again. We have failed ourselves if we blame others for our lack of progress or rationalise why we can't get back up. We have failed others when we don't assume our responsibility in the body of Christ.

There are two kinds of failures: moral failure and failure to meet certain objectives. Moral failure cannot be blamed on anyone but ourselves. Such failure needs to be acknowledged only to the extent of the exposure and to those potentially affected by the sin. If only God knows, then confess only to Him unless others have been or could be affected by the sin. 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us' (1 Jn 1:9,10). So you have sinned. Confess it, get back up again, and keep moving forward. It is a moral failure to blame someone else or never acknowledge your sin to God. If your sin has been evident to others, then your confession should be only to the scope of those who know. The opposite of confession is not only silence, but also rationalisation.

A mistake is never a failure unless you fail to learn from it. Everybody has failed to accomplish his or her objectives at times. We have failed in the past, and we will fail tomorrow. Many who are afraid to fail never try — or they give

up when they feel the slightest resistance. Failure is the line of least persistence. People don't fail; they give up trying. Theodore Roosevelt had great insight regarding success:

It is not the critic who counts, nor the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

Success is ninety per cent attitude and ten per cent aptitude. Those who accomplish something in their lives will look back and say it was persistence that got them there. Success is ten per cent inspiration and ninety per cent perspiration.

Taking the risk

Stepping out in faith is a risk, but life is a risk. We all like the security of the trunk, but the fruit is always out on the end of the limb. An anonymous author wrote:

To *laugh* is to risk appearing the fool.

To *weep* is to risk appearing sentimental.

To *reach out* for another is to risk involvement.

To *expose feelings* to another is to risk exposing your true self.

To *place your ideas, your dreams* before a crowd is to risk their loss.

To *love* is to risk not being loved in return.

To *live* is to risk dying.

To *hope* is to risk despair.

To *try* is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing. The person who risks nothing does nothing, has nothing, is nothing. He may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love... live. Chained by his certitudes, he is a slave; he has forfeited freedom. Only a person who risks is free.

If you were to make a list of a rogues gallery of the most offensive people in the world, who would be on the top of your list? Now compare it with the Lord's in Revelation 21:7,8:

He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

We would expect murderers, sorcerers, and idolaters to be on the list, but how many would guess that the list would be headed by cowardly and unbelieving? God does not look with favour on those who limp along in unbelief and never take the risk of living by faith because of fear of failure. It is the mark of a Spirit-filled Christian to be strong in the Lord and courageous.

When the early church was threatened, they turned to God in prayer: 'And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness' (Acts 4:31). 'For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline' (2 Tim 1:7).

Susan Jeffers was raised to believe that she couldn't. Then one day this timid soul decided she wouldn't, no, she couldn't live that way any longer. She writes:

Part of my problem was the nonstop little voices inside my head that kept telling me, '*You'd better not change your situation. There's nothing else out there for you. You'll never make it on your own.*' You know the one I'm talking about — the one that keeps reminding you, '*Don't take a chance. You might make a mistake. Boy, will you be sorry!*'

My fear never seemed to abate, and I didn't have a moment's peace. Even my doctorate in psychology didn't seem to do me much good. Then one day, as I was dressing for work, I reached the turning point. I happened to glance in the mirror, and I saw an all-too-familiar sight — eyes red and puffy from tears of self-pity. Suddenly rage welled up inside of me, and I began shouting at my reflection, '*Enough... Enough... Enough!*' I shouted until I had no more energy (or voice) left.

When I stopped, I felt a strange and wonderful sense of relief and calm I had never felt before. Without realising it at the time, I had got in touch with a very powerful part of myself that before that moment I hadn't even known ever existed. I took another look in the mirror and smiled as I nodded my head *yes*. The old familiar voice of doom and gloom was drowned out, at least temporarily, and a new voice had come to the fore — one that spoke of strength and love and joy and all good things. At that moment I knew I was not going to let fear get the best of me. I would find a way to rid myself of the negativism that prevailed in my life. Thus my odyssey began.²

In Susan's book *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*, she shares two fundamental truths about fear. First, 'the fear will never go away as long as you continue to grow.' Every

step in our maturing process will be met with new challenges and obstacles to overcome. You can't wait until the fear goes away because it never will, which leads to the second truth: 'The only way to get rid of the fear of doing something is to go out and do it.'³ Someone once said, 'Do the thing you fear the most and the death of fear is certain.'

Remember, nobody can keep you from being the person God has called you to be. It is normal to feel the fear but step out anyway as the following poem suggests:

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centred:

Love them anyway!

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish motives:

Do good anyway!

If you're successful, you will win false friends and true enemies:

Succeed anyway!

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow:

Do good anyway!

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable:

Be honest and frank anyway!

The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest minds:

Think big anyway!

People favour underdogs but follow only top dogs:

Fight for some underdog anyway!

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight:

Build anyway!

People need help but may attack if you help them:

Help people anyway!

Give the world the best you've got, and you will get kicked in the teeth:

Give the world the best you've got anyway!

NOTES

1. Adapted from John Pepper, *Detroit Daily News*, Sunday, 17 August 1997.
2. Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1987), p 4.
3. *Ibid*, pp 22, 23.