

**WHAT IF?
Exodus 3:10-13**

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The story line from a childhood classic, which has all the elements needed for a good attention-getter –fire, snakes, the voice of God, excuses, excuses and more excuses. I have read the story 2 dozen times. As a child, I envisioned the burning bush--a bush never consumed. But this time I saw something that always escaped me before. I don't feel too guilty because it is located in a faraway text. Don't focus on the burning bush today. Forget about the staff that turned into a snake or a hand leprous white. Today I want us to look at the barefoot shepherd, someone like you and someone like me who is terrified of failure.

Turn to Acts 7:25.

Moses had dreamed of releasing his people. He had felt much earlier that God wanted to use him, had even placed him in Pharaoh's family so that he would be in a privileged position to know the heart and soul of Egypt. But despite the fact that Moses had dreamed of leading God's people from the burden of bondage, Moses was afraid he would fail. He had long since pushed this dream out of his mind and had become cozy, comfortable, a satisfied shepherd, trying to avoid a challenge.

Like Moses, there are people who put their dreams in a little box and say, "Yes, I've got dreams, of course, I've got dreams." Then they put the box away and bring it out once in a while to look at it, and, yep, they're still there.

**These are great dreams, but they never even get out of the box. It takes an uncommon amount of guts to put your dreams on the line, to hold them up and say, "How good or how bad am I?" That's where courage comes in.
(Erma Bombeck, syndicated columnist, #1724)**

Human beings share a common fear. It is far greater than fear of heights, of water, or even death, itself. It is more paralyzing than the most potent poison. It is indiscriminate and ruthless. It is the fear of failure. There are phrases in the text that reveal that Moses is afraid to go for it.

I. Who am I? (3:10-11)

First, we discover Moses is not sure of himself. Notice in 3:4, "Here I am!" has become "Who am I?" Moses, afraid to risk, reluctant to go for it. He had thought about seeking to release his kinsmen before, but when God said, "Go for it!", Moses said, "Who am I?" Frozen from fear of failure. Afraid to "go for it!"

Moses was 80 years old, he had grown comfortable in life, he had decided to just play it safe. To repack his dream of releasing God's people and never take it out of the box again.

What are you afraid to try? In 1984, Coca Cola was on a downhill slide in competition with its rival, Pepsi. Sergio Zyman was assigned the task that Coke's share of a dwindling market would be reversed. Zyman came up with a fabulous idea: replace the old formula, call it NEW Coke and blare the news. New Coke was the most disastrous product since the Edsel. Within 79 days, the old formula Coke was back on supermarket shelves as "Classic Coke." As a result, Zyman left Coca Cola – failure, personal, humiliating, image-wrecking failure.

Seven years later, Zyman was hired back at Coca Cola with a bigger job and a bigger title. He persevered. He learned and he returned. (Patricia Sellers, "What's So Good About Failure?" *Reader's Digest*, August 1995)

Are you afraid to fail? Sometimes we have to start small – at failure level. Fed Ex, the international shipping giant, which shipped 14 million packages yesterday, handled only 6 packages on its first day in 1973. That wasn't that long ago!

Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team.

And Sandra Day O'Conner, the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court, also had a questionable start. She was offered only one job after graduating from law school, and that was as a legal secretary.

Best-selling author, John Grisham, had his novel, *A Time to Kill*, rejected by 28 publishers. (SIF)

Moses was afraid he was incapable of the task. He was so quick to throw in the towel, to sit on the bench. Notice Exodus 5:22. "Lord, I told You that I would fail." But to do anything in life, we must eventually simply "go for it." Or, we can become helplessly paralyzed, because all of life is a risk.

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 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 failure.

But risks must be taken.

Because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.

If you risk nothing and do nothing, you dull

**your spirit.
You may avoid suffering and sorrow,
But you cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love
and live.
Chained by your attitude, you are a slave.
You have forfeited your freedom.
Only if you risk are you free.
(Anonymous)**

One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time. (Andre Gide, French novelist, from *The Counterfeiters*.)

Moses realized that he cannot remain both in the Midian desert with the comfortable task of watching his father-in-law's flocks and also go south to Egypt. Moses first question was "Who am I?"

II. Who are You? (3:13-14)

Moses had a second question, "Who are You?" Moses was not sure about himself. Neither was Moses sure about God. When Moses declares that he is a nobody, God reminds him that God is Somebody.

Notice chapter 3:12. "I will be with you."
God doesn't try to build Moses' self-esteem. When Moses says that he is a nobody, God replies, "But I am Somebody, and I will be with you."

Like us, Moses was not sure God is able. "But who are You?" he asked.

I am reminded of what the prophet Isaiah said to Israel in Isaiah 43:1-3. "But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, do not fear for I have redeemed you, have called you by name and you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you, for I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

III. What if? (4:1)

Moses is just plain scared. He is going to go hand- in-hand and toe-to-toe with the Pharaoh of Egypt. The odds don't look good. Pharaoh thinks of himself as God and Moses is still asking the question, "Who am I?"

Moses against Pharaoh was about like Billy Bloomfield against Bubba Walker.

Randall O'Brien tells the story, *Billy Bloomfield's Wet Britches*.

You laugh, but you never saw Bubba Walker. And even if you did, you never saw him throw a baseball. We did – plenty of times. Billy Bloomfield sure did.

Bubba was a large human – Goliath's big brother. Even when he was little, he was big. He would go on to star in two sports as a 6'4" dominant athlete at McComb High. Then off to State on full scholarship.

Bubba reached manhood somewhere around 12, just prior to his last year of Little League baseball, as I recall in a cold sweat. Dragon size, maybe bigger – age 12.

Which brings me back to Billy Bloomfield. We all dreaded batting against Bubba Walker. No exceptions. 'Course we all tried to hide it. I hate to say we were scared to death of Bubba, but we were scared to death of Bubba. The man threw so hard that the catcher wore a sponge in his mitt!

Usually, when we had to bat against Bubba we'd do five things: 1) cry, 2) pray, 3) swing at the first 3 pitches, 4) go back to the dugout and beg, "Please, Lord, let Coach put someone in my place. I'll be a preacher--anything", and 5) think of ways to gracefully quit the game forever.

Poor Billy. Had his new white uniform on and everything, that hot summer day in '58. Praying in the batter's box helps. Billy was praying. Bubba went into his windup. And Billy wet his pants.

Poor Billy Bloomfield. We all saw it – the girls, guys, parents, ump, Bubba – everybody. We all saw it. The dark, large, wet, expanding circle against the otherwise bright white dry pants. Poor Billy Bloomfield. What can you say in times like that? "Excuse me?"

Woe is me. Life is like that. Billy could be any of us. Secretly, are we not scared to death of facing Bubba: the next grade in school, leaving home, getting married, responsibility for providing adequately for others, new job, social interaction, finding the meaning of life, aging, death and dying. Bubba throws hard.

And we try to hide our secret fears, don't we? Well, Billy couldn't. But Billy is my hero. Why? 'Cause everybody in McComb knew Billy Bloomfield wet his britches. Yet Billy hung in there. Never quit. Faced the fiddler. Everyday. Going through life's beltline.

Courage. That's what I call it. That's what life takes. And character. Heroes. That's who you are. All you folks out there standing in the batter's box everyday against Bubba. With courage and character, you stand in there. When life scares you to death, humiliates you, laughs at you publicly, still you stand. "For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." (2Tim. 1:7)

No, Billy Bloomfield never made it to the Major Leagues. You might not either. But if ever they name an All-McComb, All-Time baseball team based on courage and character, I think

I've got a nominee. Eight batters after he soiled his suit in front of God and everybody, guess who stepped back into batter's box?

Yes, Moses, you, me – we are all Billy Bloomfields. And the world is full of Bubba Walkers. But we cannot and should not be afraid to go to bat.

Notice Exodus 4:1. Moses is afraid of failure – plain and simple. "Who am I?" "Who is God?" And, thirdly, "What if?"

It is one of those incredibly beautiful afternoons that calls you to be outside and notice how wonderful it is to be alive. The counselor intently watches the young governor's scholar sitting in the chair opposite him, as he stares glumly out the window of the counselor's office.

"My life is over," he tells the counselor. "What's the sense in doing anything now?"

With straight As, a sky-high SAT score, 145 IQ, multiple scholarship offers, and national award recognitions, he's decided to throw in the towel. Yale – his and his father's vision of ultimate achievement – turned him down.

Failure.

Another high school student sitting in that same chair just a few weeks earlier, crying as she recounted with painful disbelief how two of her classmates committed suicide when they thought their grades were too low.

Failure.

But other stories flood the mind, too – stories when we recall our own failures and they stare us in the face. Like the newly hired newspaper reporter whose editor told him he had no good ideas. Yet Walt Disney went on to win 45 Academy Awards and create one of the most successful movie studios in history.

Or, how about Joan Sutherland? (It's okay if you haven't heard of her.) In college, her favorite music teacher told her to forget about singing as a career, since her voice wasn't of "professional quality." Sutherland became the most sought-after and highly paid operatic singer in the world.

Then there's the astounding story of a man named W. Mitchell. In a bizarre motorcycle accident at age 28, Mitchell was burned over 65 percent of his body. He lost several fingers and his face was permanently disfigured. Then, four years later, he was paralyzed from the waist down in an airplane crash. He could have counted his existence as a failure.

But Mitchell went on to become a husband, self-made millionaire, recognized environmentalist, mayor, and congressional candidate. He ran with the slogan, "I'm not just another pretty face." (Mary Moseley, "When You Miss The Mark: Dealing With Failure", Journalistic Inc., 1995)

I guess I have become fascinated by failure. Failure is an inescapable part of living. So why is this natural phenomenon so dreaded and feared?

I think of my own sister, Jaye Batson. Her first grade teacher meant well, trying to help. She told my mother that my little sister would always be a C student – not to expect too much or push too hard. To tell Jaye she couldn't was enough to make her show you she could. And she did. She graduated with honors from the University of South Carolina and is a vice president with the best global tire manufacturer in the world.

IV. What about someone else?

Notice Exodus 4:13

Lord, you want me to teach a Bible study class? Oh, year, I could, but what will people think about me? I might say something really dumb. I might be boring. I could do it, but somebody else could do it better.

What's that, Lord? You want me to go and visit in the hospital? I could go, but I wouldn't know what to say. I could go, but somebody else could do it better.

What's that, Lord? You want me to...? Well, I might fail. There are others who are older, others who are more gifted. I could do it, Lord, but there are certainly others who could do it better.

And the Lord says to you, to Moses, and to me, "I'll be with you. Go for it!"

What are you afraid of today? What challenge is around the corner for you? What bully are you looking up at from the batter's box?

You say, "What if?" God says, "Go for it!"