



## Discussion Guide

Date: 9/13/2026

Sermon Title: Why am I afraid to fail?

Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:3-7

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

### OPENING PRAYER

*Gracious God, we come before you today carrying different things. Some of us come with confidence, while others come carrying disappointment, regret, or fear. Some of us are afraid to fail because we are afraid of what failure might say about us. Remind us today that our worth does not depend upon our performance. Your grace meets us before we get it right, remains with us when we get it wrong, and invites us to keep becoming the people you have created us to be. As we open Scripture, give us humble hearts, honest minds, and the courage to listen. Help us receive your grace for ourselves and become people who offer that same grace to others. May our conversation move us away from fear and toward love, from perfectionism toward growth, and from shame toward the freedom found in Christ. In the name of Jesus, who meets us in both our successes and our failures, we pray. Amen.*

### GETTING STARTED: Why am I afraid to fail?

Failure does not have the final word because grace does.

Fear of failure can cause us to avoid risks, hide our mistakes, compare ourselves to others, become defensive, or believe that our worth depends upon getting everything right. But the gospel offers another way. In Christ, failure can become a place where we encounter grace, learn, grow, and begin again.

Paul's words to Timothy offer an interesting connection: the goal of Christian teaching isn't perfection, winning arguments, or proving that we are right. "The aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith."

That gives us a helpful question: What if Christian maturity isn't about never failing, but about becoming people who know how to receive grace, extend grace, and keep growing in love?

### OPENING QUESTION:

1. When you hear the phrase "fear of failure," what comes to mind?
2. Why do you think failure feels so threatening to us?
3. What is the difference between actually failing and feeling like a failure?

4. Have you ever learned something important precisely because something didn't go the way you hoped?

### **BACKGROUND: WHAT IS HAPPENING IN TIMOTHY ONE?**

1 Timothy is traditionally associated with Paul writing to his younger ministry colleague Timothy, who is serving in Ephesus. The letter addresses challenges within the Christian community, particularly teachings and practices that were distracting people from the heart of the gospel. Ephesus was an important and influential city in the Roman province of Asia and was famous for the temple of Artemis.

The immediate problem in 1 Timothy 1 isn't specifically fear of failure. Instead, Paul is concerned about people becoming consumed with arguments, speculation, and claims to religious expertise. That's actually a useful connection for our theme. Sometimes our fear of failure causes us to become obsessed with being right, looking competent, proving ourselves, or avoiding mistakes.

But Paul redirects Timothy toward the true goal: Love. A pure heart. A good conscience. Sincere faith. The passage suggests that Christian maturity isn't measured by how much we know, how confidently we speak, or how rarely we fail. It is ultimately expressed through love and sincere faith.

### **READ THE TEXT TOGETHER:**

Read 1 Timothy 1:3–4, then work through the following questions.

1. What kinds of things distract people from what really matters in faith?
2. Why do you think we sometimes prefer having all the answers rather than living faithfully?
3. How might fear of failure lead us to overthink, over-control, or avoid taking faithful risks?
4. Where do you see a temptation in your own life to focus more on appearing successful than on actually growing?

Read 1 Timothy 1:5

1. What do you think Paul means when he says the goal is love?
2. How would our churches, families, workplaces, or friendships look different if love—not success—were the primary measure?
3. What does a “**good conscience**” mean to you?
4. How can grace help us face our failures honestly without becoming trapped in shame?

Read 1 Timothy 1:6–7

1. What does it look like when someone loses sight of the main thing?
2. Have you ever become so focused on getting something right that you lost sight of why you were doing it?
3. How can fear of failure make us defensive when someone points out a mistake?
4. What might it look like to respond to failure with curiosity instead of shame?

### **GRACE CHANGES OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH FAILURE:**

This is where a distinctly Wesleyan perspective can enrich the conversation. John Wesley understood grace not merely as something God gives us after we fail, but as God's active presence throughout our entire journey. United Methodist theology commonly speaks of prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace. Sanctifying grace is God's ongoing work of transforming us into people increasingly shaped by the love of God and neighbor. Wesley described this journey as being "perfected in love." That means Christian growth is a process. We don't have to pretend we have already arrived.

A Wesleyan way to frame it:

Grace says: You are loved before you succeed. You are loved when you fail. You are loved as you learn. You are loved as God continues to transform you.

And therefore: Failure doesn't have to be the opposite of growth. Sometimes failure becomes the place where growth begins.

### **SERMON QUESTIONS:**

1. Pastor Allison describes how caring deeply about something is not the problem, but that caring can become crippling when it paralyzes us from acting on what God has called us to do -- in what areas of your life has the fear of failure prevented you from using a gift or pursuing a calling?
2. In the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:16-18, the servant who buried his gift did so out of fear rather than indifference; how might fear, rather than laziness or apathy, be the more common reason people fail to use what God has entrusted to them?
3. Romans 3:23 reminds us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and yet God's response is grace -- how does truly internalizing this truth change the way you relate to your own failures and the failures of others?
4. Pastor Allison encourages us to identify 'our people' who are the community whose voices of accountability and encouragement we genuinely receive. Who are those people in your life, and are you allowing them to play that role?
5. Paul's letter to Timothy names the faith of Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice as a living legacy. How has the faith of someone who came before you shaped the way you approach your own calling, and what legacy are you building for those who come after you?
6. Second Timothy 1:7 tells us that God has already given us a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline -- how does understanding the Holy Spirit's presence as already given, rather than something we must earn, reshape the way you approach moments of fear or inadequacy?
7. Pastor Allison draws a distinction between fearing that we will disappoint the people we love and fearing that we will disappoint God. Do you believe your failures affect how much God loves you, and how does your honest answer to that question influence the way you live?
8. The sermon suggests that preparation like prayer, study, gathering with others is one of the keyways we face fear of failure, not to earn grace but to make ourselves available for God to work through us. Where in your life do you sense God calling you to do more intentional preparation?
9. Pastor Allison closes by publicly committing to return to the piano after a painful public failure years ago -- is there a gift, a calling, or a relationship that you have buried out of fear of failure, and what would it look like to take one step toward rekindling it this week?

### **PERSONAL REFLECTION:**

1. What is one gift or calling in your life that God might be asking you to rekindle?

2. Who are two or three people you would name as your people -- the ones whose opinions you genuinely need to hold close, and who will walk with you through failure rather than away from you because of it?
3. Is there something you have been avoiding out of fear of failure that preparation might make feel more possible?

#### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

*Gracious and loving God, thank you that your love is not dependent upon our success. We confess that we are often afraid to fail. We are afraid of disappointing others. We are afraid of looking foolish. We are afraid of making the wrong choice. Sometimes we are even afraid that our failures will cause us to lose your love. Remind us that your grace is greater than our mistakes. Teach us to receive your grace; not as an excuse to remain unchanged, but as the freedom to become more fully the people you are calling us to be. Give us the courage to try, the humility to admit when we are wrong, the wisdom to learn from our mistakes, and the faith to begin again. Help us become a community where people do not have to hide their failures. Make us people who offer one another compassion, accountability, forgiveness, and hope. In the name of Jesus Christ, who meets us in our weakness and calls us forward in grace. Amen.*

#### **WAYS TO RESPOND:**

Choose ONE of the following practices to focus on this week:

1. Name your people by taking time this week to write down the names of two to five people who represent your core community of accountability and encouragement. Consider reaching out to one of them to express gratitude for the role they play in your life.
2. Identify the buried talent in your life and prayerfully ask God to show you whether there is a gift, calling, or opportunity you have buried out of fear. Write it down. Share it with a trusted person from your list above.
3. Take one preparatory step over your fear of failure has kept you from acting. Identify one concrete step you can take this week to prepare. It does not have to be large. Pastor Allison committed to sitting down at the piano and playing simple scales. What is the equivalent of that first step?
4. Practice releasing the wrong opinions when you notice yourself anxious about the opinion of someone who is not truly one of your people, and practice naming it. You might simply say to yourself, "That person is not my person," and redirect your attention to those who are.
5. Memorize or meditate on 2 Timothy 1:7. Spend time this week sitting with the truth of this verse. Remind yourself that the spirit of power, love, and self-discipline is not something you are waiting to receive; it has already been given to by the Spirit of God.