



REPURPOSING FEARS & FAILURES

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You may think,

“Why discard plastic food containers when I can clean and re-use them to store crayons, buttons, or loose change.” This is a simple example of repurposing, or using items in a way that they were not originally intended.

Some people take repurposing even further. For example, ever seen someone fix up an old clothes dresser and use it as a television stand? They take the mirror off, pull the drawers out, and do a little sanding and painting. Then, violá! They have a do-it-yourself masterpiece that impresses and inspires their guests.

Equally amazing are tinkerers and artists who use old metal scraps, silverware, and pull knobs to create interesting jewelry and home decorations. They sell these items online and at festivals and craft fairs, and people like you and me buy their work because it’s “different.”

Look around, and you'll notice many other practical and creative examples of how people rescue and re-use would-be trash for new purposes. Isn't that interesting! What some may see as unusable, or as "junk," is made into something valuable and worthy of public display. It has been repurposed—it has new purpose.

Of course, people have repurposed items in one way or another since the beginning of time. It just seems that repurposing has become trendy in recent times. More and more people are realizing how old stuff can be preserved and fixed-up, then re-used in new and meaningful ways.

What if I told you we can repurpose fears and failures like we repurpose storage containers, furniture, metal scraps, and other materials? This idea may be especially appealing to you if, like so many of us, you have struggled with fears and failures. Some of those fears and failures may be new and playing out right now in your life; others may have happened in your past but still negatively affect you today.

Think about it! Fears and failures that originally left you feeling embarrassed, ashamed, defeated, and hopeless can be repurposed into new perspectives and new approaches to life. Such repurposing can even be an encouragement to others in our life who, themselves, are burdened with fears and failures like these:

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FEARS

- I am not good enough.
- People will not accept me.
- People will let me down.
- People will hurt me.
- I can't accomplish my goals.
- I don't know what I'm doing.
- I will never feel normal.
- No one loves me.
- My loved ones might leave me.
- I will never be able to love again.
- I will let my loved ones down.
- I might embarrass myself or others.
- I will never live up to people's expectations.
- I can't provide for or protect my family.
- God will not forgive me.

Do you see your fear on this short list? If not, what are you afraid of? And, I'm not talking about being afraid of spiders, snakes, the dark, and public speaking. Those are valid fears of another kind. I'm talking about the quiet thoughts and feelings that hold us back in our relationships and steal our everyday joy in one way or another. Do you have any of those types of fears?



FAILURES

- I am impatient and try to control others.
- I let my anger get the best of me.
- My kids hate me because I expect too much of them.
- I say hurtful things to my spouse.
- My spouse divorced me.
- I lied.
- I ignored my family and friends' warnings.
- If I had partied less, things would be different.
- I should have chosen a different job.
- I've lost some good jobs.
- I took what was not mine to take.
- I should have managed my money differently.
- I had an abortion.
- I have been unsuccessful with so many workout and diet plans.
- My addiction ruined my life.

Do you see your failure on this short list? If not, what is your failure? In particular, think about how you have let yourself, others, and God down. These types of failures may be embarrassing to think about, but you've likely thought about them many times and may even have deep regret. Do you have regrets?



But, isn't some fear and failure good?

Yes, fear and failure can serve important purposes in our lives. In fact, fear can protect and guide us; failure can teach and inspire us. These fears and failures do not necessarily need to be repurposed; they already serve useful purposes in our lives.

Helpful fears

Life can be scary at times. Fortunately, God equipped us with a natural emergency response system—our body's adrenal system. When we perceive danger of some kind, adrenaline tells us to “fight or take flight.” This type of fearfulness can save lives.

Life also teaches us that we must be cautious when choosing friends and making big decisions. This type of fearfulness protects us from emotional, relational, and financial headaches and heartaches.

Helpful failures

Occasional failure is inevitable. After all, we are human! At this basic level, our mistakes help raise our awareness so that we get it right the next time around. For example, running out of gas teaches us that, in the future, we cannot wait so long to refuel our car.

On a larger scale, we also see in history that failure can lead to great success. Consider Orville and Wilbur Wright, the brothers who failed many times before building and flying the world's first successful airplane. Then, there's Babe Ruth, who is famous for his 714 homeruns, not his 1,330 strikeouts. Who else can you think of in history whose failures motivated them to reach greater heights?

Some fears and failures can ruin our lives.

What about the not-so-helpful fears and failures that so many of us deal with? Look back at the list of fears above. Those types of fears often result from traumas like childhood abandonment, divorce, abuse of any kind, life-threatening injuries, witnessing a life-threatening event, or experiencing a natural disaster. These life experiences can continue to traumatize and emotionally paralyze us for years after they occur. They keep us from trusting ourselves, others, and God; they make us angry and bitter; and, they prevent us from more fully enjoying life.

Look again at the list of failures. Those types of failures can haunt us and leave us feeling like we have no chance of getting our life back on track. We've been selfish. We've hurt people that we loved, lost self-respect, and wasted precious time. If we could, we would just forget it all and move on, but that's easier said than done. Even if we could forget, others may not forget. And, so the consequences of our failures often linger for years, sometimes spiraling into a cycle of repeated failures that we feel powerless to stop.

I don't know about you, but I would like to toss my fears and failures into the trash. So many people that I have talked with and counseled over the years would do the same thing—erase fears and failures from their memory and replace them with more hopeful thoughts and feelings. Because this isn't exactly possible, re-purposing becomes a more appealing alternative. We can give new purpose to the fears and failures that fill the “junk pile” of our life.



A.L.T.A.R.

How do we repurpose, or alter, our fears and failures so that they are repurposed for the better? Here is an acronym to guide us through the steps of repurposing fears and failures.

ACKNOWLEDGE

A first step is acknowledging fear and failure as real and as defeating. So many of us try to carry on as if our fears and failures are somehow

stored away so that they are not affecting us or anyone else. Yet, our fears regularly influence our thoughts and feelings. They shame us with reminders that we feel worthless, incapable, and alone. Same with our failures. They remind us that the coldness and distance we feel in our relationships is our fault.

We can pretend that we're fearless and guilt-proof, but we know down deep that shame and guilt are real. Rather than go on living as if fear and failure aren't negatively impacting us and our relationships with others and with God, we can take the first step at repurposing our fears and failures—we can quietly admit to ourselves, "I am afraid." "I have failed." "Fear and failure are not helping me."

Next, we have to lay down the burden of fear and failure. So many of us have carried the heavy emotional load of fear and failure for so long. We know

LAY IT DOWN

it's a heavy load, but somehow we keep carrying it. Out of self-compassion, we can say, "I'm tired of carrying this load." We can decide that we want to and can do something positive with our fears and failures.

Laying down the burden of fear and failure not only requires self-compassion; it requires accepting that God loves us and has a plan for our life (Jeremiah 29:11). He "has not given us a spirit of timidity [fear], but of power and love and discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7). "If we confess our sins [failures], He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Opening our hearts and minds to these truths frees us up to lay down the embarrassment, shame, defeat, and hopelessness that hold us down.

TRANSFORM

The third step in repurposing fear and failure is transforming old thinking and old ways of being into new thoughts and behaviors.

You've changed your mind in other areas of life, right? Perhaps you once thought you would never eat a certain food, but after trying it, it became one of your new favorites. Or, maybe it took a while to warm up to a certain person, but eventually, you gained a new appreciation for him or her. Similarly with our fears, we can go from thinking, "I can't trust anyone" to "I can trust some people." With our failures, we can go from thinking, "I have really screwed up in life," to "There's still time for me to get it right."

Not only have I witnessed many people transform their thoughts and behaviors, but Scripture gives me hope that transformation is possible. We are able to take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5). We can think on "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute" (Philippians 4:8). We can trust that God is "making all things new" (Revelation 21:5), and with His help, we can lay aside our previous ways, renew our minds, and "put on the new self" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Accepting that change takes time is the fourth step to repurposing our fears and failures. That's not easy, is it? And, certainly we occasionally hear of

ACCEPT

others who changed “overnight.” For most of us, though, change is a process. It takes time to acknowledge fear and failure, lay down our burdens, and transform our thoughts and behaviors. We likely will experience setbacks as we go along. But, little by little, each step we take leads to the next, and before we know it, our fears and failures are repurposed into new confidence and courage.

We're not the only ones who have been waiting on us to change. Our loved ones and supporters have often been waiting a long time for us to change, and not just for their own selfish reasons. Perhaps some have hoped we would trust them more or take more chances in life. Others may have hoped we would be more understanding of them or less angry toward them. Our changed outlook on life will come through in our words and behaviors, and others will be glad that we are repurposing our fears and failures.

Be warned, however, that not everyone will be happy about our repurposing. If we're changing, they may be worried that they, too, will need to change. We can't control whether or not they repurpose their own fears and failures. We can't let their decisions control what we do about our fears and failures. We can, however, take peace in knowing that we are a changed and changing person.

REACH OUT

The final step to repurposing our fears and failures is to reach out. You might think—reach out for help. And, that's always a good

idea! But, in this case, I mean that we should reach out in our lives with a sense of accomplishment. Before repurposing, most of us try to hide our fears and failures like we would hide any old junk that we don't necessarily want people seeing. When we begin repurposing our fears and failures, we have reason to be proud of ourselves for turning our lives around. We can enjoy our newfound freedom from fear and failure.

We also may choose to reach out to help others who may be hiding their own junk pile of fears and failures. Oftentimes, people's success stories encourage others to repurpose their fears and failures. We don't have to be perfect or have all the answers, but through our own repurposing process, we have learned to isolate ourselves less; trust ourselves, others, and God more; make amends when possible with people that we have failed; and, behave in less selfish ways toward others. Even if we don't reach out in more obvious ways, our changed lives tell a story that can help many other people.

Why A.L.T.A.R. and not A.L.T.E.R.?

I could easily substitute these two acronyms. A.L.T.E.R. might make for a clever play on words, especially since repurposing means to alter something's intended purpose, use it for another purpose, and thereby, give it new value.

A.L.T.A.R., on the other hand, relates to repurposing in an even greater way. You may be familiar with the word altar from your experiences with various religions. In Biblical times, an altar was a place where burnt sacrifices were made as an act of worship or as an act of repentance for sin.

Today, altars are more commonly a place to pray. Of course, many of us believe that we can pray anywhere. But, somehow, when I go to my church's altar to pray, that is an even more serious gesture on my part. I am sacrificing my comfort and swallowing my pride to leave my seat and publicly approach God with my prayer.

Repurposing our fears and failures requires that we leave our comfort zone and make ourselves vulnerable to change. In this way, we are sacrificing our old thoughts and old ways of being for the hope of new thoughts and new ways of being. For these reasons, A.L.T.A.R. is a fitting acronym for repurposing our fears and failures. More than this, A.L.T.A.R. reminds us that repurposing our fears and failures is ultimately a sacrifice that demonstrates our trust and hope in God. We can make some headway on our own, but we go much further and accomplish much greater change when we in essence say, "God, I am broken. You alone can restore me. You alone can make me new."

Now what?

Throughout this article, I've shared with you the challenges, the how to's, and the rewards of repurposing fears and failures. Now, what will you do with this information? Do you have fears and failures that you would like to repurpose? Are you curious about how your life might be different if you were to apply the A.L.T.A.R. acronym?

For more encouragement and ideas for repurposing your fears and failures, sign up for my blog, Hope to Build On, and follow me on social media. Plus, stay tuned for my upcoming book on living a repurposed life.

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