

4 Ways Leaders Can Overcome the Spirit of Fear

Fears hold us back from God's best for our lives. As a leader, fear hinders your engagement of God's mission for your ministry and your church.

When you overcome your fear, your deeper dependence on God advances your personal growth and leadership.

Next month, most of us will be teaching on the Christmas account in the Bible. Fear and overcoming fear are key parts of the narrative. Four times God tells different people in the Christmas story to "fear not." Today, we know that the Christmas story is Good News—God became flesh in order to save us from our sins. But for those who experienced the Christmas story firsthand, the news scared them to death.

When you read through the Christmas account, you'll find that the characters faced five of the most common fears in existence. You'll recognize the fears because we frequently face them in ministry, too.

—The fear of inadequacy (Mary). Mary was a young peasant girl planning to get married. But an angel interrupted her plan by telling her that she was pregnant with the Son of God. It shouldn't surprise us she felt inadequate.

—The fear of disapproval (Joseph). In Matthew 1:18-20, the angel told Joseph to not be afraid and to take Mary home as his wife. You can imagine the ridicule and shame Joseph expected to face at home if his fiancée was pregnant.

—The fear of unexpected change (the shepherds). Put yourself in the shoes of the shepherds. They're out lying on the grass and tending their flock of sheep. It's all quiet. Suddenly, the sky lights up. A huge choir of extraterrestrial beings

starts singing loudly. You'd be scared, right? The shepherds were. Their plans for a quiet evening were interrupted.

–The fear of losing control (Herod). The Jews didn't like Herod—he ruled with a heavy hand because he was paranoid of getting overthrown. His insecurities caused him to lash out when he heard a new “King of the Jews” had been born.

–The fear of being disappointed (Zechariah). Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for years and years to have a baby, but it hadn't happened. They had one setback after another. When Zechariah found out Elizabeth was pregnant, his first instinct was disbelief. He was afraid to get his hopes up.

All of these fears are incredibly common for pastors to face. I've seen each of them disrupt thriving ministries. If you're facing any of these fears, it doesn't mean there's something defective about you or your ministry. These fears are common; they show that you're human. You will face fears. No seminary degree can prepare you to face them, and no sermon will inoculate you from them.

So, what do you do with your fears?

1. Surrender yourself to God. Job 11:13-15 (CEV) says, “Surrender your heart to God, turn to him in prayer, and give up your sins—even those you do in secret. Then you won't be ashamed; you will be confident and fearless.” Before you get up each morning, start your day with this prayer: “Father, I surrender this day to you. I surrender my past, my present and my future.” Let God fill you with hope and empty you of worry.

2. Stop listening to the voices of fear. They are all around you. You'll hear them in your church, in the media and in the coffee shops. Fearful voices are everywhere. If you hang around fearful people, you will become fearful. Turn those voices off.

3. Fill your mind with music that praises God. The Bible

teaches over and over that praise is the antidote to panic. You lose your fear when God is near. Mary practiced this principle in the Christmas story. When she was afraid, she wrote a song (see Luke 1:46-55).

4. Base your hope on the promises of God. Hope can't be based on what you think. It's based on what God promises. David wrote, "In the day when I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God whose word I praise, in God I have trusted; I will not fear" (Ps. 56:3-4, MEV). Memorize the promises of God and lean on them when you're afraid.

I don't know which fear is holding your ministry back. Maybe it's one of the five mentioned above. Maybe it's something else. But I do believe that if you take these four courageous steps, you can move past your fears and step into faith.

When you surrender to God, listen to His voice, praise Him and base your hope on His promises, your fears will become stepping stones to what God wants to do through your ministry.
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