

Why Teeth-Chattering Fear Shouldn't Make You Afraid

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of spending a day at a major theme park. What made this day even more exciting was that several of my young nieces and a nephew were with us. Being an uncle who likes to introduce excitement and joy into young lives, I convinced Isaiah, my 10-year-old nephew, to ride an exhilarating roller coaster with me. To say I convinced him is to say that I had to offer him a \$10 prize. Being an adventuresome boy who is also industrious, he accepted my offer.

We ran to the entrance of the ride and discovered that there was no line. As we loaded the ride, his face revealed fear. He looked at me and declared, "Uncle Troy, I'm scared." With those words, we jerked into motion. Within just a few seconds, we had climbed the hill and then rapidly descended and were somewhere in between the loops when I looked over at him to discover that his face revealed pure joy! The experience he longed for was only realized just beyond his fear.

Perhaps fear has gotten a bad rap. I know fear has had some bad days and there are some things that fear does that are not good. Fear can be crippling to us, it can cause people to react in ways that are bizarre or even dangerous. Fear has been known to keep a lot of people from reaching their full potential. President Franklin D. Roosevelt once notably said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

But perhaps there is something to fear that we are missing. Whenever we are forced out of our comfort zone or challenged to a new level, there will instinctively be fear that accompanies this adventure. It is in this moment that our level of discipline, faith or determination will direct our response. Fear either paralyzes or motivates; it either

creates a state of frozen intimidation or drives us to wholehearted action. This is not a fear problem, but rather a me problem.

I have recently been pondering this thought as I have been challenged at a whole new level of personal, spiritual and leadership growth. The question that has been on my mind is: What great leaders in Scripture or history did not first experience great fear? What great things have ever been accomplished in this world that weren't first an intimidating fearful idea to a person? Show me something great, and I'll show you something scary. Show me a person of great influence or accomplishment, and I'll show you a person who knows what it is to be afraid.

As Christian leaders, we stand in line with men and women of all ages who before they were used by God were first afraid. When we consider that we are all called to be on mission for God and his kingdom, there are a few realities that underlie our involvement.

God's work is always God-sized. God is up to something exceptional in this world. God's work is always done in a unique and exceptional way. God's work is only accomplished through God's supernatural power. What is remarkable about this is that God has chosen to accomplish his work with human hands. When we understand these realities the only appropriate response is to reverently fear and tremble before God.

When God told Moses to lead the people of Israel Moses, his first response in Exodus 3:6 was that he feared and trembled before the Lord. Moses feared and trembled at his own weakness and inadequacy. Moses feared and trembled at the opposition he would face. Moses feared and trembled at the thought of leading the people who would not believe him and potentially not follow him. Moses feared and trembled at the thought of standing face to face with Pharaoh.

As I thought more about this, it dawned upon me that just about every great leader in the Bible and down through history somewhere early on in their endeavors stood with fear and trembling before the Lord. Before he was the great leader of Israel, David ran from Saul and the throne that God had appointed him. Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress, which was an expression of his fear, when the angel of the Lord called him to service. Paul, was humbled at the calling of God and considered himself the worst of sinners and the least among Apostles. Mary had to be told by the angel to "Fear not" when God's plan for her life was revealed. Even Jesus trembled in the garden before the greatest act ever performed in human history and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39).

It seems to me that before God does something great, His first order of business is to really scare someone. This truth flies in the face of what is often set up as the model for influencers today. There is an image presented in society that we are to be instinctively confident, egotistical leaders who never waver. The truth is that before we are qualified to serve, our first order of business is to humbly and reverently, yes even fearfully, bow in the presence of the Lord.

Although fear is often the entrance into the calling of God on our lives and is often the first emotion when we are tackling something new, fear is never to be our final destination. Fear that comes from hearing God's voice and being called of God ultimately leads to great strength and courage. The same presence that caused Moses to fear at the burning bush was later his source of strength and courage. When Moses asked God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?", God said "I will be with you" (see Ex. 3:12). The presence of God was now the very thing that gave him courage. The songwriter put it

this way: "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear/ And grace my fears relieved."

So today, as you read this article, you may feel a little like my nephew Isaiah, a bit afraid. Go ahead and ride the ride! Take heart! Choose to respond in faith and courage! Remember, you are in good company with godly leaders of all ages. You are in even better company as God is with you, and it may just mean something great is about to happen! Don't be afraid of fear!

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