

How Discipleship Stands Against Fear

Read Time: 5 Minutes 11 Seconds

My family and I moved to Chicago in 2012. My son was seven at the time and had, up to that point, not lived in the city.

He had grown up in a small town in Central Illinois where the buildings are shorter, the traffic slower and the people fewer. These differences became particularly evident when my son and I were shopping downtown.

Having grown up downstate, my son was not used to walking close to me. On the relatively empty sidewalks of our rural hometown, he could run to the next corner and wait for me. He didn't have to stay by my side. A crowded Chicago street, however, brings new challenges.

I watched as my son tried to navigate the bustling Chicago sidewalks on his own. He was being jostled and bumped out of the way by walkers who didn't notice him. He dodged groups of shoppers, backtracked to avoid people guilty of texting while walking and hugged the walls to avoid being trampled. I watched him for a bit before calling him over to walk closer to me.

At the time, I was six foot, 250 pounds, with a sleeve of tattoos. People saw me coming. I didn't bully my way through the crowds, but I wasn't exactly dodging every walker either. At my side, my son was able to walk more confidently. He didn't have to dip, duck, dive and dodge. He benefited from my physical stature and presence. He was able to walk as if he was also six foot, 250 lbs. He walked differently because he walked with me.

As I think back on that day with my son, it reminds me that

when I walk with God, I can walk differently. The dangers and complications that frighten and challenge me when I walk alone tend to shrink when I am walking with God. That isn't simply because nothing represents a threat to God, but because walking with God assumes God is leading me toward a particular destination. Discipleship is not simply a matter of depending on God for safety, but recognizing that safety is less important than following where God leads.

Discipleship opposes fear because, through discipleship, we learn to perceive the world differently. We adopt a different rhythm and outlook. We learn that "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

What it means to be a disciple is to look with eyes that see and listen with ears that hear. Discipleship opposes fear by making sense of the practices of the Christian faith. It helps us to discern the world around us from a decidedly theological perspective. We see God, and even when we don't, we recognize that He is active, present and prepared to do something beyond anything we could ask or think (Eph. 3:20).

To be discipled involves learning to live with wisdom, which begins with the fear of the Lord (Prov. 9:10). Such wisdom is rooted in the observance of the full counsel of God. When we obey God's instruction, we affirm that we trust in His sovereignty, wisdom and benevolence.

Rather than taking charge of our own lives, choosing our own way and deciding that God is holding us back, we, as disciples, follow God along a path (even when that path is inconvenient or painful), knowing that "for all those who love God all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28).

Discipleship crowds out fear because through discipleship, we come to grasp the simple fact that whatever "light momentary affliction" we may experience in this life "is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor.

4:17). As we embrace our role as part of a body of people who proclaim the gospel by pointing to and glorifying Jesus, we will begin to understand that the loss, pain and discomfort we experience in this life is worth it because we know that through it we are being prepared to live in God's presence forever. We will learn to endure faithfully rather than escape knowing that God does not abandon us but refines us and protects us even in the most tragic of circumstances.

Proverbs 29:25 reads, "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe." The world disciplines us to fear men. The economy is crashing. Be afraid. War is inevitable. Be afraid. Your livelihood and security are at stake. Be afraid. Such fears lay snares that tempt us to doubt God's sovereignty, wisdom and benevolence.

We take matters into our own hands, and in doing so, fool ourselves into believing that the ends justify the means. We are in a state of flux and panic that pushes us to find immediate solutions, to assign blame or to lash out with our words or actions. We will be tempted to set aside the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" and to pick up the worries and fears of a world that does not know God.

Discipleship teaches us to be strange in faithful ways. Disciples are peaceful in a violent world, calm amidst chaos and truthful even when being honest is painful. We show mercy, love our enemies and allow our loyal love for God to spring forth in love for neighbors. Disciples are odd in ways that allow us to point to Jesus. As such, discipleship stands against fear.

God's people are not guided by phobias. We aren't silenced because we wish to avoid the negative consequences of speaking. We follow Jesus and obey Him despite our fears. As Peter says:

"Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is

good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil" (1 Peter 3:13-17).

Discipleship does not guarantee comfort. There will be times when, like the Son of Man, we will have nowhere to lay our heads (Matt. 8:20). Still, discipleship opposes fear as we learn that there is nothing more dangerous than disobedience. Fear is not wisdom. It will not bring life. Instead, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight," (Prov. 9:10).

Bring *Charisma* magazine home with a subscription today!

Dr. James Spencer serves as President of the D. L. Moody Center, an independent non-profit organization inspired by the life and ministry of Dwight Moody and dedicated to proclaiming the gospel and challenging God's children to follow Jesus. His book titled "Useful to God: Eight Lessons from the Life of D. L. Moody" was released in March 2022. He previously published "Thinking Christian: Essays on Testimony, Accountability, and the Christian Mind," as well as co-authoring "Trajectories: A Gospel-Centered Introduction to Old Testament Theology."