

Overcoming Fears by Welcoming the Child

By Gordon Dalbey

“Comfort, comfort my people,” says our God. “Comfort them! Encourage the people of Jerusalem.... The Sovereign Lord will take care of his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs together and carry them in his arms..... Those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise up on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not grow weak.

Isaiah 40:1,2a,10,11,31,32

Whoever welcomes in my name one such child as this, welcomes me.

Matt. 18:5

A struggle with major health issues this past year left me scrambling for ways to overcome a variety of worries and fears.

The doctors encouraged me to take walks. That’s been healthy, but has stirred its own stress.

Can I do this walk safely? I worry while lacing up my shoes.

“NO!” an ugly host of frightening images shout. “Imagine the terrible things that could happen to you!”

I pray, asking God for His peace and guidance. Sometimes, I sense a “let’s rest today”—and forego the walk. But in fact, most often I get a clear word from the Father saying, “Yes; you’re fine. Go for it!”

On my Father’s assurance, I’ve pushed through the fears and my body has come along.

LOST JOY

My mind, however, is another story. Too often the stressful thoughts continue, disengaging me from the moment. The joy of being outdoors and the uplift of exercising—even the fun of walking together with my wife—is lost.

For a long time, I wrestled with this negative pushback, without success. It made no sense; the Father had told me He would uphold me on the walk, so why should these fearful “darts” keep harassing me when I go out (Ephes. 6:16)?

I cast out spirits of fear, anxiety, and foreboding, which gave me some relief. Nevertheless, when I was actually outside walking—or doing whatever other activity spurred those spirits—the fears persisted.

Breakthrough came just a few weeks ago in my prayer closet. Shaking my head in dismay, I exhaled deeply and cried out, “Have mercy on me, Father! I’ve tried everything I know to rest in you, but nothing’s working.”

In that moment, a pain arose from deep inside me. An impulse to suppress it beckoned, but I just fell back exhausted in my chair.

And then it happened.

TEARS

Tears came to my eyes.

For those unfamiliar with the term, it's like water that comes right out of your eyes—usually amid deep, heartfelt emotion.

At once, the dam burst and I began to cry, shaking uncontrollably.

“Father, I’m so afraid my body won’t work and something awful is going to happen if I go out walking!” I sobbed.

After a few minutes, I sat crumpled quietly in my chair. Then I saw Jesus come to and put his arms around me. “It’s OK to be afraid,” he said. “I know it’s been hard for you. It’s been a tough year. When you’re ready, I’m right here with you and we’ll go out and walk together.”

At that, my tears ebbed. Inhaling deeply, I sighed in relief. In fact, a broad smile came over my face and I felt... could it be?

Joy!

Unbridled, free, and divinely certified joy.

And guess what? Outside, the sun was shining, birds were singing, trees were waving in the breeze. Soon my body was striding along, and my spirit was rejoicing.

I had trusted the Lord for His comfort, as Isaiah prophesied in the opening Scripture, and found my strength renewed. I walked, and did not grow weak.

Later, I cried out a number of other fears to Jesus, and was similarly uplifted.

Haleluia! The boy is back.

It’s as if a little boy inside me were saying, “Yes, you can force me to go where you want me to go. I don’t have the power to resist, so my body will go with you. But if you don’t respect my heart and listen to my fears, I will do what I can to resist: I’ll shut down to protect my heart, and you’ll push through life without the freedom of my child-like spirit.

COMPLIANCE, NOT JOY

“You’ll learn compliance, but not joy” (see Mark 10:13-16).

Translation: You’ll miss out on the “abundant” life that Jesus brings you (John 10:10).

At last, I saw what had been missing in my faith that short-circuited that healing.

It was OK by The Father, and even the doctors, to go out and exercise. So I simply shoved aside the fearful little boy and pushed ahead.

Yet it was not yet OK in my heart.

Because no one had listened to my fear.

In fact, I had told that scared little boy that I didn’t want to hear from him, that he was not welcome in my life. Thereby, as the opening Matthew Scripture, I had not welcomed Jesus into my life, that is, into my deepest fears.

And so I carried the little boy’s worries with me.

It wasn’t that God didn’t care about my feeling, but that I never dared to express it. Indeed, when finally I told Jesus—the Savior who said, “You’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father”—He listened, even comforted me (John 14:9).

At last, I felt respected and significant.

Now, I could trust and respect those who had called me to the “fearful” activity ahead—i.e., the doctors and the Father, even my own desire to go out for a fun break. I could step out engaged by the present experience, without all the residual back-talk in my head that otherwise stole my rest and enjoyment in the moment.

AFRAID TO BE AFRAID

In fact, I’d been afraid to be afraid.

And I began to realize why.

I had learned to fear my fear as a child. My friends and I were all sons of the WWII generation, men taught by war to suppress fear as weak, unmanly, and a hindrance to the mission at hand. If we cried in front of our fathers, they would spank us with the numbing warning, “Stop crying, or I’ll give you something to cry about!”

A Navy brat, I moved often as a boy with my family. Each time, I was sad to leave my school and friends, but couldn’t say that to my parents. When we arrived at a new neighborhood, therefore, it was difficult for me to jump in and engage. I continued this pattern of uprooting and travelling as a young man, performing highly at tasks but stuffing my fears until I felt lost and adrift.

Eventually, a friend of mine in graduate school wondered out loud if I had any real feelings at all—then asked me point-blank, “When was the last time you cried?”

I couldn’t remember. In fact, I didn’t want to.

But I knew then that a fuse had blown in my emotional circuit.

Via helpful books and counseling, I realized that, in denying me my feelings, Dad was just doing to me what his father had done to him as a boy. That, together with the larger, impassive culture, kept him from seeing how his emotions had been truncated, leaving him burdened with fears he couldn’t release.

Such compassion led me to forgive him for doing that to me. I even cried for him and his own un-comforted heart as a boy himself. I told him to his face how much I respected him for all he’d overcome in his life and appreciated all he’d done for me and our family.

Still, I was determined not to pass that brokenness down to my son. Yet I didn’t see how deeply it had impacted—and remained—in me.

HONORING THE CHILD’S VOICE

In a culture that scorns fear as weakness, it takes great faith and indeed, maturity to cry out your fears to Jesus. Yet, if you don’t give that wounded child a voice—and here’s the supreme irony—you never really grow up.

You can’t become an adult without first becoming a child.

The more you welcome the child’s voice into your heart, that is, the more you welcome Jesus—and the more you mature into his design for your life.

In my own journey, I had purposely ignored the authority of my boyhood heart and buried my fears. In such unfaith, I just carried the stress from my childhood wounds into my adult life. That not only short-circuited my genuine emotions, but frustrated my efforts after close relationships and postponed my destiny.

My experience here is not a cure-all for overcoming fear. But I offer it as one avenue that I hope might bless some others as it’s done for me.

My brothers and sisters, please: Don’t waste any more time running away from the authority of your heart. Let Jesus demonstrate the authority of the Father’s heart for you as His child. Cry out your fears and trust Him to listen.

Let your Father comfort you. And then, get ready to rise up as on wings of an eagle.

RESOURCES

*Plus books, mp3 book reading downloads, videos,
past Newsletters and other teachings at*

www.abbafather.com

- * *Sons of the Father: Healing the Father-Wound in Men Today*
- * “Weeping Warrior” in *Fight like a Man*
- * “Battling for the Child” in *Fight like a Man*
- * *Do Pirates Wear Pajamas? and Other Mysteries in the Adventure of Fathering*
- * “Depression or Expression? The Emotional, Physical, Spiritual Battle” in *Religion vs. Reality; Facing the Home Front in Spiritual Warfare*
- * “Delivered from Abortion: Healing a Forgotten Memory” in *Religion vs. Reality*