


FEARLESS

ENDING MY LONG ROMANCE WITH FEAR
AND LEARNING TO COURAGEOUSLY
EMBRACE FAITH ADVENTURES

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The background image is a composite. The top half shows a sky filled with dark, heavy, grey-blue clouds, with a bright light source breaking through on the left side, creating a lens flare effect. The bottom half shows a green football field with white yard lines and large white numbers (50 and 60) painted on the grass. The field is viewed from a low angle, looking down the center line.

My hands shook and my chest trembled with fear as I sat alone in my classroom. I welcomed the solitude...my reputation would suffer serious damage if anyone had discovered me in this condition!

It all started on my commute to school that morning. I asked the Lord to give me specific instructions for my day.

He answered, "Pray for your principal."

Unfortunately, I knew what He meant. He did not mean the passive, “drive-by” kind of prayer—under my breath, just between me and the Lord, like most of us typically offer on a day to day basis. He meant the scary, awkward, in-person kind.

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I’ve experienced a long romance with fear. I’m sure you can relate. I’ve heard that the most common command in Scripture is “fear not.” I know the famous quotes about how courage does not suggest the absence of fear, but rather acting in spite of it.

I’ve learned to define fear as “false evidence appearing real.” Heck, even Yoda knows that “Fear is the path to the dark side.” But in the grip of hand-shaking, chest-thumping, gut-tightening fear, sometimes these helpful encouragements do not suffice.

Just a few years ago I attended a football game at my high school. A play near the end zone resulted in an injury to one of our own. The longer he laid motionless on the grass, the more anxious we became.

Then I felt the inner prompting, “Go pray for him.”

Fear responded, “You work as a public school teacher, and you are participating in a school event. You’re not allowed to pray.”

These two stories demonstrate why fear sometimes wins with me. The combination of two related fears—the fear of personal rejection and the fear of legal or professional consequences—often leave me paralyzed. Faced separately, they feel less debilitating. But in this case, the total always exceeds the sum of their parts.

Knowledge is one way to dispel

fear. I am so thankful for the ministry of CEAI, especially the many workshops on legal freedoms that I have attended and now lead. I joyfully witness many teachers walk away with tremendous confidence simply because they now know where the legislatures and courts have drawn the boundary lines for faith expression in public schools. The truth has set them free from fear.

But ultimately, the courage to act in the face of paralyzing fear must come from a deeper source.

I find encouragement in what the Scriptures say about fear. Joshua 1:9 helps when I need a kick in the rear end. God entreats Joshua with an apparent sense of urgency like a football coach in the fourth quarter. “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous...for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (New International Version).

Then, 1 John 4:18 reminds me not to fear because “perfect love drives out fear.” Both of these verses function in the context of relationship. God “with you wherever you go” demonstrates relationship, and “perfect love” requires relationship. I have learned

that when we engage in relationship with God and also with other committed, healthy believers, fear wins less. The more intimate these relationships, the more powerfully they dispel fear. Conversely, the more we isolate ourselves, the more fear wins.

After hearing, “Go pray for him” at the football game, I wrestled with my response. Would I get up out of the stands, take the long walk to the field, and pray? Or, would I listen to the myriad of excuses suddenly screaming at me? Thankfully, God had connected me with a prayer partner years ago, who sat next to me in the stands at this critical moment. I was not alone. Leaning on my prayer partner’s presence for encouragement, I said to him, “Let’s go to work.” We took the long walk down to the field together.

I could only get close enough to the injured player to touch the top of his cleat and quietly pray. Moments later, the paramedics came and carted him off the field. He recovered quickly and completely. Did our prayers help? I don’t know, but I do know I expected backlash. Did an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) attor-

ney attend the game that night? I hoped I would just receive a warning from my principal as the worst consequence for my prayer.

The answer came Monday morning.

At the weekly faculty meeting, our typically stoic, business-like principal who maintains strict neutrality called me out at the meeting, “I want to give a big thank you to Mr. Schmus who came out of the stands to pray.”

Stunned. Expecting correction, I received honor.

Several months later, there I sat trembling with fear in my classroom, deciding if I would obey the prompting to pray for the very same principal. Why so much fear? Hadn’t I learned? Fear isn’t rational, right? I am learning that we can’t partner with God to transform schools, not to mention our own hearts, without courage.

I cautiously started the short walk to the office. When I turned the corner, I discovered someone had already beat me to the open chair in her office. Good, a way out! I regrouped and prayed for a few min-

utes in the restroom (yes, embarrassing to admit), telling God that I would only try this one more time. I walked by her office again, hopefully on the most direct path back to my classroom, when I saw, to my horror, that she now sat alone with her door open. She agreed to let me in, and I awkwardly explained my directive to pray for her.

An eternity passed while I waited for her response—so long that I started to mentally freshen up my resume. But she needed the time to de-

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cide if she could trust me. As she finally began to share, I learned that she faced a devastatingly painful, difficult, and confusing experience. Even worse, she endured it almost completely alone. After praying with her, the thought “What if I hadn’t obeyed?” struck me. How many

other times have I ignored (disobeyed) similar promptings? How often have I let fear win? What other people in need haven't experienced God's touch because of my fear?

In my work with CEAI, I watch God raise up educators to serve as modern-day Joshuas, Gideons, Esthers, and Daniels. But this transformation doesn't take place in isolation. In the absence of intimate relationships with God and my prayer partner, I would have surrendered to fear and missed both of these opportunities to extend God's kingdom on my campus.

I am praying that you would obey His promptings. Will all of your courageous faith adventures end well like my two experiences? God doesn't make promises like that. But He is good, and He loves you. You can trust that He will honor His promises to never leave you. Plus, in my experience, He is a better master than fear. We will either serve one or the other. Let's choose Him over our fears and watch what He does in our schools.

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