

DO NOT ALLOW FEAR TO DISABLE YOU

By Jim Mathis

A neighbor of mine during my childhood, Bill Moore, died recently. He was 97. Bill lived across the road from us during the entire time I was growing up. For several years Bill rented land from my family to use as a pasture for some of his dairy cows.

His passing reminded me of a day when I was about 6 or 7 years old, the day my cousin Bobby and I decided to take a shortcut through the pasture heading for our favorite fishing hole. Bill Moore had a big, old, mean bull that was very protective of his pasture. When the bull saw us cutting across "his land," he apparently did not think that was a good idea, so he decided to chase us off.

Bobby and I ran as fast as we could and dove under a barbed wire fence to safety. I do not recall looking back to see how close the bull came to us, or if the sound of his snorting and pawing the ground got us moving, but I know we were scared to death. Maybe we had watched too many cartoons featuring fire-breathing, aggressive bulls. But fear – in this case, healthy fear – propelled us out of the pasture.

Fear can be a great motivator, causing us to avoid or flee from danger, and encouraging us to actively seek safety. Psychologists talk about the "fight or flight instinct"; in dangerous times that proves useful. At the same time, fear can be very debilitating. It can keep us from following our dreams, taking the initiative to resign from a lousy job, or finding the motivation to try something different at work or in our daily lives.

I saw a sign recently that said overcoming fear of failure is the beginning of creativity. Every great accomplishment has been preceded, to one degree or another, by overcoming fear: The fear of failure. Fear of ridicule. Fear of discovering the challenge is much greater than we anticipated. Fear of venturing outside of our comfort zones. Fear of realizing, "No one has ever done this before!"

The Bible talks a lot about fear, recognizing it as one of the most basic, common human emotions. It tells us much of our fear is unnecessary, as long as we place our trust in God and His resources. For instance:

Assurance we are not alone. One reason we feel fearful is the feeling of isolation, that we are facing challenges and obstacles by ourselves. God says that is not true. He says, "*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God...*" (Isaiah 41:10a).

Assurance of God's help. Overcome by fear, where do you turn? God asks us to turn to Him. "*...I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand*" (Isaiah 41:10b).

Assurance of God's love and concern. When we trust in God's unfailing love and protection, we can face our fears head-on. "*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love*" (1 John 4:18).

Whether our fears are real or imagined, whether the bull is bluffing or he really is after us, we need to accurately assess the situation, face and overcome our fears, and follow our dreams. If God has given us an ambitious goal or desire, we can trust Him to guide us and provide the resources to get it done.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What has been the most fearful situation you have ever encountered? How did you respond to this situation?
2. On an everyday basis, what are your greatest fears – at work, at home, or in your personal activities?
3. Have you found fear to be more motivating, causing you to try or work harder, or debilitating, sometimes paralyzing you from doing anything? Explain your answer.
4. Do you find comfort or encouragement from promises in the Bible about fear and trusting in God's intervention? Why or why not?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Psalms 111:10; Proverbs 1:7, 3:25-26; Jeremiah 29:11-13; Luke 12:32-34; 2 Timothy 1:7