

Overcoming Fear Outside the Comfort Zone

By Sergio M. Fortes

Some time ago I wrote about the benefits – and limitations – of living and working in the “comfort zone,” areas we find comfortable and familiar. We find security there, but staying there may inhibit our personal and professional development. Why do we remain there? I believe it is because of what we might call “the Fear Zone.”

When we make the important decision to abandon the comfort zone, we find ourselves entering an unfamiliar, untested realm characterized by an absence of self-confidence. Fearful of challenges we have never faced before, we might feel overpowered and influenced by the opinions of others. Rather than boldly venturing into the unknown, we take refuge in excuses.

Fear is not necessarily bad. It puts us on alert, adrenaline surging within us to prepare us for threats that surround us. But fear can also paralyze and disable us from taking any action, even positive steps for growth and professional advancement. Over the years I have learned this is the strategy of the enemy of our souls – Satan – as the Scriptures warn us. We are told he *“roars like a lion looking for a victim to devour”* (1 Peter 5:8). Immobilizing fear can turn us into easy prey.

There are many kinds of fear: Fear of going wrong. Fear of not making the right decision. Fear of what others might think. Fear of the unknown. This brings to mind the people of Israel after they had been freed from slavery in Egypt. Despite the adversity they had left behind, it still represented a “comfort zone” for them – the known and familiar. Discomfort with the unknown turned into dread. They began to rationalize: “It wasn’t so bad back there.” They wanted to give up and turn back, to return to the “onions and garlic” from Egypt. Amazingly, they concluded that dying in Egypt would be better than surviving in the desert.

Anxiety has been called “one of the evils of the century,” something that afflicts all ages, from children to the elderly. We fear in advance things that have not yet happened and may never happen. How should we deal with fear? The Bible provides us with precious guidance:

A divine command. Addressing the Israelites, God instructed, *“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go”* (Joshua 1:9). Whether leaving our comfort zone or facing a big challenge, confronting fear is a divine directive. We might regard this as the 11th commandment: *“You shall not be afraid...”* (Psalm 91:5).

Spirit of a winner. Paul the apostle was mentor to his young protégé, Timothy, who found himself surrounded by obstacles imposed by Jewish leaders who did not want to leave their own comfort zones. Paul challenged him to persevere, to win: *“For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, love and of self-discipline”* (2 Timothy 1:7).

Confidence despite uncertainty. Fear is often inevitable. Circumstances, problems and obstacles attack our faith. However, drawing from personal experience, the psalmist David wrote, *“When I am afraid, I will trust in you...in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?”* (Psalm 56:3-4).

No fear, not even of death. Life can put us into situations that appear hopeless, when it seems our end has been decreed. But God’s Word comes to us with unbeatable power: *“Even though I walk through a dark valley like death, I will not be afraid of anything. For you, O Lord God, are with me; you protect me and direct me”* (Psalm 23 4).

Do you find yourself outside your comfort zone and into the zone of fear? We can stare it down, because of the certainty that Almighty God is with us. The Fear Zone is worth facing and overcoming, because as I will write in a future edition of “Monday Manna,” the next stage is the Learning Zone!

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. By way of review, how would you define the “comfort zone”? What makes up the comfort zone for you? How difficult do you find it to venture outside this comfort zone?
2. Mr. Fortes suggests a “Fear Zone” confronts us if and when we determine to step beyond our comfort zones? What kind of role do you think fear plays in encouraging us to remain with the familiar and comfortable?
3. What kinds of fear do you find yourself dealing with most commonly? In what ways have you been able to overcome them?
4. A number of biblical promises are presented for enabling us to overcoming the fear of venturing outside our comfort zones. Do you find them helpful? If so, in what ways? If not, why?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more consider the following passages:

Isaiah 26:3-4, 41:10-14; Jeremiah 29:11-13, 33:3; Matthew 6:25-34; Ephesians 3:20