



## The Fear Factor

Fear of someone you don't trust is a paralyzing fear. But fearing someone you trust is encouraging, for each time you are instructed you can rest assured it is in your best interest.

Last fall my Bible Study group went through a series on the Holy Spirit. As we began to get a deeper understanding of this third member of the Trinity (who we by no means got our minds fully wrapped around), some of the ladies in my group expressed concerns about their relationship with God as Father.

They felt they had always been able to relate to Jesus because he came in the flesh, healed the sick, fed the hungry, respected women and was tempted as we were (yet without sin). Now, as their relationship with the Holy Spirit grew deeper, their connection to God as father felt distant.

That's when one woman in our group shared a powerful thought. She said something to this effect, "God wants us to be close to him, that's why he comes as the Holy Spirit to comfort us. He wants us to know how desperately he loves us, that's why he sent his Son to die for us. But he is also an awesome and fearful God, full of power and majesty. God as Father represents that for me."

Sometimes I think that in our touchy-feely society, we don't spend enough time standing in fearful awe of the ruler of the universe. We spend a lot of time focusing on a God of love, (and rightly so, because that's who he is) but the God of love demands to be feared.

The Psalmist writes, "Let everyone in the world fear the Lord and let everyone stand in awe of him" (Psalm 33:8, NLT). Isaiah says, "the Lord Almighty is the one...you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread" (Isaiah 8:13). And, of course, Jesus follows up with, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him" (Luke 12:4-5).

We are a world of terrified people. Afraid of elevators and airplanes, afraid of terrorists and war, afraid of AIDS and oil prices, afraid of tsunamis and global warming, but we for-

get to be afraid of the One who created it all. We forget that the greatness of God is not only in his love, it is also in his power, and that power *must* overwhelm us.

The late Mike Yaconelli, author and co-founder of *Youth Specialties*, had this to say about bringing the fear of the Lord back into our worship. "I would like to suggest that the church become a place of terror again; a place where God continually has to tell us, 'Fear not;' a place where our relationship with God is not a simple belief or a doctrine or theology, it is God's burning presence in our lives. I am suggesting that the tame God of relevance be replaced by the God whose very presence shatters our egos into dust, burns our sin into ashes and strips us naked to reveal the real person within."

God's presence in our lives should shake us up! But what should we fear? Should we fear that he will rake us across the coals because he likes a good chuckle? Should we fear that we've done something he will never forgive? Should we fear that we haven't done enough Hail Mary's to earn back his good favor? Absolutely not! That's the type of fear one offers an untrustworthy God.

Fear and trust have an important relationship. Fear of someone you don't trust is a paralyzing fear. But fearing someone you trust is encouraging, for each time you are instructed you can rest assured it is in your best interest.

So even as we quake in our boots in front of the one with lightning in his fists, we can rest assured that his might is matched by his grace. The almighty, omnipotent, blinding, earthshaking God will *never* forsake you.

The God who loves you beyond your wildest dreams is also the God who roared from the top of Mt. Sinai. The God who calms the storm can drop you in the middle of one. The Lion of the Old Testament did not disappear when he became the Lamb. Fear him, and you will fear no more. □

—Susan Reedy