

Fear Not

Beth Oppenlander

I am often asked to talk about my journey over the last 15 months. That was when I transitioned from being a full time salaried employee within a large corporation to taking the plunge into being an independent contractor paid solely on commission.

When I was first asked to consider being a full time real estate broker I had recently accepted a new assignment within my company. The timing didn't feel right and I thought I was up for the challenge of my new role. Well after 6 months, and 60-70 work weeks without making significant progress I was really discouraged, feeling beat up and feeling trapped. It was also about that time that I was in a minor fender bender which exacerbated some old injuries I experienced from another car accident several years before. Between the stress of the job and the fender bender, I was rendered unable to move my neck, unable to lift my right arm and endured constant headaches.

After a month of physical therapy for the accident, my physical therapist told me that I wasn't getting better, instead I was getting worse, and the only solution toward wellness was to make some major life changes. After that appointment I sat in the parking lot and sobbed uncontrollably. I pleaded for God to show me way forward. I confessed that I wasn't willing to surrender my health for my high paying job. I didn't feel I had many options and I was afraid and I felt very alone.

While I sat in my car, wiping away my tears, I received another call asking if I would reconsider being a full time real estate broker. That night, my husband and I talked about my health, my current job and the new job possibility. It wasn't until he said, "You can resign in two months and get your bonus and then start the new job in January." It was then that I knew I had reached my limit with the new position. A single tear dropped from each eye. Noticing this, he suggested I give one month of notice so we could save up a little and then I could start the new job. Now my silent tears were steady and uncontrollable. We agreed, I would turn in my resignation the following day and I would allow 2 weeks.

That night in my kitchen I confessed to God and my husband that I was terrified to take this leap. Yet, I knew I simply could not continue to push through my pain and the long hours. I was afraid to enter into a new career where I had 20 years of indirect experience, but never direct brokering responsibilities - was I being foolish to think it could be done? I told God that I wanted to be well, I wanted to be free and most of all I wanted to embark in work that not only brought me joy, but was a ministry to others. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I confessed I simply didn't want to be afraid and my fears were the single thing preventing me from taking the leap of faith. If this new opportunity was in fact a gift that God was unfolding, I didn't want to squander that gift by being afraid. I made a deal with God that night. I would surrender my fear, trusting that God would address those fears as they surfaced. Together we would walk away from my doubts and fears and together we would embrace what unfolded.

I gave my notice the very next day. Two days later, I had a physical therapy appointment. She lifted my arm and I had full range of motion again. My neck didn't need to be adjusted, it was perfectly aligned. Astounded she declared, "All your injuries are gone!" She asked what changed. I told her I quit my job and decided to trust that God would provide for my needs going forward.

The weekend between jobs, I shared my God story during worship. Right after the service, a couple came up to me and said, "We are moving out of our home in 3 days. We have been asking God to show us what realtor we should work with and we haven't been clear, until now. Now we know why we have been waiting so long. Will you list our home for us?" A different kind of tears fell that day. God not only provided for me, but he provided for others. We both had our prayers answered.

There is no magical, hidden secret to my story of choosing to live without fear. Rejecting fear is a process and a continued act of faith. One that must be embarked upon daily, moment by moment. For that reason, let me offer four critical steps I went through in my journey from fear into trust.

First, I absolutely had to tell the truth of my personal experience. I was at my limit and I should not feel ashamed. I couldn't push thought it any longer and a change had to be made. I was afraid to trust that God would provide for all of my needs, I thought I was doing a pretty good job on my own. I was addicted by my salary and I didn't really understand how far my personal sacrifices had extended to continue to bring home that paycheck. Finally, leaving a high paying salaried position isn't what society considers practical and I aspire to being practical...often to a fault.

Second, I had to tell my personal truth of the context of my external environment. My job was a burden beyond my limits. My husband and I were constantly arguing about my choices to overextend to meet a deadline at work. I had earned my MBA and I was conditioned to follow the opportunities that led to more responsibility and ultimately more pressure because I thought that is how I had to prove my sense of worth and validate my education. And lastly, my husband and I did not have the financial means to simply live off his salary alone.

Third, I had to surrender those truths and circumstances to God. I also had to claim the truth of the nature of God while doing that. God is practical! God is not threatened by my fears, anger or doubts, all these are already known and they are loved. God does not play by the rules of our broken world system; in God there is another way. God knows me better than I know myself, especially when I am not brave enough to tell the truth of my condition and I am consumed by pride, ungratefulness and fear. Again, God is not threatened nor repulsed by my condition. Instead, God yearns to be in relationship with humanity and God wants that relationship to be grounded in trust. God works through our strengths and weakness so that we can be set free and made whole; together we have the power to triumph over fear. God does not want us to be afraid and God is trustworthy to free us from our fears.

Fourth, I must share the truth of my journey with others. There is tremendous power in community! I am learning that when I am engaged in community, what I once thought were limited resources (I don't have enough time, I don't have enough money, I lack this or that) are transformed into something miraculously beautiful and abundant. I have learned that in community with God and others, one plus one is far greater than two. And for that community to happen, I must share my story.

"Fear not!" That was the proclamation made by the angels before amazing miracles unfolded in scripture. When we reject fear in our lives, we not only facilitate the Kingdom of God's goodness, gratitude and joy we encourage others to do the same. This is a deeply transformational change and one others see and respond to. There is no witness more powerful to others than choosing not to be afraid and sharing our stories of how we overcame those fears. Watch and experience how many people come to you and ask, "What is your secret?" While it isn't always easy to reject fear, and there is always a personal sacrifice, it is by far the most liberating experience I have encountered.

I am happy to report, there has not been a single day in the last 15 months where my fears have consumed me. When I start to feel afraid (and yes, there are many days where it sneaks up on me), I walk through the steps outlined above and I wait, I listen and I trust. I do this independently and within my community by inviting them to participate in my God story. Sometimes my fears are released immediately and others take longer to unhinge. But, each and every time, when I let go of my fears and trust God, miracles unfolded beyond my wildest comprehension. Try it. I promise, you won't be disappointed!