

Fear and Faith: Same Definition?

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When faced with a demanding or trying situation, do you respond with fear or with an outlook of faith? Whichever is your answer, do you respond that way by conscious preference or by habit?

Maybe you've never realized that your response is a choice. For some of you, I'm offering that possibility. One of the purposes of my articles is to raise your awareness. Despite the distressing nature of the dilemma you face, you do have the freedom to choose how you respond.

I often share my ideas for potential articles with my wife; I love the interesting conversations we generate. She reminded me that fear is an emotion and often comes upon us unexpectedly. We agree that emotions are like the indicator lights on the control panel of our car. Our emotions are an indicator of something happening physically, mentally, or spiritually within us.

We also agree that once we feel that emotion, we do not have to be controlled by the fear (or whatever other emotion we may feel, such as anger, guilt, or sadness). Like driving down the highway, we can continue to travel with the indicator light illuminated, or we can stop the car and address the real problem.

Perhaps it will help to realize that the response of both fear and faith is a projection of what we imagine might happen. It was a huge insight for me when I realized that the definition of faith and fear is essentially the same: the belief that what we don't see will happen.

My habitual outlook, unknowingly learned from my mother, was fear. It wasn't until my forties that I learned that everything in our world is colored by whatever "glasses" we wear (that is, whatever perspective we've intentionally or inadvertently adopted). If we have a scarcity outlook, we will tend to be risk averse and protective. If we have an abundance outlook, we will be more generous and willing to take risks.

Although "faith" is a term typically associated with religion, even non-religious people manifest faith. When you sit in a chair, you have faith it will hold you up; otherwise, you would carefully check the condition of the structure and how firmly the parts are connected. When you pass through a green traffic light, you have faith that those approaching the red light will stop.

Our behaviors and our outlooks are based on the values and beliefs we inherited from our original families, adapted from our peers as we grew up, or have chosen as an adult. If our behaviors are not generating the outcomes we desire, we could investigate and consider alternatives, just as we would explore the underlying cause of an indicator light in our car.

Our values, including our orientation toward fear or faith, drive our choices. The time to examine our beliefs and values is when we are not under stress. We can examine our history and determine if we want to continue our past behaviors or make a change. Changing our outlook may not be easy. With the help of a friend or mentor, however, we can identify new preferences and work to respond differently.

These are stressful times. As a leader, be aware that many of those under your authority may welcome the opportunity to talk about the insights in this article. I suggest that you distribute copies to your team members and allocate some time for them to offer comments and raise questions.

Not knowing the demands facing your organization, I can't predict what interests might be identified. I can promise, however, that if you offer the opportunity, you'll be able to address some potentially distracting energy that you didn't know existed. Listen closely to what every person says. Consider making personal contact later with each individual, offering your support in whatever way he or she might prefer.

Responding in fear or faith--the choice is available to each of us!

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