

# MATTMCWILLIAMS

Live with Passion. Lead with Purpose. Leave a Legacy.

## The Insanity of Fear

I still remember the first time I saw my dad having a panic attack. It was utterly terrifying. He was rocking himself back and forth on the floor, sweating profusely, trembling from an unknown fear. I didn't know it at the time, but his heart was racing, his body was numb, and he was detached from reality.

At an extreme level, my dad's fears were just like our fears. They cause us to tremble, cause our minds and hearts to race, and ultimately detach us from reality.

For nearly a year I watched those panic attacks cripple my father. He'd been wrestling with them for months before I found out. He couldn't sleep most nights. He seemed distant and depressed. The medications made him feel even worse.

### **Overcoming fear**

Then one day, my dad told me he'd been panic attack free for more than a week.

What changed in that week? What pill did he take? What technique did he discover? What food did he add or take away from his diet?

It was none of those things...

The only thing that changed was that my dad made a decision. He threw out the pills and decided that fear wasn't real. Everything he feared:

- losing his job
- being unable to provide for me
- losing his reputation
- being labeled a failure
- having to crawl back to my grandmother for help

All of those things were fictional at the time. They were all in his mind. And he made a decision not to fear them anymore.

Years later, he would leave that job. Some would label him a failure. His reputation was somewhat tarnished and we had to cut back on our lifestyle. And we ultimately moved in with my grandmother to save money.

Ironically, his fears did someday become a reality, but when they did, it didn't bother him. Even when his greatest fears came true, they weren't all that scary.

## **Fear is not real**

I am reminded of the movie *After Earth* with Will Smith. In the movie, Smith's character, Cypher Raige and his son, Kitai, live in a distant time after Earth has been virtually destroyed. They crash land on earth, along with an alien life form that locates its victims not by sight or sound but by the smell of fear. Cypher has learned how to defeat these creatures by overcoming fear.

On Earth, Cypher is crippled and Kitai, barely a teenager, must travel out into the wild, knowing that there is likely a fear-sending alien hunting him. At one point in the movie, Cypher tells his son the story of how he came to be "fearless."

As he was battling one of the creatures, he faced certain death. Everything slowed down and with a pincer through his shoulder, he decided he didn't want that in his shoulder anymore. So he pulled it out and the creature let him go. At this point, Cypher's lack of fear renders the creature unable to find him. He is a ghost. That's when it dawned on him:

*Fear is not real. The only place that fear can exist is in our thoughts of the future. It is a product of our imagination, causing us to fear things that do not at present and may not ever exist. That is near insanity Kitai. Do not misunderstand me, danger is very real, but fear is a choice. We are all telling ourselves a story and that day mine changed.*

Just like my dad's fear, all of our fears are nothing more than a product of our imagination. They are all future events, some possible, some impossible, some that might even come true. But when you allow yourself to live in those fears as though they are currently reality, it is near insanity.

It may not drive you to the horrible panic attacks I saw in my father, but it will cripple you and hold you back from your greatest contribution to the world. It will keep you from experiencing peace, joy, fulfillment, and passion.

## **3 sources of fear**

There are three common places that fear comes from. The past, current events, and distortion.

### **Fears rooted in the past**

Some fears are rooted in the past. You saw your parents struggle. Your dad and his dad had that illness. Your parents' marriage failed. Those past events might be decided, but your future isn't.

Make a choice not to fear what hasn't been decided yet and instead choose to look to the future with optimism and hope.

### **Fears rooted in current events**

Some fears are rooted in what's happening around you right now. Your best friend's business failed. Your neighbor's house was foreclosed on. The statistics say this or that. But you aren't a statistic. You are you. And you have a choice.

Make a choice not to fear that which surrounds you. Unfriend negative people on Facebook, stop watching the news, and make a conscious decision to fill your mind with positive material.

## **Fears rooted in distortion**

Distorted reality can lead to paralyzing fear. Distorted reality says that cancer is incurable, that every business will struggle in a recession, that no one from your side of the tracks ever starts a successful business so you'll be stuck in that dead-end job forever.

When you actually write out these distorted thoughts, you begin to see how ridiculous they are. Today, most people with cancer survive, many businesses thrived in the recession, and have you heard of Oprah? She came from the "wrong side of the tracks" and has done quite well for herself.

As Will Smith says, "We are all telling ourselves a story." The story of our future can be one that is based on optimism, hope, and excitement or it can be one of fear, despair and inaction. What story are you telling yourself?

**What is the biggest cause of your fears: The past, current events, or distortion?**