

Joy Comes in the Morning

When have you been afraid? I didn't ask *if* you've been afraid because fear hits us all in one way or another. It's hit me. Two moments in my life immediately come to mind.

- I was afraid of becoming a father. Who was I to be responsible for another human being? What if I mess up? Do something wrong? Say something wrong? I could scar a kid for life!



Yet here I sit 37 years later, and both sons made it to adulthood relatively unscathed by my efforts to be their father. Why was I so afraid?

- I was afraid of defending my doctoral project before a group of seminary professors. I had worked on this project for over a year and read over a hundred books on my subject, but it all came down to this one hour. I literally sweated as they asked me question after question. Later I stood out in the hall drying my face as they decided my fate.

They brought me back into the room, and the first words I heard were, “Dr. Pryor ...” Why was I so afraid?

As I write these words, I am well aware that many of you face far greater fears than these. Yes, I was afraid, but these were also events I sought. Many of you face unwelcome fears: a malignant tumor ... separation and divorce ... job loss. Furthermore, my fears were unfounded, but for some of you, your fears became reality. Some fears become paralyzing.

What can I possibly offer you?

I can offer you this: a firm belief and conviction that this life is not all there is.

Life continues for those who are in Christ. Physical death does not change that. God heals. God restores. As Zephaniah the prophet closed his short book of prophecies, he shared these words from God:

“The King of Israel, the Lord, is among you; you need no longer fear harm.... He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will be quiet in his love. He will delight in you with singing.... I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes. The Lord has spoken” (Zeph. 3:15,17,20).

These words were spoken to the Jewish people in the seventh century B.C., but they point us to a coming Day. We may face fears today, but that won't always be the case. And regardless of how real those fears are, they won't last—and they will never overcome what we have in Christ. Through my writing over the last few weeks, I keep coming back to this incredible truth and promise found in Romans 8: Nothing—absolutely nothing!—will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's why I can sing with the psalmist: “Weeping may stay overnight, but there is joy in the morning” (Ps. 30:5).

I look back on the fears of fatherhood and graduation I faced in the 80s and I ask myself, “Why was I afraid?” A day is coming when I will be face-to-face with Christ, fully experiencing His love, grace, and presence, and I will look back on the whole of my life and ask the same question, “Why was I afraid?”

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away. Then the one seated on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new” (Rev. 21:4-5).