

**“The Fear-Factor in Fruit Bearing”**  
**by Willis Dowling, D.Min.**

Is there a difference between being called by God to minister to people and being driven by success to achieve an acceptable ministry status in the eyes of others? I dare say that there is a vast difference between the two. Can it simply come down to being connected with God or just being connected to the ministry itself? Yes, ministry itself with all of its own set of standards and perks can be the thing that can drive us on in life. We can be driven by the desire for personal significance, for fame, power and fortune. In a word: SUCCESS! But when we have a difficult ministry experience, it can render us dysfunctional for a while. We can become disillusioned with the ministry. When we are not successful, we see ourselves as a failure. This can bring us to our senses as well as to our knees. *“Lord, what do you want from me? What do you want me to do? What do you want me to be? How can I move on in my life? What am I doing wrong? Where did I go wrong? How can I get back on track?”*

For some it is a long road back to recovery. There are conflict issues to deal with in the last situation. Often there are needs for forgiveness, perhaps on both sides. There are family matters not to be ignored. There is the need for self-examination. There is a need for prayer with people who care. Perhaps counseling with professionals is a benefit. For nearly two decades The Pastor-in-Residence, Inc. organization has helped ministers and their families work through the down times in their lives through linking them to churches that can help them recover and get back into ministry again.

But one thing that stands out in my mind in this recovery process is what I might call “The Fear Factor in Fruit-Bearing.” With the success-oriented mindset our Christian world constantly pushes in our face, we feel that we are nobodies if we are not published or in some high profile ministry. Perhaps I should just speak for myself: I desire to bear fruit for God in a way that will change lives and last forever. I naturally want to be successful in this endeavor. But if I go by the Scriptures, that is something only Jesus can do through us. It is not a matter of glitzy marketing or having the right charisma to attract crowds or getting the right publisher. It is not about being in just the right place at the right time and making it all happen because the ministry growth conditions were just right. Rather, Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The passage goes on to say that we have to remain in a close relationship with Jesus in order to bear genuine lasting fruit for Him. We do not want to be among those who, on that Day of Judgment, try to impress God with reciting our mighty ministry miracles, signs and wonders. But in the end, Jesus says, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ (Matt. 7:23). It only makes sense: knowing God is the way to know His will. Building your ministry house on the rock is to follow the revealed will of God to you. To do your own thing for God is to build on the sand. When it collapses, we shouldn’t be surprised or perplexed.

Yet we may know the Lord and know what He wants us to do in a given situation, but still be held back by fear. It could be the fear of failure. It could be the fear that you or your family may be hurt by the church. After all, who wants their children to reject Christ and His Church because of a difficult ministry situation? We are naturally protective. We want what is best. We can easily

become gun shy after a bad experience. We may also fear the reality of being out of a job. It is a real fear. The bills don't stop just because the paycheck does.

But just look at Hebrews 10:19-39. This is an awesome text of Scripture! Give it a good read. Meditate on it. Here is a salient excerpt: <sup>22</sup> "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup> Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." This is an admonition to stay close to God, not to lose hope, think of ways to inspire those around us (instead of focusing on ourselves all the time!). Continue to be involved in the life of the church. The temptation is to quit the church---as many pastors do! They just throw in the towel! They stop serving God because they got burned by the church. What a shame! How sad! God has more for them and He will equip them to continue on if they do not give up.

The clincher in the Hebrews passage is as follows: <sup>36</sup> You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. <sup>37</sup> For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. <sup>38</sup> But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." <sup>39</sup> But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved (Heb. 10). Don't let *anything* stand between you and obeying God's will for your life. Don't shrink back from service to God. We only get one chance in this world to serve Him. It will go by quickly. Give Him your best strength. Give Him your all. Give Him your whole heart of worship. May He say to us one day, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Fear is inevitable, one way or another. But the one we are to fear is God Himself. That is a righteous, holy fear—the kind the angels have as they stand in His presence. His work is so important: we are seeking the redemption of sinners from an eternity in hell. He sent His own Son Jesus to purchase that redemption by His own blood! He is calling us to be ambassadors of reconciliation that unbelievers may repent and turn to Christ and be saved. He is calling us to be disciplinarians and build people's lives into followers of Christ. Will some people reject this message of salvation? Will there be people who don't like us because of it? Will there be trials and difficulty because of our calling to seek the salvation of the lost? Yes, Yes, Yes! But our fear of God, our reverence for His will, our desire to be loyal to Christ---these things are far more important than our own comfort zone. Don't fear man. Don't fear failure. Fear God.