

Read Jordan Wilson's Essay

From Fear to Faith

Do they know? Can they tell? Am I playing the part successfully? As I walked the school hallways, these questions were my pernicious companions. The life I was accustomed to had evaporated, but I was determined to keep my reputation intact. In public, my persona never wavered; however, at home, I pleaded with my mother to change. I needed her to change before others discovered the truth. I was ashamed of my current lifestyle and family. The fear of exposure that broiled inside threatened to consume me and manifested in anger and resentment.

My childhood was Hollywood perfect and included all the ingredients of a fairy tale concoction, including a loving family, opulent home, extravagant birthdays, and gift-filled holidays. I enjoyed it all and felt entitled to the lavish lifestyle. With the myopic vision of youth and seemingly secure position on top of the world, I could not fathom the transience nature of my situation. I had faith that this was the life I was meant to live.

My faith collapsed in 2016. My mother, a single parent, fell ill. The illness eroded her physically and mentally, chipping away at her motivation, her esteem, and eventually, her job. Her loss of employment dimmed her light and strength; she was no longer the pillar that supported my sister and me. Soon we could not afford our house or our luxurious neighborhood, and we were reduced to being forced to move in with grandmother. I was far from my school, my friends, and my community. I despised my life and promptly forgot the values my mother had instilled in me from a young age: gratitude, resilience, prayer, and faith.

I chose to be an angry person. I was frustrated with the circumstances of my life and filled with the fear that with merely a glance in my direction, others would be able to discern my fall from grace. In my judgemental frame of mind, my grandmother's home was located in what my friends might describe as "the hood." For much of the time we lived with my grandmother, I fiercely guarded the secret of my changed circumstances. I wanted my old life and my old comforts back, yet as time passed, I began to fear our situation would never improve. My outlook worsened. My anger and resentment were no longer limited to my home environment; my academics, my sports performance, my personal relationships were suddenly all defined by my attitude.

There was no great moment of epiphany, no flash of insight. Instead, I had the creeping realization that this person, this Jordan, was not the boy my mother had raised. My grandmother had opened her home to us, and yet I failed to show any appreciation. I had encountered obstacles, but neglected to demonstrate the resiliency with which I had been instilled. I had not been the brother, son, and grandson my family needed me to be. Instead, I let fear overcome my faith. I knew change was needed.

There is a popular saying that if you want to change the world, you start with yourself. Once I changed my focus from fear to faith, I ceased to dwell on the negative aspects of my current circumstances, and instead on my potential and my dreams. I realized that although I was not always faithful to my family nor my God, they had remained faithful to me. I prayed for forgiveness and for focus. Rather than resenting my mother for collapsing under the travails of life, I prayed she would overcome, and not for me, but for herself.

I filled my days with faith. I told myself that I could succeed, and so I did. My grades excelled, I flourished in school and out, and I trained with a single-minded focus to improve my football performance, eventually earning my first Division One scholarship to the University of San Diego. Fear would fail to defeat me. I have taken Michelle Obama's insight to heart and will never again view my "challenges as a disadvantage...[and instead] understand that [my] experience facing and overcoming adversity is actually one of [my] biggest advantages."