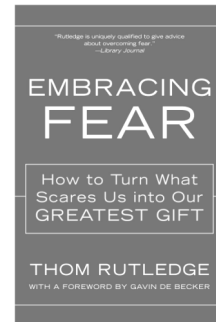


No Fear

Thom Rutledge

If you could travel back in time . . . let's say you are given the opportunity to relive your adult life, beginning at age 18 . . . you can only make one change . . . what would it be?



I was recently given this opportunity . . . well, not the starting over at 18 part . . . and I am happy to return from my time travel mission reporting that I have discovered my answer to that very important question. If I could go back, I know what I would change. And I plan to change it, starting . . . now !

An invitation to speak at my undergraduate alma mater catapulted me 25 years back in time. Arriving the night before I was scheduled to give a lecture, I decided to take an evening walk across the college campus where I had spent four of the most important years of my life. With the exception of two or three new buildings, everything seemed basically the same as when I left. What alarmed me was the inescapable feeling that I was still basically the same as when I left. I realized that I was still the same in one very specific . . . and not very flattering ... way: I was scared.

I'm not talking about being a little nervous about the speech I was there to deliver. I'm talking about fear being a central . . . possibly even organizing . . . element of my very identity. As I walked from one end of that campus and back again, I was in class once again. Forget about the lecture I was there to give; here is the lecture I was apparently there to get:

Pay close attention. Listen carefully:

“You are afraid. You were afraid when you walked this campus 25 years ago, and even with the progress you have made in the last many years - and I am not discounting that progress - you are still living essentially from a place of fear. Let's look at what happens when fear is in charge.

“With fear in charge, you can never fully relax, let your guard down, be your true self. You can't open up because you are afraid of how people will respond if they were to meet the real you. When fear is in charge, you simply cannot take that chance. Fear will not allow honesty, fear despises spontaneity, and fear refuses to believe in you. Fear may mean well, but ruins everything by over-protecting you, insisting that you stay hidden, promising that your time is coming ... sometime later. Fear is bold, but insists that you be timid. Take a chance and there will be hell to pay: fear will call on its dear friend, guilt, to meet you on the other side of your risk taking. Fear will trip you, tackle you, smother you, do whatever it takes to cause you to hesitate, to stop you. In this way, fear is fearless. Fear will remain in charge for as long as you let it. It will never volunteer to step down, to relinquish its authority.

“Your assignment is to live a life that is not ruled by fear. To do this, you must be able to identify at any given time exactly what fear is telling you - aka: threatening you with -- and to disobey its instructions. Every morning when you awake, make a conscious decision to remain in charge of your own life. Fear cannot occupy the space in which you stand. Let your personal motto be "NO FEAR". Say those powerful words as you put your feet on the floor, as you look into the mirror, as you walk out of the door. Ask you self each morning, and all through the day, what will "NO FEAR" mean for me today? Ask yourself the question, and be sure to listen for the answer.”

The next morning, I put on my brand new "NO FEAR" motto even before I put on my eyeglasses, before I brushed my teeth, before I went to the bathroom. I delivered my speech to a mixed crowd of students and faculty. I saw some old friends from my college days, who remarked at how much I had changed since then -- these comments referring to my lecture on self-compassion and personal responsibility, not to my waist line and hair color. What they didn't know was how much I was only just now beginning to change, thanks to the lecture I received the night before, thanks to my new personal motto: NO FEAR.

Later that day I was joking with one of my psychology professors about a recurring dream I have had ever since leaving college. In the dream I am distressed because I have forgotten to check my campus post office box. There is something there I need to get, but I cannot because I am no longer enrolled in school.

It occurs to me only now, as I write this, that my recurring dream has likely found its resolution. There was in fact something -- an important message -- I had left behind when I graduated from college. For one evening, 25 years later, I returned, to listen to one final lecture, and to pick up a message that I believe was intended for me all along: NO FEAR.

“No Fear” is an excerpt from *Embracing Fear*.



Thom Rutledge is the author of *Embracing Fear & Finding the Courage to Live Your Life* (HarperSanFrancisco), and co-author (with Jenni Schaefer) of *Life Without Ed: How One Woman Declared Independence from Her Eating Disorder & How You Can Too* (McGraw-Hill). He has been featured on NBC's Today Show, CNN's Anderson Cooper 360, Fox News, and Australia's Channel 10. Thom is an outspoken critic of the international bestselling dvd/book project, *The Secret* --- his response to *The Secret* is available free at www.theseecretantidote.com.

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