

Week 51: How All This Passion, Pain, and Courage Add Up to Joy

I put it off as long as I could.

My kids had each earned a free pass to Six Flags Great America by meeting a reading quota at school, so we promised them a summer trip to the theme park. I'm not a huge fan of shelling out crazy amounts of money to fight crowds and wait in long lines under a blazing sun. But a promise is a promise. So, finally, on a Friday in late July, we'd run out of excuses and we went to the park. My kids had never ridden a roller coaster.

I wasn't sure how brave they'd be.

My youngest didn't think she could handle the coaster with the big drop, two loops, and four inversions in total. But she rode it, and she said it was the most terrifying thing she'd ever done. Our middle guy didn't think he could handle the high velocity wooden coaster with the teeth-rattling turns and eleven stomach-churning drops. But he rode it, and he said it was the most terrifying thing he'd ever done. And our oldest son, a complete adrenaline junky, didn't know if he could handle the biggest coaster in the park, The Goliath. It's the world's fastest, tallest, and steepest wooden coaster—boasting a 180 foot drop at a nearly vertical, 85-degree angle, while flying 72mph. But he rode it, and he said it was the most terrifying thing he'd ever done.

It turns out my kids are brave, because bravery isn't the absence of fear.

Bravery is going one step farther than you think you can.

It's not being fearless during that step. It is simply *taking* it. In fact, fear is a necessary ingredient for bravery. If you aren't afraid, there is nothing, really, to be brave about. Of course, in life, most of us naturally settle into patterns that stop just short of our scary coaster. We ride the rides that thrill us but don't terrify us. Meanwhile, there is a voice in the back of our head, telling us which ride we'd like to get on—the ride that is just out of our comfort zone and just one step into our scary zone. In life, that ride might be a new relationship or a new job or a new town or a new church. Or it might be a new way of *being* in the midst of old relationships and jobs and towns and churches. Whatever that ride is, it will be scary to step onto it. But in doing so, you will find the brave place inside of you. And you will find something else, too.

You will find joy...

At the end of the day, on the ride home, I asked my kids which was their favorite ride. And, to be honest, I expected them to name the first coaster of the day, the one they all knew they could handle, the one they weren't afraid of, the one they

road with laughter and squeals of delight. I expected them to name the one they didn't have to be brave to step onto. I was wrong.

All three of my kids said their favorite ride was their most terrifying one.

It turns out, the things we fear ahead of time but bravely step into anyway are the things we remember most fondly. Why? It certainly isn't because we enjoy terror. It is simply because we *did* it. Because we learned something new about ourselves. Because now we know fear won't have the last word. Because now we know we have a place inside of us—a brave place—we can draw upon to step into the next scary thing.

Fear about the future becomes bravery in the present becomes joy in hindsight.

Joy is knowing you can be scared and still ride through life. Joy is being terrified and trusting you'll survive it. Joy is believing in yourself enough to believe you are brave. Of course, there are some kinds of bravery we don't choose. There are some kinds of bravery that choose *us*, in the form of trials and tragedies that no human being would ever voluntarily step into. And I don't want to suggest those kinds of tribulations should be celebrated or enjoyed. But I do want to suggest, adamantly, that those things can be *redeemed*, by embracing the fact that you survived it. By embracing the brave place inside of you.

By realizing fear comes and goes but your brave place is here to stay.