



Facing One's Fear

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June 25, 2017

The Psalmist wrote a song of confidence in Psalms chapter 27, verse 1. The song begins with these words: **¹The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?**

The Psalmist is thankful to God for the promised protection he receives. The fear the Psalmist experiences is brought on by the situation and even the people around him. Yet, when he turns his attention fully on God he finds a place of confidence and security.

As human beings, we strive to find a place of serenity, confidence and hope. To find such places we have to wade through the many human emotions that hold us back and even paralyze our lives. The greatest human emotion we have to overcome is fear.

There are around 530 different phobias or fears that people can experience. Phobias are fears of something, some place or some one. These are real fears that people struggle with in life. It is important for us to understand fear so we can gain confidence in what we do and how we live.

When we sense danger, the brain reacts instantly by sending signals that activate the nervous system. This causes physical responses, such as a faster heartbeat, rapid breathing, and an increase in blood pressure. Blood pumps to our large muscle group to prepare the body for physical action (such as running or fighting). Skin sweats to keep the body cool. Some people might notice sensations in the stomach, head, chest, legs or hands. These physical sensations of fear can be mild or strong.

This response is known as "Fight or Flight" because that is exactly what the body is preparing to do: fight off the danger or run fast to get away. The body stays in this state of fight-flight mode until the brain receives an "all clear" message.

We fear things or situations that make us feel unsafe or unsure. For instance, someone who isn't a strong swimmer might have fear of deep water. In this case, the fear is helpful because it cautions the person to stay safe. A person could overcome this fear by learning how to swim even better.

A fear can be healthy if it cautions a person to stay safe around something that could be dangerous. But sometimes a fear is unnecessary as it causes more caution than the situation calls for.

People tend to avoid situations or things they fear, that we fear. But this doesn't help them overcome fear – in fact, it can do the reverse. Avoiding something scary reinforces a fear and keeps it strong. And that's how that a person survives in the world.

The challenge for many people with fear is to find ways to overcome and work through this emotion that is holding them hostage. Find ways to work through it so they that they can live and not be afraid.

We all confront our fears differently. When General George Patton's autobiography was published, it contained this significant statement by him. "I learned very early in my life never to take counsel of my fears."

The Gospel lesson from Matthew testifies to the disciples witness to the world of persecution and hostility. Several verses preceding the verses read today tell of the Lord's warnings to the disciples of impending persecution.

The disciples were being sent into the world to witness to the salvation of humanity. No doubt the disciples were somewhat fearful of the situations into which they were being sent. Yet, Jesus reassured them to be strong and confident in their mission. Have no fear.

Jesus prepared them to encounter others who followed a false and evil teacher called **Beelzebul** or Satan or the Evil one. They seek to do harm to the disciples of Jesus and malign the teachings of the Lord.

The Lord knew how the disciples of **Beelzebul** worked and the mischief they would inflict in peoples lives. So the Lord encouraged his disciples to remain confident in the face of their darkness. Jesus said ²⁶**"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.** Everything that is said or done by the disciples of the evil one in darkness will eventually be exposed.

Jesus instructed the disciples to confidently reveal the Good News of the Lord. He said, ²⁷**What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Be open. Be transparent. Be available.**

Jesus used everyday examples to express his truths. ²⁹**Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father.** ³⁰**And even the hairs of your head are all counted.** ³¹**So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.**

The Lord affirmed his care for those who are connected and near to the Creator's heart. The fear of the disciples is overcome by the acknowledgment of the Lord's constant presence in his or her life, in our lives. He said, ³²**Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven;** ³³**but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.** The words of Christ reassures us of what we need to do and that is to not be afraid. So proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. Have no fear.

The place where we find confidence is in the Lord Jesus Christ. He invites us into a relationship where we give up control of our lives and live obedient lives.

There have been times when fear loomed in my mind and caused me to think all kinds of thoughts. As I went through these feelings of dread or uncertainty, I would go full circle and return to a passage in the Book of Psalms

that quieted my mind and soul from fear. Psalm 46 verse 10a says **“Be still, and know that I am God”**

As a transitional pastor, I have worked with churches and many congregational members uncertain and fearful about their future. The hope and view of the future was often overshadowed by fear of the unknown. I have advocated for hope; there is always hope. When folks direct their attention in the hope that God provides, this sets them and us on a path of confidence and certainty. Fear is overcome when folks turn their eyes upon Jesus and seek a safe harbor in God.

I believe that the Ever Present God assures me that everything is going to be alright. Many of the churches that I go into I know that things are going to be alright. Yet, we have to struggle with some of the evil that exists.

The light of Christ is the position I seek to come from and promote. However, like the Christian disciples of old, the darkness and evil of Satan weasels its way into a community of faith.

In some of those churches, I have confronted evil. Even though I would have rather turned a blind eye to its existence, I could not. Instead I worked at finding solutions to issues that some would use to harm or destroy fellow members or even pastors.

I have learned, though, to face my fears by seeking out the darkness and evil that exists and then showing the Light of Christ on these behaviors and activities. By confronting those who want to hurt me, to hurt others or to form alliances to sabotage the ministry I seek to accomplish in a congregation will soon find their behaviors and activities exposed to the Light of Christ as well as to the entire church body. The Light of Christ will be shown into the darkness.

The words of Jesus ring true for me. ²⁶**“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.** And **“Be still, and know that I am God”**

As people of faith, you and I can rely on the promises of God to give us strength and courage when dealing with fear. The following scripture lessons reassure us of the promises of God whenever we experience fearful events in life.

❖ Psalm 23:4 (NRSV)

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

❖ Psalm 31:24 (NRSV)

²⁴Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord.

❖ Joshua 1:9 (NRSV)

⁹I hereby command you: be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

❖ Isaiah 51:12 (nrsv)

¹²I, I am he who comforts you; why then are you afraid of a mere mortal who must die, a human being who fades like grass?

❖ John 14:27 (NRSV)

²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

So my dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, the closer we are to the Lord the more confident we become in our faith. So let us remain strong in our faith and fearlessly share our faith with others. Because Jesus Christ is counting on each one of us to go into the world to share the Good News of the Gospel.

Remember that we are invited into God's ever-loving presence to find a place of confidence in our faith. The moment we let go of our fears about everyday situations and interpersonal relationships, we can find a calm place for living. A safe harbor.

So may we be confident that the Lord will carry us through the fearful events in our lives. Let us find ways to increase confidence by living for the Lord Jesus Christ. In him, we find calm and peace. Whenever we face fear, that is a moment in time when we turn to Jesus for courage and for peace. Jesus said, **"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."** [Matthew 14:26]

Let us pray: God of Assurance and Presence, we acknowledge you in our lives in times of joy and in times of fear. Help us to remain strong in the face of those feelings that cause us to either run or stay. Guide our hearts and minds in the way of your constant presence and love. In Jesus Christ we have a Savior, we have a Companion to walk with us in daily life. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

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Scriptural Support:

Jeremiah 20:7-13 (NRSV)

⁷O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed;
you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed.

I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me.

⁸For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, "Violence and destruction!"
For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long.

⁹If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,"
then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones;
I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

¹⁰For I hear many whispering: "Terror is all around!
Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" All my close friends
are watching for me to stumble. "Perhaps he can be enticed,
and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him."

¹¹But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will
stumble, and they will not prevail.

They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed.
Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten.

¹²O LORD of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind;
let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.

¹³Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD!
For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

Matthew 10:24-39 (NRSV)

²⁴“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

²⁶“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³²“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.