

Fear the Opposite of Faith

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I want to begin by telling you the first time in my life that I turned my back on fear and gave myself over to trusting God. My son David was born in 1967, nine years before I became a believer. An incident occurred when David was an infant when he stopped breathing for a short time during an illness, and I became very scared. I did not connect my fear reaction to the incident until much later, but by the time David was in his late teens (by that time I had become a believer), I had developed an unhealthy fear about his becoming injured or dying. It was so severe, that I was in agony every time he drove somewhere and was late getting home, and I phoned hospital emergency rooms several times to learn if someone of David's description had been brought there.

I was a new believer at that time, reading the Bible often and being disciplined mainly through Christian radio. Well, one day I was getting into that fear mode and suddenly, what I had learned from the Bible about fear came to me, and so did a deep awareness that the fear I was carrying was not appropriate for a believer, and was contrary to the Scriptures I was studying. So profound was the realization, that there and then I gave David and everything about David over to God. And not only David, but everything else of mine as well – Marie, everything I owned, and my own life also. And you know what? From that moment on, I experienced a freedom that I had not previously known. Today, I know that what happened was that I had had an encounter with God and was delivered from a spiritual bondage.

That was a milestone in my faith-walk with God, and it remained with me over the years. Whenever I moved in even the slightest direction toward fear, I brought the memory of that deliverance to mind as well as 2 Timothy 1:7 that reads:

“For God gave us a Spirit who produces not timidity (the NKJ says not “a spirit of fear”), but power, love and self-discipline.”

My faith against fear was tested again very recently. Most of you know that about ten weeks ago I had quadruple by-pass open heart surgery. I was feeling fine on Thursday September 8, when I began feeling a pain in my chest that would not go away with rest. I was driving with Marie at the time, so we detoured to the emergency room of Suburban Hospital in Maryland. By the time I arrived there I was feeling fine again, but tests showed that I was having some kind of heart incident. They kept me overnight and catheterized my heart on Saturday and discovered that I had a 98% blockage of four arteries that were needed to nourish my heart with blood. My choice was to leave the hospital and probably collapse with a massive heart attack very soon or submit to quadruple by-pass surgery. I took the obvious choice that was not really a choice, but that is not what I want to emphasize about this. What I want to emphasize is that I experienced no fear. Either later in the day or the next day several in my family tried to help me deal with the fear that they assumed was there but it was not. I remember telling my son Brian that I was at perfect peace and had given my situation and myself over to God with complete trust. The trust was not that I would survive the operation, and truly I did not know if I would. The trust was that I was

in God's hands whether in this world or in the next, and I was content for it to be either way. Death was not an important consideration because either way I knew I would live.

Well, you know the rest. This is the fourth week that I am back at services, which means that I was driving six weeks after the operation and was getting around days after. And the pain of recovery? Except for a little soreness in my chest muscles, there was no pain. Now I don't know how ordinary that is in this kind of surgery, but I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you that prayed for me and continue to pray for me. I am sure that my fast and essentially pain-free recovery was substantially due to all of the prayers that went up. And you remember I contracted a bacterial infection while in the hospital? Well, after treatment for it began, two days later it was gone.

Threats to our health, safety, and security comprise one area that fear often permeates. We live at a time when threats to our well-being surround us, and where tragedy and catastrophe occur with regularity. Some of these threats are economic, with our government and economists seemingly unable to agree on what is best to do for the country. Some of these threats are climatic – degrading air quality, diminishing clean water, and dilemmas of how to use fuel without making things worse. Some of these are natural disasters like floods, hurricanes, tornados and earthquakes, and some of these such as airplane crashes, are the result of imperfect technology and human error. All of these impact us negatively, and some even cause death. There are also threats to us that are caused by evil in the world, and those for which we have no explanation at all. All of these can evoke fear in us if we do not trust God, and I do not mean trust Him for what we want to happen. We must trust Him in whatever happens.

There are two kinds of fear that the Scripture is **not** talking about as being bad. The first is the kind that causes us to jump back and defend ourselves or run away when something startles us or attacks us. That is a natural defense mechanism that God has built into our bodies for our preservation in dangerous situations where there is no time to think or pray. Physiologists call it the response of “fright, fight, or flight.” This kind of fear can persist for awhile, for the duration of the danger, but it is normal and it is helpful.

The second kind of fear that the Scripture is **not** talking about as being bad, is a proper fear of God. No, the kind of fear that Scripture is talking about that is bad, is the kind that is the opposite of having faith in God. It is the kind that persists and becomes chronic – the kind that does not trust God with our possessions, our futures, our lives, or the lives of our loved ones. It is the kind of fear that demands to understand why a bad thing has happened so that we can console ourselves in our understanding, and seek to control our destinies. Some of us have read the Bible many times through without it occurring to us that the Bible is full of bad things that have happened to innocent people. The stories often don't pierce us because they are accounts of things that happened many years ago and very far away, but they occurred nonetheless.

Fear seems like such a natural thing when we are threatened, and it is for short periods of time and when it is in response to **real** danger. But when it dominates or diminishes the quality of life, it is not natural and it is not of God. It is the spirit of fear that we are warned about in Scripture, and we need to cast it out of us aggressively, using the biblical tools of love and faith. Consider 1 John 4:18, which tells us:

“There is no fear in love. On the contrary, love that has achieved its goal gets rid of fear (the NKJ says: “perfect love casts out fear”), because fear has to do with punishment; the person who keeps fearing has not been brought to maturity in regard to love.

The Scriptures are replete with encouragements to faith and warnings against fear, and I have chosen nine of them to share with you. It’s a lot, but they are short so please hang in and absorb what they have to say:

Psalms 23:1-4 *“ADONAI is my shepherd; I lack nothing. He has me lie down in grassy pastures, he leads me by quiet water, he restores my inner person. He guides me in right paths for the sake of his own name. Even if I pass through death-dark ravines, I will fear no disaster; for you are with me; your rod and staff reassure me.”*

Psalms 34:5 *“I sought ADONAI, and he answered me; he rescued me from everything I feared.”*

Psalms 56:3(2)-4b(3b) *“Most High, when I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God- I praise his word- in God I trust; I have no fear; what can human power do to me?”*

Psalms 112:6b-8 *“The righteous will be remembered forever. He will not be frightened by bad news; he remains steady, trusting in ADONAI. His heart is set firm, he will not be afraid, till finally he looks in triumph at his enemies.”*

Psalms 118:6 *“With ADONAI on my side, I fear nothing- what can human beings do to me?”*

Isaiah 12:2 *“See! God is my salvation. I am confident and unafraid; for Yah ADONAI is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation!”*

Mark 4:40 *“He [Yeshua] said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you no trust even now?”*

Two more to go:

Philippians 4:6-7 *“Don't worry about anything; on the contrary, make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. Then God's shalom, passing all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with the Messiah Yeshua.”*

Hebrews 13:6 *“Therefore, we say with confidence, “ADONAI is my helper; I will not be afraid- what can a human being do to me?”*

Let’s now look at some of the circumstances that can cause fear. They can be severe, and they can involve severe loss. I lost both my parents when they were elderly, but I lost my younger brother when he was relatively young. After each loss I felt disoriented – it was unreal that someone who had been there all my life was no longer there. I knew my parents were with the Lord, but that did not counteract the emptiness in my heart. Because I knew they were with the

Lord I was not grieving for their sakes, but for mine, and I was comforted by Romans 8:28 that says:

“Furthermore, we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called in accordance with his purpose; “

It’s hard to see how God will turn some things for good, but He will. Remember Joseph’s plight on his being taken captive and sold into slavery by his brothers. Much later on when Joseph had gained prominence in Egypt and was reunited with his brothers, he said to them:

“Don't be afraid! Am I in the place of God? You meant to do me harm, but God meant it for good- so that it would come about as it is today, with many people's lives being saved.”
(Genesis 50:19b-20)

He said it then, but can you imagine how abandoned and alone he must have felt when he was first abducted? These things are put in Scripture so we can learn from them. Psalms 27:1 reminds us:

“The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

And Luke 12:4 admonishes us:

“My friends, I tell you: don't fear those who kill the body but then have nothing more they can do.”

In order for that Scripture to give us comfort, we have to have faith in Scripture’s teaching of the afterlife, so we ought to examine ourselves and ask ourselves – “Do we believe?” If we do, 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 has meaning for us, and if we don’t it doesn’t; here is what that Scripture says:

“Look, I will tell you a secret- not all of us will die! But we will all be changed! It will take but a moment, the blink of an eye, at the final shofar. For the shofar will sound, and the dead will be raised to live forever, and we too will be changed. For this material which can decay must be clothed with imperishability, this which is mortal must be clothed with immortality. When what decays puts on imperishability and what is mortal puts on immortality, then this passage in the Tanakh will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin; and sin draws its power from the Torah; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Yeshua the Messiah!”

We often think of fear as a feeling, and indeed there is a physiological component to it. However, God does not command us regarding feelings, but rather regarding the choices that we make (hopefully in faith) despite of our feelings. That is the teaching of 2 Corinthians 5:7:

“.. for we live by trust, not by what we see” (rendered in the New King James: “For we walk by faith, not by sight.”)

The Greek word for “sight” in this Scripture is εἶδος (pronounced “*aye-dos*”), and the Greek word for “faith” is πίστις (pronounced “*pistis*”). *Aye-dos* refers not only to eyesight, but to all of our senses, including those that imbue us with feelings. If we walk by *aye-dos* (sight), we are destined to be plagued by fear at every turn of life. What we want to do is walk in *pistis* (faith) and enjoy the freedom of knowing that, in all things, we are in God’s loving hands.

To summarize, fear is the opposite of faith and trusting God for our welfare and protection both in this world and in the world to come. Fear is debilitating and opens us to spiritual attack. That is why there are so many Scriptures in both the *Tanakh* and in the New Covenant Scriptures that warn us against giving in to fear, and exhort us to walk in faith instead.