

“FACING OUR FEARS”

(Psalm 56:3)

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[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 6-9-24]

--I--

1. When we listen to or watch the news today, we're exposed to a lot of reasons to be afraid, and lot of things to be afraid of :...

A--War in the Ukraine, War in Gaza and Israel, domestic terrorism, school shootings, racial and ethnic prejudice and violence, continued health epidemics, political and theological divisions, and a world and national culture which seems to be growing more selfish and less civil by the day.

B--Do a Google-Search for "*fear*," and you'll find between 700-900 *million* responses dealing with the subject.

C--Given all of this, its understandable why many people in today's world (including some of us, at times) give in to frustration, panic, and fear in life!

D--Yet, the Bible can gives us a solution to the problems and challenges of fear in our world today, if we will but listen to and follow its words.

E--This is actually the heart of today's scripture reading from Psalm 56:3. Let me invite us to say its words together in unison...

**[ON SCREEN...], "*Whenever I'm afraid, I put my trust in you*" ("You" here = God)**

2. As most of you know, this past week our children shared in their annual Vacation Bible School program called ***Camp Fireflight***, in which today's scripture was their theme verse.

A--I'm proud to say that we had nearly 100 children to participate, and over 50 volunteers to help out throughout the week (thank you!)

B--Each day the children engaged in crafts, music, story and snack time, and various other activities to teach them the biblical stories of Jacob, Ruth, young Jesus, adult Jesus calming the storm, and the joy of early Christians in sharing the gospel.

C--And in case you don't know these stories well, suffice it to say that each of them tells either of someONE or of some INSTANCE where there was legitimate reason to be fearful or afraid.

D--Yet, in each of these stories, the characters *trusted in God*, and by doing so, they found the help they needed through their times of fear and challenge.

3. Well, today as we celebrate this past week's *Camp Fireflight* VBS, I want to share with *you* the same message of hope that our *children* learned by talking about how we - like them - can learn to face and overcome the fears of our life by trusting in God.

4. To do that, though, let's begin by backing up and talking about the meaning of fear itself.

--II--

5. In the dictionary, the main definition of "**FEAR**" describes it as "*an unpleasant, often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger, pain, or threat*" <sup>1</sup>

A--So, let's start by recognizing that there IS such a thing as *healthy* fear.

1--Healthy fear, for example, can keep us from touching and burning ourselves on something hot, or help us focus and balanced when we're up high on a cliff and don't want to fall.

2--Fear of sickness, disease, or even death can keep us motivated to eat right, exercise properly, or go see a doctor when we don't feel good.

3--Fear of someone hurting us can keep us diligent and mindful when we're alone in a dark parking deck or alleyway at night.

B--And, of course, the Bible sometimes even uses the word "fear" in a healthy way to describe the importance of having a proper reverence, respect, and honor for God -- as in: "*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom/knowledge.*" <sup>2</sup>

6. But that said, when the emotion of fear is allowed to be something that controls US (vs. US controlling IT), then it becomes a *negative* thing. And as I've already indicated, there ARE things in life that can (and perhaps *should*) cause *this* kind of fear.

A--There is evil, injustice, oppression, and violence we humans force on others. There are things we face beyond our control like natural disasters, accidents, & sicknesses/disease.

B--And on a personal level, many of us struggle with other fears: fear of losing our jobs and/or of financial insecurity; fear of loneliness; aging; of something we said or did in our *past*; or of change in the *present*; or of the "what ifs" of our *future*. <sup>3</sup>

C--In fact, the Bible itself recognizes the the existence and reality of this kind of negative fear. <sup>4</sup> In today's scripture, for example, while the VBS callout theme is from Verse 3, listen to how the author enumerates a few reasons he has to be afraid in some of the chapters' *other* verses (Verses 1-2 & 5-8)...

*1 God, have mercy on me because I'm being trampled. All day long the enemy oppresses me. 2 My attackers trample me all day long because I have so many enemies.... 5 All day long they frustrate my pursuits; all their thoughts are evil against me. 6 They get together and set an ambush -- they are watching my steps, hoping for my death. 7 Don't rescue them for any reason! In wrath bring down the people, God! 8 You yourself have kept track of my misery. Put my tears into your bottle -- aren't they on your scroll already?"*

7. Do you hear the negative fear in the author's words? He feels he's being "trampled", "oppressed" "ambushed" "frustrated in his pursuits" by his enemies -- to the point where he's shed "tears in a bottle".

A--Do any of that ring a bell for you in challenging times in YOUR life? Times when you felt trampled? oppressed? ambushed? frustrated to the point of tears?

B--I can think of plenty of times like that I've faced in my *own* life:

1--...When I made a decision NOT to pursue a career in law but instead seek to become a pastor, I was afraid at first.

2--And even after making that decision, I found out about the first church to which my Bishop would appoint me (a small, rural church in Carrollton, GA where I discovered I'd be the *fourth* pastor in 2 years!), and I was afraid!

3--In 2006, when my wife Trish faced breast cancer, I didn't know whether or not she would survive, & I was afraid. And there've been plenty of other times, too.

4--And I'm sure *you* can think of things you've experienced which have caused you fear over the years, as well (whether you recognized/acknowledged it or not!)

8. So, the words of the author of today's VBS scripture could really just as easily be OUR words, as well.

--III--

9. Yet, despite the reality of all of these (legitimate) reasons to be afraid, the Bible is equally clear about the solution to the problem of negative fear.

A--In the rest of the chapter for today's text (which includes the VBS theme scripture), listen to the solution the author discovered (in Verses 3-4 and 9-13)...

*"Exalted one, 3 **whenever I'm afraid, I put my TRUST in you** -- 4 in God, whose word I praise. I TRUST in God; I won't be afraid. What can mere flesh do to me?... 9 [When I cry out,] then my enemies will retreat. I know this because God is mine. 10 God: whose word I praise. The Lord: whose word I praise. 11 I TRUST in God; I won't be afraid. What can anyone do to me? 12 I will fulfill my promises to you, God. I will present thanksgiving offerings to you 13 because you have saved my life from death, saved my feet from stumbling so that I can walk before God in the light of life."*

B--Even in this short set of verses, we find the phrase "TRUST in God/You" appearing 3x, and that *that* leads to fear losing its hold over us!

1--In the English dictionary, the word "trust" means "*to have firm reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something,*" <sup>5</sup>

2--And in today's Bible chapter (Psalm 56) the Hebrew word ("*batah*") literally means "*to take refuge in -- or to confidently have hope and security in -- someone or something.*" <sup>6</sup>

3--I love that way of thinking of TRUST as "*taking refuge in God,*" knowing that if

we symbolically "hide" ourselves in *Him*, *He'll* protect us. *That's* what trust is! <sup>7</sup>  
 C--In fact, the Bible is filled with many verses inviting us to remember to trust in God's presence with us when we go through fearful times/things. Listen to just a few...

1--Isaiah 41:10, "*Do not fear, because I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand.*"

2--In John 14:27, Jesus himself says, "*Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. [So] Do not be troubled, and do not be afraid.*"

3--2 Timothy 1:7, "*God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of love.*"

4--And 1 John 4:18 says that "*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear,.... The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*"

D--In other words, according to these verses, the opposite of fear is not *courage*, but love!

1--I read once that "*As Christians, Love is our DNA. Fear isn't.*"

2--I love that! ...Because it reminds me that, in a world today so dominated by fear, fear is not who WE are.

E--Instead, as we learn to TRUST in the Lord (like our children discovered this past week from the lives and stories of the characters they learned about), the negative fears of our lives can not only be *faced*, but *overcome*!

--IV--

10. So, as I wrap up, let me simply ask: *what negative fear haunts, controls (or perhaps just threatens to control) you today?*

A--Is it fear of the unknown? fear of what you DO know? fear of losing your income or savings and becoming financially insecure? is it fear of those who are *different* (or who think, or believe, or live differently than you)? is it fear of failure? fear of success? fear of sickness? fear of loneliness? fear of growing old? fear of death?

B--Whatever it is, I invite us all not only to *remember*, but also to *live* by the prayer of today's scripture verse in Psalm 56:3 -- say it with me, one more time,...

**[ON SCREEN] "*Whenever I'm afraid, I put my trust in you.*"<sup>8</sup>**

11. [PRAYER - *Invite congregants to cup their hands in front of them and to visualize in their mind something they are afraid of. Then, as a sign of surrender and trust in God, lift that your hands up and give that thing(s) to God... ]*

**ENDNOTE:**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fear>.

<sup>2</sup> "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" is found in NRSV Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 9:10. And "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*" is found in NRSV Proverbs 1:7.

<sup>3</sup> In his book Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope in Uncertain Times (New York: Convergent, 2018), p. 26, author Adam Hamilton describes this latter kind of F.E.A.R. as "*False Events Appearing Real*."

<sup>4</sup> In fact, depending on the translation we read from, the negative form of the word "fear" appears somewhere between 300-500 times in scripture.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trust>

<sup>6</sup> ESV Interlinear Hebrew-Greek Dictionary, Hebrew term #h0982 (פָּחַד *bâtaḥ*).

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps that's why some form of the phrase "*fear not/don't be afraid/do not fear/do not be afraid*" appears about 100 times in scripture (the exact number again depends on the version translation we're reading from). For instance, "*Don't be afraid*" appears 92 times in the CEB version, and "*Fear not/be not afraid/do not be afraid/do not fear*" appears 103 times in the KJV.

<sup>8</sup> A great book to use for personal or group study about how to learn to trust God more to overcome fear in life is Adam Hamilton's UNAFRAID: Living with Courage and Hope in Uncertain Times (New York: Convergent, 2018), available from [Cokesbuy.com](http://Cokesbuy.com) or [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)