

Crossing the Border of Fear 12/23/2018

Recently Chapman University released its list of top fears of Americans. This was a result of polling 1,190 adults.

Top Ten Fears of 2018

1. Corrupt government officials
2. Pollution of oceans, rivers and lakes
3. Pollution of drinking water
4. Not having enough money for the future
5. People I love becoming seriously ill
6. People I love dying
7. Air pollution
8. Extinction of plant and animal species
9. Global warming and climate change
10. High medical bills

Perhaps you can relate to some of these or perhaps you have other fears that tend to grip your life. I've left space on the outline for you to list your top 5 fears. It might be worth spending some time thinking about.

"Fear" is a very prevalent topic throughout the Bible. Several people have claimed that in the Bible we are told "*not to fear*" 366 times (one time for every day of the year). And it would be amazing, however I'm not sure it's true. But whether it's true or not, fear is a very prevalent topic from the first pages all the way through to the very end. Right after Adam and Eve sinned, Adam told God that it was because it was their fear of Him that they hid – which told God immediately that they had sinned, because outside of sin – there wasn't any reason to fear God.

On many occasions God instructs various people throughout the Bible not to fear.

- He told **Abraham** not to fear picking up his possessions and family and moving to an unknown destination.
- He tenderly told **Hagar** not to fear after Abraham and Sarah kicked her out of the house and she found herself in the desert with her small child and no food or water.
- He told **Joshua** not to fear leading the Israelite nation into the Promised Land because He was with Him.
- When God called **Gideon** to lead the Israelites against their enemies he was terrified – but God told him not to fear because He would fight for and with Him.
- **David**, often in the psalms, expresses his trust in God while he's running and hiding for his life, and therefore he states, he will not fear his enemies.
- Many times during his ministry, Jesus told his **disciples** not to fear.

When we focus our attention on the story of Jesus' birth we find several examples of people being told by God, through angels, not to fear.

- **Zechariah** – it says that Zechariah was "gripped with fear" when the angel appeared to him in the temple (**Luke 1:11-13**). The angels message to him is significant in our understanding of "fear" in relationship to Jesus coming – but we'll get back to that shortly.
- **Mary**, after the angels initial appearance to Mary was quickly told not to fear (**Lk 1:30**)

- **Joseph**, after he heard Mary was pregnant prior to them getting married was planning on divorcing her quietly, but the angel appeared to him and told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, because the baby was indeed conceived by the Holy Spirit. (**Matt. 1:20-21**). So, the fear the angel is cautioning Joseph against is the fear of others reaction.
- Finally when the angel appears to the **shepherds** they are also told not to be afraid because the angel has good news to tell them (**Lk 2:8-9**). Remember, these would have been tough men who had often fought off wild animals wanting to attack their sheep. So, they wouldn't have been the cowardly type – but when an angel shows up and the sky lights up with the glory of God – it would make even the strongest, bravest of men to cower in fear.

Most often in the Old Testament, God appeared in power and might and amazing miracles, and in a fire and earthquake. But in Jesus, God appeared in the form of a cuddly little baby. Quite the dramatic contrast.

In the Old Testament, God was often kept at a safe unapproachable distance, in Jesus, right off the bat, he was approachable to stinky shepherds and non-Jews from the east. There was very little threatening about a baby lying in a cradle in relative obscurity.

Let's go back to the angels message to **Zechariah** concerning Jesus.

Luke 1:69-75 (NIV) *He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

That right there is a game changer. In the Old Testament they could never become holy or righteous. Even though they were constantly offering up various animal sacrifices for their sins – those sacrifices never really took away their sins because they were never perfect sacrifices. The only perfect sacrifice ever offered was Jesus when he willingly and lovingly gave up his life for our sins. And he did that so that we could finally come fully into a relationship with our Eternal Father. We can now approach God without fear but we can come as a child should be able to approach an emotionally healthy earthly father.

That's the point of **Romans 8:14-15**. When we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, we are welcomed into God's family as His sons and daughters and therefore we can approach God confident that we are fully loved and accepted. Knowing that God's love is unconditional – meaning we don't have to earn it by our good behavior. God's love for us flows out of His character not a response to how we're doing living our lives. And so, when I sin, I don't have to fear His retribution or punishment or anger as you may have experienced with your own earthy father. God is never mad or too busy to be available to you. That's the incredible point of 1 John 4:16-18.

1 John 4:16-18 (NIV) *God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

“*Perfect*” = God's goal for us. Perfect love is the type of love Jesus had for His Father.

With all of that wonderful news I also need to provide a proper balance to this concept of fear. Because an unfortunate response from a sermon like this might be to think “fear of God” should have no part in a Christian's life. And the result of that is we can go on living a careless and sinful life and believing that God's fine with that. We tend to devalue our opinion of God to a point where He's comfortable to us and fits our current lifestyle. We fashion God to fit us rather than us conforming to God.

And so my caution to that approach is to not lose the sense of wonder and awe and reverence and strong respect for God. For while you are a most loved son or daughter of God, there still ought to remain a powerful sense that He is God and you are not and never will be. He is who created each of us as well as this massive universe we live in. He's the one who powerfully rose Jesus from the grave and He is the one who will one day forever defeat Satan and His forces.

Since Jesus is our ultimate model for how to live our lives, He can also be our model in grasping this aspect of the proper fear of the Lord.

Isaiah 11:1-3 is a prophecy concerning Jesus and it describes Him this way.

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord— and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.”

At first, the concept of delighting in fear might seem like an oxymoron. But it could easily be argued that Jesus had, by far, the most comprehensive grasp of who God is. And having that understanding led to delighting in who God is or fearing Him. That deep understanding of God led to a deeper respect, awe and delighting in the otherness of God. When Jesus became a teenager he never lost his sense of awe and wonder for his Father as many teens do. His deep respect and awe for Him continued to deepen and grow each and every day. And so it could be said of Jesus that He delighted in the fear of the Lord. It wasn't fear in the sense of being afraid of what his Father might do to him if He messed up, but it was the ultimate in admiration and respect and awe of who He is. And this daily act of rejoicing in that led him into an increasingly deeper love for and wonder in His Father.

The same ought to be true of us as well. We ought to strive to increasingly delight in our fear or awe or respect and admiration and love for God.

That's what Paul is referring to in **Philippians 2:12-13**.

Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV) *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*

The realization that God is transforming us to be like Jesus everyday and that He is wanting to use you for the display of His glory – ought to cause us live each day in awe and wonder and anticipation of what that's going to look like today. And that reality or expectation can happen in both good times and difficult times.

I was contacted yesterday by a friend who wanted to know if I knew of someone who could use help this Christmas because good friends of hers had just recently had their unborn baby's heart stop beating and went home to be with the Lord. And so, in response to that they wanted to help someone else out this Christmas. What an incredible act of love in the midst of grief. And their generous gift of love is going to make a profound impact to the recipient. That's a great example of living in the love and awe of God and being open to what He wants to do in and through you even when your heart is breaking. As delight in the fear of God it ought to motivate us to make a difference in the lives of others.

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12/23/2018**

Your Top Fears:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

“Fear not” in the Bible:

Who did God tell not to fear?

Fear not in Jesus’ birth:

Who did God tell not to fear?

- Z _____
- M _____
- J _____
- S _____

Describe how God appeared in the Old Testament?

Describe how God appeared in Jesus?

What did the angel tell Zechariah that Jesus would do:
*...” he would enable us to serve him _____ fear in _____
and _____ before him all our days.”*

What does 1 John 4:16-18 tell us about fear?

Describe Jesus’ fear of God (Isaiah 11:1-3)

Describe your fear of God:

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