

Fear Beyond Reason

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In Mark 4:40, Jesus is with his disciples out in the boat. The waves were rough, and they were complaining that they might get thrown out of the boat. To this Jesus asks, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

We have met at some point some very fearful people. There are some people who are afraid of change, others are afraid that things are going to remain the same. Some people are afraid of moving ahead, some are afraid of staying where they are. There are people who are afraid of what has happened, some are afraid of what is happening now, while others are afraid of what will happen or might happen.

If we are making a choice in our life to live in fear – there’s lots to choose from; there is always something to be afraid of.

Science tells us that not all fear is bad. The ‘Fight or Flight’ reflex is an ancient imbedded code of behavior. If we face something that is threatening to us, or to our loved ones, at an instinctive level we know what to do. We do it automatically: we either face it and fight it, or we flee. It is not cowardice to run away. There is a deep seeded wisdom that is prodding us. But I don’t want to talk about this kind of fear. I want to talk about the fear that we live with daily; it’s the type of fear that becomes the basis on which we make daily decision in our lives.

Everybody feels fear, so don't beat yourself up if you are afraid; there's nothing to be ashamed of. You may feel fear at times when no one else does, and when others may be in fear you may be calm. It is all individual based reactions. We will all feel fear at times, but we don't have to live in fear – that's what I want to discuss today.

To live in fear is unnecessary. It is a choice, as is everything; it is unproductive, impedes the flow of God in our life, and blocks the good that God wants us to experience. Yet it takes awareness and practice to not allow fear to affect us.

Once upon a time there was a mouse, and this mouse was very afraid of the cat. So it wished and wished, "I wish I was a cat," and poof! – the wish was granted ...it became a cat. It was a cat for a very short period of time when it realized it was very afraid of the dog. So it wished and wished, "I wish I was a dog," and boom! – it became a dog. It was happy for a short period until it came across a lion, and it realized it was very afraid of the lion. The dog wished and wished, "I wish I could be that lion.," and pow! – it became a lion. It was truly happy until it met a hunter, and he became again very afraid. "I wish I could be the hunter," and boing! – he became the hunter. Again he was happy and at ease until he realized that the hunter was very afraid of his wife. So, the hunter wished and wished, "I wish I could be my wife," and kerplooe! – he became the wife. This lasted a while until the wife saw the mouse.

If we are going to live a life of fear, there is little peace that we will allow ourselves. There will always be something that we give access to our panic button and fear will be a constant companion.

When we walk with fear, every decision is fear-based; every relationship we enter is fear-based.

Sometimes we are afraid, and we don't even know why. We can't even put our finger on the cause. Sometimes our fears have nothing to do with logic or experience or reality – they are beyond reason.

I've told this story before, but it makes a point. As I was growing up, my Mom was very afraid and anxious about going to the dentist. And over the years of hearing her express that fear of the dentist, I must have adopted those fears as my own, because when I was an adult, I did not go to the dentist for 20 years.

As you can imagine, after 20 years of neglect, my mouth was in pretty bad shape. But I forced myself to go, and I was told by the hygienist that God blessed me with a good oral environment that wasn't prone to cavities or to plaque buildup. So, thank you Mom and Dad for that gift.

Still, after 20 years I had problems, including two large cavities that had to be addressed. After my first visit I was scheduled for the actual work to be done in two weeks. For two weeks I was in dread; I was fearful about all the pain and discomfort I was going to suffer though. The fear was the center of all my thoughts for those two weeks.

Finally, I get into the dentist and I was, literally, clinging to the armrests with white knuckles. The doctor approached me with the needle and he must have seen the fear on my face. But my mouth was open, so I had to accept what was coming, and there was this

almost imperceptible sting. That was it. Then the second injection – nothing, no pain at all. Even the palatal injection in the upper part of the mouth was insignificant. As he worked on my mouth there was the typical sounds, smells, and tugs and pushes ... but no pain what so ever.

At the end of the procedure the doctor said everything went well and he would see me again later. As I was walking out to my car 1 Corinthians went through my mind, “O death, where is thy sting?” I had entered the den of lions and returned unscathed. Where was the pain? I had avoided the dentist for 20 years because I feared the pain, and there was none.

My fear kept me away from the dentist for twenty years and in the meanwhile one of my molars became impacted and for years was grinding against the adjacent tooth causing severe pain. Soon after this first painless procedure I went in and had to get both those teeth removed. My fear of pain caused me years of pain and anxiety.

Now the real point to this story. I later went back to Mom and questioned her about her dental anxiety. I asked, “So, Mom ... you’re fearful of the dentist because of the pain, right?” “Yes,” she said. “Do you actually feel pain when you are in the dentist?” “Well, no,” she said. “Then why are you afraid of the dentist?” And she said she didn’t like the smell or the pressure she felt as they probed her teeth.

Here are the two lessons I get from this experience: one, is that our fears can be caused by things we dislike; things that make us feel

uncertain or uncomfortable. They can be based upon things that we don't understand, and things that we have a disdain for or a distaste for. These can grow into a fear. Mom's fear of the dentist is really not physical pain; it is an emotional or mental pain caused by other issues.

We all have this kind of fear. It is not a physical pain fear, but discomfort of a different sort – mental, emotional, or social. I used to have a fear of meeting new people because I felt awkward and had no skills in how to converse with someone. So, these feelings of awkwardness and a lack of skill grew into a fear. I didn't want to be perceived as being a social klutz, so it was easier not to put myself into that position to begin with.

It reminds me of the joke: light travels faster than sound; that is why some people appear bright until you hear them talk. That was me. We all have some area of our life that we allow to hold us back because we are afraid. We may not call it fear, but we are reluctant or uncomfortable or anxious about stepping into that arena.

This type of fear can easily be eliminated through education and practice. I have learned how to speak with a new person; how to carry on a conversation. These are learnable skills. We may never become an expert in our current areas of fear, but we can achieve a basic level where we are no longer afraid. Although I can more comfortably speak with new people and not shrink from crowds, it is not my first choice. If given the choice of going to a big party or stay home, I will always choose to stay home.

Many are afraid to speak in front of a group of people, but this is a learnable skill and the accompanying fear can be relieved easily with practice. It's just that most of us will not take the time to learn the skills or gain the education to overcome our fears. We would rather live with our fears than change our schedule to learn something that can make us live better.

There is a second point to my dental story: Mom's fear, although she said was pain, was really not physical pain, but based upon other things: the pressure, the smells, and the other things that were uncomfortable for her. In contrast, my fear of the dentist was based upon something that was totally imaginary. I thought she didn't like the dentist because of the pain; so, I adopted that fear as my own. It was a presumptive fear based on ignorance, hearsay, someone's opinion ... something that was not even there; it didn't even exist.

I think this kind of fear is the most destructive kind of fear that we can have because it is not based upon reason or anything real at all. We've heard the acronym for fear as being False Evidence Appearing Real. On a social level, this is where many of our fears originate – from ignorance, fear based on nothing that is real. This is the birthplace of homophobia, racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia.

When we live in fear we can no longer make decisions based upon what is good for us; we cannot clearly determine that any longer. Our minds instead are focused on simply avoiding the things that make us afraid.

Where do these fears come from? I think many are part of our cultural education. Don't talk to strangers. Look both ways before you cross the street. Phrases like, "You can't be too careful." "Stay close to me."

I'm not saying we shouldn't teach our children to make wise decisions. I'm just saying that we are really good at teaching fear; we are really good at teaching each other that there are predators and killers out there. But when do we get the education that 99.9% of the people out there are good, loving, helpful people doing the best they can. When do we get that education?

Despite all those things to fear 'out there', it is the fears we create within ourselves that offer the greatest challenges: the fear of not being good enough; the fear of being alone; the fear of becoming ill; the fear that if we become ill we will not regain our health again. The fear of being ourselves and not being accepted, and the list goes on.

Sometimes all we need is a new perspective. A story I like and use frequently about maintaining perspective is about an old farmer. His only horse ran away. His neighbors all came over and told him how sorry they were, and how sad it was that he no longer had a horse and how he would become impoverished. The farmer said, "Maybe yes, maybe no."

The next day the horse comes back and brings with him six more wild horses. The farmer's neighbors all come over and tell him how wonderful for him that he now has seven horses. What a blessing this is. The farmer said, "Maybe yes; maybe no."

The next day his son is trying to put a saddle on one of the new horses and he falls and breaks his leg. His neighbors all come over and tell him what a tragedy this is for him. With his son disabled he won't have help in plowing the fields. You're sure to become impoverished. The farmer said, "Maybe yes; maybe no."

The next day a war breaks out and the military is canvassing the nearby homes looking for able-bodied young men to fight. When they see the lad with the broken leg they pass him by. All the neighbors come over and tell him how blessed he is because this war is taking the lives of many of the young men that are enlisted into the battle. The farmer responds, "Maybe yes; maybe no." And life moves on.

The lesson of the story is to live somewhere that your neighbors won't always be getting up into all your business!

But truly, the farmer's attitude, regardless of the situation was to be serenely neutral. It was nonjudgmental. He would deal with every instance as it came and not place some sort of expectancy on anything by calling it good or bad, as did his neighbors.

This is a good story for me because I tend to lean toward judging things in a negative light. So, this story helps me remain neutral, nonjudgmental.

Have you ever noticed that most fears are based upon some future event that we are anticipating? Even if it is something that we fear

from the past, isn't it our fear that it may happen again in the future? It hasn't happened yet, but it could – so we fear.

Here are the common types of fear: fear of pain and mutilation, fear of loss, fear of failure, fear of non-gain or unachieved potential, fear of loss of autonomy, fear of extinction, fear of uncertainty, fear of separation and rejection, and the fear of ego-death, which is fear of shame disapproval, or worthiness. Yet they all share one thing in common: they haven't happened and it all about expectancy. I can't think of any fear that is not based upon an anticipated future happening. Even my fear of heights – I have a fear of heights because I am afraid that I may fall off a high ledge. There is no immediate danger, but an anxiety that exists of what might happen.

There are many Christians who live in fear about the end of days. Ever since Christ left his earth physically, we have anticipated his return and the time when the earth is destroyed, or however people interpret the words of Revelations. So, for thousands of years many folks have lived in constant anxiety about some future time that even the Bible says “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

It is a cruel truth that there is little that causes humans more anxiety than in not knowing when something is going to happen. The only solution is to stop anticipating some non-existent future disaster and live today the best you can. When we release fear, we let Spirit flow and we can again feel the peace, joy, love, and power of Christ.

We can release our fear, no matter what face it wears – dread, terror, concern, anxiety, or gloom, by reconnecting with the indwelling Spirit and becoming aware of the presence of God within us. Knowing and accepting that we are a Child of God sharpens our awareness that there is nothing that we can face that is too far beyond us with the help of God. There is nothing that we will be asked to do that is beyond our capabilities with the help of God. There is never a situation so dire or a catastrophe so great that we cannot find resolution with the help of God.

My prayer is that we can recognize more fully our divinity and contact the oneness and unlimited supply of love, peace, joy, and wisdom within us, and recognize fear to be what it truly is – a phantom, a specter that we can easily dissolve. I pray that we can acknowledge that we are supported by a power that cannot know fear. At our spiritual core there is only love, joy, peace, strength, wisdom and courage.

May we take to heart the words of Christ in John 14:27 -- *“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”*

Let us pray....