

Fear

I. Introduction

A. Pray

B. Regardless of its source, fear is a powerful force. Regardless of its reasonableness or rationality, fear has the power to significantly influence our choices and behavior. We can see this power in a child's fear of the dark – even in his own home. And we can see that fears power to influence can be either good or bad, beneficial or detrimental, helpful or hurtful.

C. The Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, that the fear of the Lord leads to life, that the fear of the Lord prolongs life, and that the fear of the Lord is the fountain of life.

1. The Bible tells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, that is, with a fear that powerfully influences our choices and behavior in the direction of godliness.
2. There are less spiritual fears that are just as rational and practical.
 - a. If a bear starts chasing you, fear will compel you to run away.
 - b. If bombs are dropping all around you, fear will motivate you to seek the best cover you can find.
 - c. If the roads are snow-covered or icy, fear can prompt you to drive slower and more cautiously.
 - d. And if you are taking a pan out of a hot oven, fear will make you use hot-pads instead of your bare hands.
3. The point is, fear has a proper place in our lives, and those who are fearless when they should be fearful are fools.

D. However, not all fear is good fear. For example, there is irrational fear, senseless fear, excessive fear, and fear that comes from not trusting God.

1. There is fear of criticism and rejection, fear of trusting those who are near or dear – even though they are trustworthy, fear of what you imagine will happen, fear that motivates you to lie or live a lie in order to gain or maintain acceptance, fear that compels you to defend your behavior as if you are innocent when you are guilty, and fear of failure or being wrong so that you put off making necessary decisions.
2. These kinds of fear degrade your character, they erode your mental and spiritual health, they promote irrational decisions and erratic behavior, they make it difficult for those near and dear to get close to you or feel loved by you, and they weaken, damage, or even destroy those relationships that should be mutually loving and satisfying.

3. Jesus contrasts irrational and sensible fear in **Luke 12:4-7**, “I say to you, My friends, **do not be afraid** of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. [5] But I will warn you whom to fear: **fear the One who**, after He has killed, **has authority** to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! [6] Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. [7] Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. [Therefore] **Do not fear**; you are more valuable than many sparrows.”
- E. It is my opinion that these bad, irrational, senseless kinds of fear have been and continue to be one of the most destructive forces influencing our choices and behavior as individuals, communities, and nations. As a result, these fears are one of the greatest enemies of faith in God, and loving, mutually satisfying relationships with those around us.
1. The reality is, we are too easily moved to the bad kind of fear by almost anything that we think threatens our sense of well-being, our physical or economic security, and our future good.
 2. There are numerous examples of this reality all around us, but my intention today is to use God’s word to give you examples of people or groups of people who allowed the bad kind of fear to significantly influence their choices and behavior, which – as we should expect it would – brought about bad outcomes.

II. Examples from God’s word of irrational, senseless fear

- A. According to the scripture, Abraham had a beautiful wife. In fact, she was so beautiful that when they traveled into an area where there was a ruler who had the power to take whomever he wanted as a wife or concubine, Abraham would ask Sarah to say he was her brother rather than her husband. Here is one example:
1. **Genesis 12:10-15**, Now there was a famine in the land; so Abraham went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. [11] It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarah his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; [12] and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. [13] Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you." [14] It came about when Abraham came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. [15] Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

2. Why would Abraham be so selfish as to tell a lie that would jeopardize Sarah's well-being like this? Fear! Fear of being murdered just so someone else could have his beautiful wife. Yet his fear was partially realized, for Pharaoh did take Sarah because she was beautiful.
 - a. Doesn't that prove that his fear was justified, rational, even sensible? After all, who wants to get murdered? And, his continuing to live was vital to carrying out God's plans for his life.
 - b. If we look at this situation from the perspective of self-preservation, it can appear that his fear was justified and his solution sensible.
 - c. But **what if** we look at it from Sarah's perspective, or the perspective of love for his wife, or the perspective of Sarah's safety and well-being, or the perspective of trusting God to protect both of them? After all, it was God who promised to make Abraham a great nation through a child that would come from Sarah. Could not God be trusted to protect both of them while in Egypt?
 - d. Sadly, Abraham did not learn to trust God after this mess in Egypt, for he let fear move him a second time to place his safety and well-being above Sarah's. Yet God protected Sarah both times.
 3. I believe all of us are guilty of selfishly choosing some form of self-preservation over the good of others. And so I ask: In what areas and ways do you let the fear of personal loss motivate you to make your perceived safety and well-being more important than the safety and well-being of those around you?
- B. I suspect we all know the story about Rebekah and Jacob's deception of Isaac in order to assure that Jacob got his father's blessing as the first-born child – even though he wasn't.
1. But why did they feel the need to deceive Isaac? After all, God had promised Rebekah that Jacob was His chosen one – even though he was born second. We can read God's promise in **Genesis 25:23**, The LORD said to [Rebekah], "Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger."
 2. So why deceive Isaac? Fear! Fear driven by their view of current events. They were afraid Esau would get the blessing of the first-born instead of Jacob – in spite of God's promise. In other words, current events coupled with distrust of God brought on a fear that motivated them to take matters into their own hands and use ungodly means to assure that what God promised would happen.

3. The Bible holds many promises from God related to our well-being, security, worth, happiness, and eternal destiny. In addition, God's word speaks clearly about trusting God and waiting patiently for Him to act. And one of the reasons for this is so we can discern between a true threat and an imagined threat, and between leaving a matter in God's hands because it should be left there and taking matters into our own hands because we fear God won't fulfill His word.
 4. And so I ask: In what areas and ways are you prone to let circumstances, assumptions, projections of doom, and distrust of God raise your fear level so that you take matters into your own hands rather than waiting patiently for God to act according to His promises?
- C. When Israel came up to the Promised Land from Egypt, Moses sent 12 men into the land to see how good the land was and what they were up against in relation to taking the Land from the people who lived there.
1. All twelve men gave a glowing report about the land and its ability to sustain their animals and yield good crops.
 2. All twelve men acknowledged the presence of walled cities, well-equipped armies, and giants – difficult things that would have to be dealt with in order to take the Land.
 - a. Ten of the men projected doom, saying that entering the Land would result in the men being killed, the women and children taken as slaves, and their possessions taken as booty. In other words, their view of the situation was that all would be lost.
 - b. Only 2 of the men said they should continue into the Land and drive out its inhabitants – just as God told them to do. Their reasoning was based on believing that God would enable and empower them to be victorious – just as God said He would.
 3. As you know, Israel voted not to enter the Promised Land. Why? Fear! Fear of what?
 - a. After all, they saw the Red Sea parted, they saw the Egyptian army destroyed, they saw water coming out of a rock, they saw manna coming down from heaven, they saw the earth open and swallow Korah and his followers for rebelling against Moses, and they saw the defeat of king Sihon and king Og.
 - b. What more would they have to see to believe that God would make them victorious over the walled cities, well-equipped armies, and giants? After all, God promised that He would go before them like a hornet and empower them beyond measure so they could clear the Land of all its inhabitants – great or small.

4. However, the threat that lay before them was not imagined or exaggerated. The size and power of the threat was real. They were facing a formidable foe. So where did they go wrong?
5. They did not fail in relation to recognizing the reality of the threat. Their failure was in allowing fear to promote unbelief. They did not believe that God was more powerful than the threat, and that God would make them victorious over such powerful opponents.
6. Few Christians get the same kind of calling Israel got or face the same challenging circumstances they faced. But we all face the challenge of trusting God enough to live according to what He says in His Word. For example:
 - a. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loves the church, in spite of how loveable or un-loveable she is. Wives are called to yield to their husband's leadership – even though it is best when husbands and wives submit to each other. Children are called to respect their parents. Siblings are called to love each other. All are called to serve each other. These are challenging callings – especially when the other person makes life difficult for us.
 - b. Yet maybe the hardest calling of all, the one that requires the kind of faith Israel had to have – but didn't, is Jesus' calling to "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and [trust that] all these things (*the things that most people make a priority in order to have a full and satisfying life*) will be added to you (**Matt 6:33**).
7. And so I ask: What has God, or what is God's word calling you to do that when you consider doing it, it stirs your fears because it looks to be too hard, or too costly, or too threatening to your present well-being or future security? Though the threats may be real and the costs unavoidable, let us remember that the enemy of faith is fear, that the outcome of fear often includes a loss so great it can never be made up, and in reality, our only hope is God – *not what we are able to do* – but what He will do with us, through us, and often in spite of us.

- D. There are a number of other examples of fear-based decisions that were not only foolish, but brought about unwanted consequences. For example:
1. Out of fear of losing those who had gathered to do battle with him, King Saul acted hastily and offered a sacrifice to God as if he were a priest, rather than waiting for the prophet Samuel to arrive and offer it (**1 Samuel 13:1-15**). It is probable some men would have left, but Saul lost far more than some soldiers by offering the sacrifice himself. He lost God's support for him as king of Israel.

2. Out of fear of looking bad and losing the respect of his people as a godly king, David tried hiding his sin of adultery by having Bathsheba's husband murdered.
3. After being given a kingdom by God (*the ten tribes of Israel*), Jeroboam created an alternate religion to Jehovah worship out of fear his people would reunite with Judah if they went to Jerusalem – year-after-year to worship Jehovah (**I Kings 11:30-39**).
4. Out of fear that he might end up like Jesus, Peter denied knowing Jesus – three times – thus bringing shame upon himself for years to come – because his story is in the Bible.
5. In the parable of the talents given to three servants to take care of while their master was away, we learn that the third servant let fear motivate him to hide the money in the ground to ensure he had it when the master returned. In other words, he let fear keep him from taking the initiative required to act responsibly – and lost far more than what he feared he would lose.

III. Faith is the cure for irrational, senseless fear

- A. As I said at the beginning, fear is a powerful force. And it is the irrational fears, the unnecessary fears, the senseless fears that move us to distrust God, that prompt us to practice selfishly based forms of self-protection, that damage or destroy close relationships, and that break apart communities and divide nations.
- B. Yet the bad kind of fear is everywhere. So what can we do?
 1. We can turn to God, trust His love and care for us, and wait for Him to act – even when circumstances are powerfully threatening.
 2. We can use God's word to remind ourselves that the bad kind of fear is useless and God is worthy of our trust. For example, we probably already know **Psalm 23:4**, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." And the Bible says, "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them" (**Psalm 34:7**).
- C. Therefore, fight the urge to project doom, to discount the promises of God, and to let fear drive impatience with God so as to take matters into your own hands and act contrary to faith. Make the effort to see the benefit of good fear, the harm of bad fear, and the presence and power of God to see you through in spite of how fearful a situation is. This is faith overcoming fear.