

St. Matthew A.M.E. Church
Bible Study
Monday, November 12, 2007

Overcoming Fear
Genesis 3:7-10

Many people believe that the opposite of fear is hope, courage or strength, but the true opposite of fear is faith. Fear causes paralysis, it not only quenches one's peace but attacks the foundation of peace, namely our faith. Peace is absent, when fear is present.

Fear is rooted in doubt that God will be present, provide justice or help, or be capable of dealing with the crisis at hand. Faith says, "Yes, God is here. Yes, God will provide. Yes, God is capable of all things. Much of fear is also rooted in threats; sometimes threatening words, sometimes threatening behavior. Faith says, "I will not be traumatized by threats. I will act wisely, not fearfully. Our challenge in times of threat is not to focus on what might become a reality, but rather to focus on what we can count on being true!

Many people are living under a dark cloud of threat today. Some are experiencing the threat of disease, some are facing the threats of injury to their children, and some are hearing threats related to the loss of their job. The answer to all these types of threat is faith in what we know to be true about God and His love and care for us and His ability to provide for all we need, especially His peace.

There are some common fears we all face.

Fear of Sin's Consequences

Fear is a normal and universal response to our knowing we have sinned and become separated from God. Fear of this type is the first emotion we find in the Bible with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:10). A recognition of our own sin always makes us feel exposed and vulnerable to God's judgment. The fear is of being found out and chastised. God actually built the emotion of fear into our human nature so that we would flee danger.

Fear of Danger and Harm

Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, fear was not only to be the emotion a person felt in the presence of Satan, but also the first emotion a person felt in the presence of anything associated with death, destruction, or danger. It is the first emotion we are to feel in the presence of evil of any kind, from any source. Fears such as falling, fear associated with coming in contact with a burning stove, or the fear of crossing a busy highway at rush hour. These are fears that help protect us and preserve life. They turn us away from harm and pain and help us avoid injury, not only physically but emotionally and spiritually.

Fear of Evil

Spiritual dangers are just as real as physical dangers. It is good for a person to be fearful in evil situations. This fear was rooted in the spirit realm. It is good because this fear can

and should drive us to pray, to trust God to deliver us from the power of evil, and to get as far away from evil as possible.

Fear of Disobeying God

It is also good to have a fear of disobeying God. This fear can and should compel a person to obey. Faith in God is always more powerful than fear. Ongoing trust in God can keep fear from becoming a dictating, domineering emotion.

Shadow Fears

The above fears are normal, and in many ways helpful. They are real fears. Shadow fears however are not real. They reside only in our imaginations or our minds. If they persist or grow, they can result in a person's developing a "spirit of fear."

A spirit of fear enslaves a person's mind and heart. It may be anything from a serious phobia to a paralyzing or crippling fear that keeps a person from functioning normally in relationships with other people. The person won't go certain places, engage in certain activities, and speak out in certain situations because he or she fears great loss, injury, persecution or retribution.

The first goal we should have when dealing with fear is determining if the fear we feel is legitimate or if it is a shadow fear.

Shadow fears also include fears rooted in our emotions. Fears related to our feelings of self-worth or self-esteem is very damaging. A person who fears rejection tends to respond to other people out of that fear whether or not the fear is justified.

Some shadow fears come from bad teaching. Fears about whether one will get to heaven often develop because people have been taught incorrectly about God's power to forgive or about God's gift of eternal life. Fears about God happen when people have been taught the wrong things about the true nature of God.

The key questions we must ask in determining whether a fear is normal, real and helpful or if it is debilitating, enslaving, and paralyzing are these:

1. What does God say about this fear?
2. Does He say this is something I should fear?
3. Does He say that He is sufficient in all ways to meet my needs so that I don't need to fear this thing, this relationship, this action, this possibility or this situation?

Seven Steps to Overcoming Fear

1. Acknowledge the Fear We Experience

Acknowledge that we are afraid. Ask God to help us identify the fear- to name it, define it, and bring it to the surface of our conscience so we can talk about it and confess its presence to the Lord. Don't deny that we feel fear. We never become so spiritually mature that we don't feel fear, either the natural and normal fear that helps

in our preservation and protection, or spiritual attacks of fear. Fear can grip any of us. Don't just accept fear as something harmless, it can keep us from going places that God desires for us to go and doing things God desires us to do. Acknowledge fear and face up to it.

2. Immediately Ask God for Help

Go to our heavenly Father and immediately ask Him to help us conquer our fear. Ask God to cleanse our mind of fearful thoughts and to protect our mind from gripping fear. Ask Him to prepare us to counteract fear in positive, strong ways. (Psalm 34:4)

3. Determine the Root Fear

Ask God to help us identify any emotions that may be linked to fear such as:

Greed- fear of not having enough

Rejection- fear of not being accepted

Guilt – fear of being out

Lack of confidence – fear of failure

Anger – fear of not getting your own way, losing control of self-esteem

Jealousy – fear of not having what you believe is rightfully yours

Indecisiveness – fear of criticism, fear of making a wrong decision

The truth is God is always by our side. Our ability to see Him present with us, just inches away from us and walking with us may very well be the key to our walking in faith, not fear.

4. Go to God's Word

The Bible has dozens of "fear not" verses. For example Isaiah 41:9-13 or Psalm 56 Focus on passages in which various individuals in the Bible faced fear. Notice how God dealt with and directed them. Saturate your mind with these verses and build up your faith.

5. Praise the Lord

The truth of God's Word should be accompanied by praise

6. Take a Positive Step

Jesus asked those He delivered or healed to take a positive action as part of their deliverance or healing. It is very important for a person to confront fear by taking a positive step in faith. Do something that gives you an experience in which God can reveal to you that He is greater than the fear we have felt.

7. Make a Decision

Come to a firm decision that you are not going to live in fear. Make a choice to believe God. We will not come to the point of complete faith and trust immediately. The growth of faith takes time and testings. Our faith and confidence in the Lord grow as God reveals His faithfulness to us over time. Every time fear strikes we must say to God, "you are in control of my life all the time."

We must also make a decision that we are not going to be afraid of God. We are going to believe in God, who loves us, provides for us, cares for us, is always available to us and is in control of our lives at all times. Make a decision to trust Him.