

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, March 12, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

THE MAGNIFICENT JOY OF TRIALS Facing Your Fears *James 1:2-4, Selected Scripture*

“Consider it pure joy, my brother (and sisters) whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” –James 1:2-4 (NIV)

We began our study several weeks ago called “The Magnificent Joy of Trials.” Although it sounds absurd or perhaps at least a little sarcastic that trials should ever be counted a “joy”, we have discovered that maturing in our faith and finding a complete (or whole, full, mature) faith includes times of trial... sometimes great trial. Without them we may never really develop... and nobody, it seems, ever escapes the process. We simply cannot become the people God intends us to be without some headaches and heartaches along the way... some bumps along the road. Just for review we have discovered that when troubles and hardships... trials come we can do a couple of things with it:

2 Possible Responses to Trials:

- 1. We can allow it to defeat and embitter us, and push us away from God** – Often when “trial of many kinds” (as James calls it) come our way, whatever that trial may be (failure, loss, discouragement, heartache, disappointment), it may catch us so off guard, so unprepared, that it knocks the wind out of our sails. It may leave us reeling, perhaps hurting so deeply or so confused and bewildered that we find ourselves growing angry... sometimes even mad. We get mad at God, mad at the world and mad at others. We can lash out and allow our pains and disappointments in life to literally defeat and stifle the life out of us and defeat us. We may grow bitter and out of touch with God.
- 2. We can allow it to grow and mature us, and draw us closer to God** – That’s what James says. He is telling us that for a believer, the trial we experience in this life can actually serve to mature us and grow us in the faith so that our faith is complete and not lacking anything. Those trials may actually cause us to draw closer to God than we have ever been in greater dependence and reliance on Him.

So the question is how do I develop and mature in my faith rather than wilt and die in despair and bitterness when I’m hurting? How do I turn moments of struggle, and hardship, and difficulty into opportunities to develop my faith? James mentions *“trials of many kinds”* and we have explored a couple of these different types of trials that God may use to grow us in our faith the past few weeks.

Where We Have Been: (2 trials we have explored the past few weeks)

1. **The trial of waiting** – What do we learn from the trial of waiting? We learned to wait, rest and trust in God.
2. **The trial of failure** – What do we learn from the trial of failure? We learned that failure doesn't have to be final... that we learn from our failures and that sometimes failure gives us a greater dependence on God.
3. **The trial of discouragement** – What do we learn from the trial of discouragement? We learned that we are not alone in our discouragement... that discouragement is not a sin and that many of our great heroes of the faith faced discouragement. God is faithful in our discouragements, to see us through, to strengthen us and provide for our needs in the midst of it, and encourage our hearts with his presence and provision.

The Christian life is an overcoming life. Even though we will definitely have problems and personal struggles in this life (trials of many kinds), we will be able to overcome because of Jesus. Because of Him, we have victory over the world, including sinful habits, bitterness, loneliness, guilt, fear, and discouragement. God desires for you to live an overcoming life! Jesus, Himself, said in John 16:33, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* And in 1 John 5:4-5, *"For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."* Christians are overcomers and truly are to live victorious Christian lives every day, but let's be honest, there are many trial and struggles, heartaches and difficulties along that way that can daily steal our joy and paralyze our faith, destroy our relationship and weaken our walk... trials of many kinds that can embitter and defeat us if we let them.

One such enemy is "fear." Famous American essayist, lecturer and poet, **Ralph Waldo Emerson** once said, *"Fear defeats more people than any other one thing in the world."* And I might add it defeat and paralyze the lives of many professing believer and keep them from enjoying the full benefits of their faith and the victorious Christian life that Christ died to give them. And the famous and well known American pastor/preacher, **Harry Emerson Fosdick** is famously quoted as reminding believers, *"Fear imprisons... paralyzes... disheartens... sickens... makes useless, while faith liberates... empowers... encourages... heals."*

Perhaps, nothing is more paralyzing to our lives than fear. Maybe you've never thought of fear as a trial, but isn't that exactly what it is. It may be one of the most trying emotions we encounter in life, and yet it is so much more than simply an emotion. So much of life is accompanied by fearful things... trials of many kinds themselves can actually produce fear in us. So many otherwise enjoyable and fulfilling experiences are not ever undertaken because the roads leading to them are paved with fearful things... potential pitfall and insecurities. The simple fact is... no one is ever completely rid of all fears. Our goal, therefore, is to learn how to grow and mature in our faith... how to lead victorious Christian lives through the trial of fear – not to think that someday we will arrive at an absolute absence of fear. Since fear is one of our constant companions, it will be helpful to learn how to maintain something of a mastery over

it... how to make it work for us rather than against us... how to overcome the trial of fear when it rears its ugly head and threatens to steal our joy and paralyze us.

I. LAYING THE GROUND WORK FOR OVERCOMING FEAR (2 Timothy 1:7)

I'm going to start off this fear Bible study by posing what may seem to be a very simple question: What is fear?

1. A Definition of Fear –

2 Good Definition of Fear:

(1) **Webster's Dictionary Definition** – Webster's dictionary says, **“fear is to expect with alarm.”**

Observation: Now, as Christians, we are supposed to have a sense of expectancy, but a person who is experiencing fear lays in wait for what seems to be an unavoidable catastrophe. I have a strange feeling that this is not the kind of expectancy God had in mind

(2) **An Acrostic Definition** - One of my favorite definitions of fear is an acrostic definition that was given to me one time. You know what an acrostic is... it is taking assigning to each letter of the word to explain the word in some way. Here is a good acrostic definition of FEAR.

F – False E – Evidence A – Appearing R - Real

Observation: That acrostic definition is more true than most people realize. Statistics have proven that a vast majority of the things we fear never become reality. But, in our mind's eye, the false fears can sometimes seem more real than anything else around us.

2. **God's Word on Fear** - When we are looking to determine the true nature of something, the best place to look is in God's Word. What does the Bible say about fear. What is fear really? I want you to notice what the Apostle Paul writes about fear to his young protégé in the ministry, Timothy. This is such a telling word about fear and it gives us some a good understanding about fear if we are to lay the ground work toward overcoming this trial in our lives as believers. Notice **2 Timothy 1:7**;

“For God hath not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” - 2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV)

Here it is in the Amplified Bible... just listen to this;

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (of cowardice, of craven and cringing and fawning fear), but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of a calm and well-balanced, sound mind and discipline and self-control. -2 Timothy 1:7 (AMP)

Some important Scriptural truths about fear based on 2 Timothy 1:7: There are a few important points that this scripture brings up.

- (1) **Fear is a spirit** – Notice that Paul calls it “a spirit of fear.”
- (2) **It is a spirit that God did not give to us** – Notice that Paul also says that “God hath not give us...” this spirit, therefore it is not of God. *Note: I do believe that there is a type of fear (reverence) that comes from God, and I also believe that the emotion of fear is a God given emotion that can be a warning mechanism placed inside of us for protection and for learning/wisdom (see Proverbs 9:10, 10:27, 14:27, 15:33, 16:6, 19:23)
- (3) **Power, love and a sound mind are our protection from fear** – Paul mentions each of these in verse 7 of 2 Timothy 1. The word “power” reminds us that positively, God has already given us as believer all the spiritual resources we need for every trial and threat. Ephesians 3:20 says, *“²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”* Divine power – effective, productive spiritual energy belongs to believers. He also mentions “love” – this kind of love centers on pleasing God and seeking others’ welfare before one’s own. And “a sound mind” refers to a disciplined self-controlled and properly prioritized mind. This is the opposite of fear and cowardice that causes disorder and confusion. Focusing on the sovereign nature and the perfect purposes of our eternal God allows believers to control their lives with godly wisdom and confidence in every situation even those that may cause fear in our lives.

Observation: Though we are talking about controlling emotions, fear is much more than just an emotion (just as most emotions are). Fear is a spirit, and it is a spirit that does not come from God. Fear is a spirit of torment sent out by our enemy the devil. But, we should not be surprised. The Bible says that "we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world...and against evil spirits in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12 NLT). God says that Satan only comes to "steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10). And that is what the spirit of fear is sent out to do. Fear is, quite plainly, a spiritual attack designed, not only to steal your peace, but your destiny in Christ. As Believer's it is our responsibility to learn how to safeguard our mind against these attacks, and reclaim what God has in store for us.

3. **What Fear Can Do? (Matthew 14:22-33)** – Fear can steal your miracle. Fear has the power to steal the miracles that God wants to do in you, and through you. An excellent example of this is what happened to Peter in Matthew 14. He was on the edge of greatness, true victory in his life but his fear stole his miracle and that of the other disciples as well.

5 Truths Concerning Fear from the Story of Jesus Walking on Water:

- (1) **Fear causes us to place our focus on our circumstances and situations rather than on God** – *What were the immediate circumstances and situations that the disciple found themselves in our passage?* The waves, the winds, the storm, the possibility of drowning. *Did they have a right to be afraid?* Yes! We would be too! Remember that fear is a very real and even necessary emotion that is God

given, what is not God given is “a spirit of fear” that come from the enemy that paralyzes our faith and takes our focus off of God. *Did this happen to the disciple in this situation?* Yes! *How do you know?* They saw ghosts! That didn’t come from God, but that thought was placed there from somewhere else. That leads us to the second thing fear can do...

- (2) **Fear causes us to become obsessed with what is not reality and may never be reality** – Like in this circumstance... they saw Ghosts! Remember that we said earlier statistics have proven that a vast majority of the things we fear never become reality. *What does that tell us about “fear”?* That fear is 99.9% misplaced trust!
- (3) **Fear is always (always) relieved when Jesus enters the picture** – Is that the case in this passage of Scripture? Absolutely! When Jesus stepped into the boat His words were (v.27) “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid!” And Peter’s fear was so relieved that he got out of the boat in the midst of the storm and at Jesus’ bidding began to walk on water with Jesus.
- (4) **Fear is conquered only by keeping our eyes on Jesus in the midst of our circumstances and situations** – So true! It couldn’t be more true, or more graphically pictured that in our story. As long as Peter kept his focus on Jesus his fears were conquered. When he took his eyes off of Jesus his fears returned.
- (5) **Fear will drown your faith** –

II. AN OVERALL GLANCE AT DEFEATING FEAR (Psalm 27)

Psalm 27 was apparently composed by David prior to his anointing (installation) as Israel’s king. This anointing was different from the one performed by Samuel in David’s father’s presence. For some time Israel’s monarch, Saul, had targeted his jealous hatred toward his faithful subject, David. His attacks were savage and perilous, designed to injury – even death. David had every human reason to be afraid.

1. **Scope of the Psalmist** – David’s thoughts traveled along two subjects We could call this psalm a song of contrasts:

2 Subjects of Psalm 27:

- (1) **Faith (vv.1-6)** – The first half of the psalm reflects David’s faith in the face of great challenges... challenges that could cause him to have great fear. Reminders such as *“The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?”(v.1)* are a reflection of David’s faith in the face of his fears. It is almost as if David is reminding himself, while afraid, why he shouldn’t be.
- (2) **Fear (vv.7-14)** – Obviously from this psalm we can see that David was in trouble. He speaks of adversaries, enemies, evil men who wish to devour his flesh and attack him, and war against him, and the toughest part is that David was not imagining this terrifying scene... it was a reality for his life. Perils were all around him. He walked on the edge of danger for much of his life and faced very really fears. Some fears may be imaginary, but these were not and many of ours are not

either. The reality is there are many, many things in this life to fear and be afraid of... very real and frightening circumstances and situations.

2. Outline of the Psalm –

- (1) **Statement of Truth and theme of the song (v.1)** – The phrase, “... whom shall I fear...” and “of whom shall I be afraid?” in verse 1 is the key to understanding the psalm.
- (2) **Declaration of trust (vv.2-6)**
- (3) **Prayer for strength (vv.7-13)**
- (4) **Conclusion: Wait! (v.14)**

III. AN INTERNAL ANALYSIS OF FEAR

1. **Statement of Truth (v.1)** – “The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?”

2 Statements of Truth:

- (1) **Truth Statement of our Strength** – David mentions light, salvation, and stronghold – note that David didn’t say that the Lord provided these benefits, but that He Himself was those very things – at all times. The understanding of this is critical.
- (2) **Truth Statement of our Fear** - Observe that each phrase is trailed by a probing question, “... whom shall I fear?” “... of whom shall I be afraid?” Though these appear similar, each is actually quite different and he speaks of the reality of fears we face in this life. Note that David does not deny the presence of fear or fears, but he identifies them and calls them by name

2 Types of Fears:

- **Fears of Life** - The term “fear” is used in David’s first question in it’s normal, everyday sense – “a feeling of anxiety, agitation caused by the nearness or presence of danger or pain.” Hence fears of life.
- **Fears of Man and Circumstances** - On the other hand, the term “afraid” means “to be in awe... intimidated by someone (people) or something (circumstances).”

2. **Declaration of Trust (vv.2-6)** – David’s conflict was intense. He was alone. Saul’s army was against him solely. He spoke of the intimidating forces in such terms as “evil men” out to “devour my flesh” and as “enemies” in verse. 2. In verse 3 he refers to them as a “army” besieging him.” They were an ever-present source of threat. Looking ahead to verse 10 we see that even his parents had forsaken him. He was rejected on all fronts – except by God. However David’s reaction is worth noting in the second half of **verse 3, “... though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.”** Verses 4-6 describe his mindset of security – the single source of that security was his Lord. David’s life wasn’t polluted with deceptive techniques and clever reactions. Invariably, when intimidated we are more conscious of the person or event “shouting” the threats than we are of the Lord. Not so with David.

David's single source of security and trust was the Lord!

3. Prayer for Support (vv.7-13) – At certain times, subjects are not enhanced by technical analysis or verse-by-verse dissection. In these verses we observe David requesting God's support. His prayer wasn't complicated, loaded down with religious words and clichés. He used everyday words which revealed a heart fully given to prayer. The verse alone reveal this...

- **“Hear... be merciful... answer me” (v.7)**
- **“Do not hide...turn... reject... or forsake me” (v.9)**
- **“Teach me... lead me” (v.11)**
- **Do not turn me over to... my foes” (v.12)**

David expressed bold, unrestrained fervency in his communication to God, but we often act in powerless fashion. We need to catch a bit more of David's heart.

4. Conclusion: Wait! (v.14) – At this point we come full-circle in this series – “Growing Pains.” The first study was entitled “Growing though Waiting.” Now David comes back to a quiet stance in his own situation. All the activity he could generate couldn't solve his problem with Saul. So he said to himself (and says to us also), **“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord”(v.14).**

IV. PRACTICAL RESPONSES TO FEAR

Fear is extremely common. There are phobias of all sorts which try to clutch our minds. They can be relentless. So, what can we do to ward them off, or handle them successfully when they war against us?

Practical Steps For Dealing With Fear:

- 1. As they occur... admit them (v.1)** – Identify and openly call them by name (v.1) Do this... identify our fear right now. What is it that you fear? Identify it and openly call it by name.
- 2. If they grow... commit them (v.7)** – Commit it to the Lord! The Lord awaits this, so give it to Him.
- 3. As you pray... release them (v.11)** – As you commit it to the Lord this should lead to release. Are you feeling freed from it?
- 4. As you release them... resist them (v.13)** – What can you do to resist the fear's return? Think through this very carefully. It will bring future victory.
- 5. As you resist them... be strong** – Reread Psalm 27 and ask God for strength in this area of your life. Claim Ephesians 6:10 and following and **“Stand strong in the Lord and the power of His might.”**, then get fully clothed in the armor of God as you battle the things you fear.

V. BIBLICAL TIPS FOR CONQUERING FEAR

3 Bible Tips for Conquering Fear:

1. **Go to God with your fears (Psalm 34:4)** – *“I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.”*
2. **Remember that God is far stronger than anything we fear (1 John 4:4)** – *“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”*
3. **The more we learn to love as God loves, the less fear we’ll face (1 John 4:18)** – *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”*