

“kNOw Fear: Fear of the Future”

Well, we have made it into a new year! 2007. If you're like me you enter a new year with hopes, with dreams, with good things. And at the same time, I enter in to a new year with some bad stuff. Worries, anxieties, fears. I wanted to start this brand new year with a series on fear so that we could start the new YEAR dealing with some of the negative baggage we carry around--Some of the negative baggage of fear. Let's deal with it so that we're as free as possible to become the people that God created us to be. The Bible puts it this way, **“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1,NIV).**

So wouldn't it be awesome to start this new year, without fear? Actually it's going to be about facing our fears in such a way that we harness to help, instead of allowing them to paralyze and hurt us. This is a good time to for this series called “kNOw Fear; Facing Life's Phobias.”

Speaking of fear, last week I got on the internet and found a site (phobialist.com) that lists phobias. All of these supposedly come from reference books and are real. If any of these phobias resonate with you, just respond by lifting your hand. If you have acrophobia, you have the fear of heights. Arachnophobia, the fear of spiders. Aviophobia, the fear of flying. Claustrophobia, the fear of confined spaces. Dentophobia, the fear of dentists. Glossophobia, the fear of speaking in public. Hamartophobia, the fear of sinning. Pentheraphobia is the fear of your mother-in-law. Ecclesiophobia is the fear of church, especially when the Chiefs kick off at noon. Pteronophobia is the fear of being tickled by feathers.

Suriphobia is the fear of mice. Venustraphobia is the fear of beautiful women. Xanthophobia, the fear of the color yellow. Anuptaphobia, the fear of staying single. Gamophobia, the fear of marriage. Blennophobia, the fear of slime. I kind of have that one. I am not really keen on slime. According to cartoonist Gary Larson, Luposlipaphobia is the fear of being pursued by timber wolves around a kitchen table while wearing socks on a freshly waxed floor. How about this one, compressedframageexplodaphobia, the fear of a can of spray cheese exploding in your hands. They're all for real...except that last couple. Oh, and one more real one: Homilophobia, the fear of sermons. Hopefully you don't have that because we are going to talk over the next several weeks about the many sides of fear.

Now, some of you may be saying, “I don't have any fears. I am afraid of nothing.” I would say to you that I've heard that before, and it usually means living in Egypt, right by denial river! I've had a number of people come to me over the years broken, crushed, completely disoriented because they thought they were fearless until a particular thing happened to them.

In this series we're going to sort of frame the fears into six specific categories. Today we are talking about the fear of the future. The reason I chose the future in this first installment is because this is the beginning of the year and the future of one whole year stretches out in front of us. And because all the other fears we're going to look at in some way relate to the future: the fear of commitment, the fear of failure, the fear of loneliness, the fear of God, and the fear of death all have a future aspect to them. The many sides, the faces, of fear.

The Bible, God's word, is not silent on the subject of fear. 2 Timothy 1:7, **“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV).** See the word “fear?” It comes from the Greek term “phobas,” which means “cowardice, timidity.” It means “running scared.” God knew that we would deal with and process a lot of fear. That's why the phrase “fear not” is mentioned over 189 times in the Bible. The spirit of God does not produce negative fear. The spirit of God produces love and power and a sound mind. In your translation it might say self-discipline. So today I want to make some general comments about fear and having fear of the future.

First of all, fear is a fascinating subject because it's a two-sided coin. There's a negative side to fear and a positive side. The negative side is that fear can tyrannize and paralyze our lives. It can keep us from being all that God wants us to be. Fear can keep us from making commitments and that has a serious

negative effect on our lives. Just ask the guy with a low level of commitment to his wife. It won't be long before the attorneys are called to pick up the pieces. The fear of commitment has devastating effects in relationships, careers, faith journeys.

Fear of failure can cause men and women to be paralyzed to a point where they take no risks, they stay locked in a cocoon of comfort and play it safe all their lives and then end up with nothing but regret for the opportunities they never seized.

Fear of loneliness can cause people to sabotage the very relationships they desperately want.

Fear of God can cause people to stumble through life avoiding the one relationship in this universe that makes everything else make sense.

Fear of death can keep us from truly living life to its fullest. Way too many people fear the death of themselves and the ones they love so much that it's like they're already dead.

Fear has a very dark side. It can be paralyzing. But one thing I've learned in getting ready for this series is that fear also has a positive side. Yes, fear can rob us and paralyze us, but fear can also stimulate and motivate us to greatness. Fear can sometimes help us to avoid things that will hurt us. You see, fear is a natural part of life, it has a negative side and a positive side and as we move on our spiritual journey we need to understand fear. Not understanding fear will keep us from becoming the people God wants for us to become.

Understanding fear will help us to face our fears in the right way so that instead of allowing them to paralyze you, you harness them so that they can lead you to a better place. Instead of allowing fear to back you into a corner and immobilize you, you face it with God, who is in that corner with you, and allow that fear to lead you to a new place. This is why it's so important to understand fear so that instead of being paralyzed by it you harness it to help you make a course correction so you don't crash and burn.

Well, having said that, let me give you several suggestions as we think about the future, as we think about facing fear. The first suggestion is to **go retro**. When fear seems to overshadow you, overtake you, go retro. It seems like everything these days is going retro. Shoes are going retro. Clothes are going retro. Food is going retro. Cars are going retro. We borrow stuff from the past and bring it up in the present. Of course, going retro can be bad. If we remember the bad stuff from the past, the evil stuff from the past, the mistakes from the past, it can freeze us up in the present. It can really mess us up.

Sometimes I do this; you probably do too. We look back, we go retro on the past and say to ourselves, "Oh, I remember that comment that someone made about my personality, about my look. I remember what I did in that relationship. I remember how I messed up, how I committed a moral turnover. Surely, God can't feed me in the present. Surely, God can't use me." The fear of the future. Going retro can be bad.

But going retro also can be good. It could be strong. When we go retro and look back on the past and remember the good things, remember what God has done, remember how he has helped us, assisted us, picked us up when we are feeling low. That's a good thing. And that can cause us to stand and get nourished in the present.

I did a little word study on the word "remember." It occurs over and over and over again in the Bible. Whenever God's people are faced with fear the first thing God tells them to do is remember. After God frees the Israelites from slavery to the Egyptians, God reminds them of the miracles he did in order to set them free. God reminds them of the food he sent to them in the wilderness, of the protection he provided them, of the direction he gave them. Throughout the Bible there is this ongoing message from God through the prophets and through Jesus himself. "Remember." In all kinds of ways God says to them and to us, "Remember who I am, remember what I've done. Remember my promises and remember how I've kept them. Remember."

Man, one of the first things that fear does is make us forget. This is where we have to make the critical choice in the face of our fears to think, to remember, to be still. When Moses was leading those Israelites out of Egypt and the Egyptian army was pursuing them they had their backs against a body of water. They were trapped and had every reason to be afraid. Compared to the Egyptian army, they were defenseless. And as they faced that army coming toward them Moses said in Exodus 14:13-14, "**Do not be afraid. Stand firm and**

you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still” (Exodus 14:13-14, NIV).

When you feel fear overshadowing you, incarcerating you, enslaving you, stand still. The Bible says be still and know God. We can hear from God. One of the ways we hear from God is through God’s word. And God will remind us, too, of those experiences in the past where he cared for us and that will give us the drive and the octane to get nourished in the present, and ready to face the future.

Do you feel like you are being pursued by your own Egyptian army? Do you feel like your back is against a body of water? Are you saying, “Oh, no, I fear the future. Oh, no, I remember the past. Oh, no, I remember when I messed up.” Go retro in a positive sense. Be still and listen to the voice of God. It will help you face the fear of the future. Go retro, first suggestion.

Here’s another suggestion for dealing with fear, particularly fear of the future, **stay away from scenario sickness.** What is scenario sickness? Picture this: An older man is standing on a crowded bus. A young man standing next to him leans over and asks “Sir, could you tell me the time?” The old man ignores him. The young man asks again, “Excuse me sir, but could you please tell me the time?” The old man ignores him again. The old man’s friend sees this and asks, “Why were you so rude to the young man asking for the time?” The old man answers, “If I had given him the time of day, next he would want to know where I’m going. Then we might talk about our interests. If we did that, he might invite himself to my house for dinner. If he did, he would meet my lovely daughter. If he met her, they would both fall in love. I don’t want my daughter marrying someone who can’t afford a watch!”

That’s scenario sickness and it’s a form of fear, fear of the future, and it’s highly contagious. Scenario sickness is running all the scenarios of the future over and over in your head. “What might happen? What could happen? What if? Oh, no, tomorrow, the future....” It will mess you up. It will keep you from being all that God wants you to be. And I will tell you how you stay away from it. You have got to trust. And this is the third way to harness your fears, trust God. You’ve got a reminder of this in your pocket or wallet every day. Right there on your money. Trust God for the future.

Jesus addressed fear, worry, about the future this way: He said, **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!...Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:22-32, NIV).** In Matthew Jesus adds, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself...” (Matthew 6:34, NIV). Do not be afraid of the future. Jesus is saying, “Look around and see how God is acting in the present, taking care of things now and trust that he who is in the middle of life now will be with you in the middle of life tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that.

Each day, our Lord said, has enough trouble of its own. Many of us are so worried about tomorrow that it messes us up for today. And because we are messed up today, we are no good for tomorrow.

When it comes to fear I know what I’m talking about. Some of you know my story. For a big part of my life I lived in fear. In fact for some parts of my life fear replaced God as the center of my life. I feared getting close to people, I feared being distant from people. I feared being vulnerable, I feared not being vulnerable. I feared giving myself completely to God, I feared not giving myself completely to God. I feared failure and I even feared success. I know what it’s like to live in fear. It steals you’re your joy, paralyzes you, it’s one of the evil one’s best tools. And can tell you that. But I can also tell you what it takes to face fears, harness them and use them to pull you into an awesome future. That’s what God wants for you and me.

The Psalmist wrote these words, **“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? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident...**

“I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD” (Ps 27:1-3, 13-14, NIV).

Go retro in a positive sense. Don't catch the scenario sickness. Trust in God. Three powerful ways to face fear God's way. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank Rev. Ed Young, Senior Pastor of Fellowship Church in Grapevine, TX, for his resources for this message.