

INTRODUCTION

In 1975, Roger Hart conducted a study on where children felt safe to play. He focused on 86 children between the ages of three to twelve in a small town in Vermont. Hart followed the kids throughout the day, documenting everywhere they went by themselves. He discovered that these kids had remarkable freedom. Even four- or five-year-olds, traveled unsupervised throughout their neighborhoods, and by the time they were 10, most of the kids had the run of the entire town. And the kids' parents weren't worried either.

Several years ago, around 2014, he went back to the same town to document the children of the children he had originally tracked in the 1970s, and when he asked the new generation of kids to show him where they played alone, what he learned floored him. Hart said, "They just didn't have very far to take me, just walking around their property." In other words, the huge circle of freedom on the maps had grown tiny. Hart added, "There is no free-range outdoors. Even when the kids are older, parents now say, 'I need to know where you are at all times.'" But what's odd about all of this, is that the town is not more dangerous than it was before. There is literally no more crime today than there was 40 years ago. What changed? Hart says it was absolutely clear from his interviews: Fear.

The same thing happened to Adam and Eve right after they sinned in the garden. "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. So the Lord God called out to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.'" (Genesis 3:8-10 CSB)

Fear has a way a restricting freedoms and narrowing our scope of living. Fear is a common cause for action or debilitation. However, as followers of Christ, how are we to respond to fear? Fear is a common emotion among us, what else does the bible say about it? "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment." (2 Timothy 1:7 CSB) In our discussion of fear and our response to fear, we must understand that fear is part of our design as humans, but it is also part of the fall. It is part of God's design.

I. SOME FEAR IS HEALTHY

We can understand the healthiness of fear in our relationship with the Lord. In 1933 our nation was facing a crippling economic depression with a 25% unemployment rate. Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke to the nation as it was facing uncertainty. "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." At the time, the words from the president gave comfort to a struggling nation. However, do we really think that statement is true? Some fear is healthy. Parents must teach their children that snakes can harm them, spiders can harm them, strangers are not always safe, on the list can go on and on. This is a healthy fear that gives awareness to a potential outcome that is not desired.

However, healthy fear should never cause debilitation. A healthy fear of danger can keep you safe. The fear of the Lord is a healthy fear. Jesus warns us that we will all one day face

judgment. We should develop a healthy fear of the only one who has the power and the authority to exercise judgment on that final day. Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

The fear of the Lord is having reverence and respect for God. It is somewhat like dealing with electricity: An electrician, no matter how experienced they may be, must have a continuous careful respect with electricity. Carelessness can lead to an accident or even to death. In our relationship with the Lord, we must not casually approach Him. He is Almighty God who is the ruler of all things and should be approached in that way. Death will not end your existence or my existence, but for those who are in Christ Jesus will have eternal life. Romans 8:1 gives hope in the midst of this healthy fear. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.” A sign of healthy fear is the presence of hope. Oswald Chambers said in his book, *The Highest Good*, “The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.”

II. SOME FEAR IS HARMFUL

This hopeful fear, this fear that is healthy, is not necessarily what Paul was speaking of in 2 Timothy 1:7. Although some fear is healthy, some fear is harmful. Paul says the fear that the Lord has NOT given is the fear that has no hope, the fear that can destroy and enslave us. Psychologists have cataloged over 700 fears known as phobias. Phobias are debilitating fears that cause obsessive behavior. I have a fear of sharks, but it will not prevent me from going into the ocean. Many of you have different fears but if they become debilitating, then there is something that should be done. These fears are harmful. If you watch the news and it creates a crippling fear in you, then the side effects have begun to set in your spirit.

A harmful fear can cause you to discount God’s care for your life. “Therefore, don’t be afraid of them, since there is nothing covered that won’t be uncovered and nothing hidden that won’t be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. What you hear in a whisper, proclaim on the housetops. Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10:28-31 CSB) Your worth is greater than any sparrow. Do not discount God’s care for you and your family.

At times, fear causes us to think that the Lord is no longer watching out for us. This happens in the midst of the fear that is harmful. We have a tendency to forget God’s word. The Lord commanded Moses to send out scouts to go in the land He had promised them and to bring back a report. All of the scouts were leaders in Israel; they were well-versed in the things of the Lord. The Lord told them they were going to this city and they were going to conquer the land, but instead their report focused on fear. “They reported to Moses: ‘We went into the land where you sent us. Indeed it is flowing with milk and honey, and here is some of its fruit. However, the people living in the land are strong, and the cities are large and fortified. We also saw the descendants of Anak there.’” (Numbers 13:27-28 CSB) They decided

that what they saw negated the promises of the Lord as if the Lord did not know who occupied the land. They knew better though. They had better understanding. They realized their limits. They simply forgot the limitless power and unlimited understanding and knowledge of the Lord. “Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to die by the sword? Our wives and children will become plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” So they said to one another, “Let’s appoint a leader and go back to Egypt.” (Numbers 14:3-4 CSB)

This happens so many times with our worldview. We allow information that is not of the Lord to infiltrate our minds in such a way that it would appear as if we are living as we previously did before Christ. What we see in front of us—our worldview—becomes hindered by the news, by what the government is telling us or what the CDC is saying and we begin to have more faith in their understanding of a virus instead of the one who knows every detail about it. People often come to me who are experiencing this type of fear and it is because their worldview has been infiltrated with news experts rather than God’s holy word. Do not neglect God’s Word. In times of chaos, when things feel shaky and as if the world has given way, turn to God’s word. As we turn to God’s word we can be reminded of how God has equipped us to overcome fear.

III . GOD HAS EQUIPPED US TO OVERCOME FEAR

God has given us everything necessary for us to be able to overcome fear. Look back at what Paul says in our verse to Timothy. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment.” (2 Timothy 1:7 CSB) Instead of fear, the Lord has given us three specific things that are seen in the verse.

A. Power to endure

The first tool God has given us to overcome fear is the power to endure. Without God’s power, we would be victimized by constant dread. Think of David facing Goliath. The nine-foot giant stood and challenged the Israelites to a fight and the bible is clear that all of Israel was too afraid to face him. They were literally shaking in their armor. This is a debilitating fear they were experiencing. But David, a little shepherd boy, was not concerned about WHAT they were facing, because he remembered the word of the Lord and he remembered the power of God. David was only armed with a slingshot and said this to the Giant, “David said to the Philistine: “You come against me with a sword, spear, and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord of Armies, the God of the ranks of Israel—you have defied him. Today, the Lord will hand you over to me. Today, I’ll strike you down, remove your head, and give the corpses of the Philistine camp to the birds of the sky and the wild creatures of the earth. Then all the world will know that Israel has a God.” (1 Samuel 17:45-46 CSB) It was the power of God that helped David, it was the power of God that destroyed Goliath. There is nothing you and I face today that the power of God will not overrule.

B. Love that drives out fear

We also have the tool of love, love that drives out fear. “There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, God’s perfect love drives out fear.” (1 John 4:18a CSB) Our love for the

Lord also helps us drive out and overcome our fears. Have you considered how love can drive out fear? Think of the mama bear mentality. There are several stories about supernatural courage and strength that takes place in a mother when their children are in danger of any sort. It is similar in our relationship: God's love for us helps remove fear in our lives. Knowing that God loves us and that all things work together for good to them that love Him, we find strength to face fear with faith.

C. Sound judgment to be wise

The third thing we see from the text is sound judgment. We receive sound judgment to be wise. The phrasing here from Paul means to exercise self-discipline. It is this sound mind that we can distinguish between healthy fears as well as harmful fears. This is the sound judgment to utilize the wisdom from God. But Paul gives us advice on how this is accomplished. In Colossians chapter 3, Paul says, "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." (Colossians 3:1-2 CSB)

Paul says if you want to have a sound mind, keep God's kingdom first. Keep your mind on eternal things. The diseases in the world should not occupy your fears. News stations should not hold your trust. Set your mind on heavenly things and this will allow us to walk with sound judgment to be wise.

CONCLUSION

What if the people of GABC took this opportunity the Lord has ordained to reach people with the Love of Jesus? the Lord has a way of establishing fervor for the church. Rodney Stark, the author of the *Rise of Christianity*, tracked the conversion rate and argues in his book that the spread of Christianity in the early centuries was largely due to the care and compassion Christians showed for the poor and the sick during different plagues and epidemics. Eusebius, the early church historian, said that because of the church's compassion for those in need during times of crisis, "the deeds of Christians were on everyone's lips." Candida Moss, a professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Notre Dame noted that an "epidemic that seemed like the end of the world actually promoted the spread of Christianity." Because of their hope of heaven and the love of Christ that was shown, Christians showed the world that "Christianity is worth dying for."

Throughout the centuries, the reports are the same. In England during the 1800s, when many were dying of cholera, Charles Spurgeon and his church visited hundreds of homes to care for people. And even now, the reports are already coming in that churches in China and Italy are on the streets giving out free masks, sharing their food, and helping the sick. The rest of the world may respond with a harmful fear. Let's be a church that responds with a healthy fear of the Lord, knowing that we have the power of God Himself, the Love that drives away fear and be wise in our dealings.

OUTLINE

I. SOME FEAR IS HEALTHY

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” *Proverbs 9:10 CSB*

II. SOME FEAR IS HARMFUL

“Therefore, don’t be afraid of them, since there is nothing covered that won’t be uncovered and nothing hidden that won’t be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. What you hear in a whisper, proclaim on the housetops. Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” *Matthew 10:26-28*

III . GOD HAS EQUIPPED US TO OVERCOME FEAR

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment.” *2 Timothy 1:7*

A. Power to endure

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C. Sound judgment to be wise

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