

10 Fears and Faith—easier for some than others
Part 3
Let's continue—



As we look at the whole of Scripture, being fearful is as natural as being human. It can simply mean we feel normal fear. Many times faith and fear go hand in hand. Those of us indwelt by God's Spirit may experience fears as we live out our faith. However, being fearful can be a clear evidence of lack of faith, or the lack of a mature faith. Here are Paul's words:

“For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” *Romans 12:3*

Let's be practical. We are not all wired the same way. Some of us are “adrenaline junkies,” seeking out and enjoying thrilling experiences. Others of us are naturally “scaredy cats,” avoiding danger whenever we possibly can. Those who are not prone to fear may feel a sense of pride. “Well, I'm not like _____ who seems to not handle fear well.” Yet, Paul makes it clear that we need to live wisely, humbly, with the measure of faith we've been given.

Our hard-wired temperaments are revealed clearly as we face dangers, the unknown, or venture into new challenges. Some people go inward, others lash out, while others jump aboard with excitement, while others try to take control. But no matter what our natural “fear-level” we all are called to walk with faith in God with the measure of faith he has given each of us. God sees when we are relying on him or ourselves or on other resources.



For example, a friend who is an EMT, described how he loved his job. “When we arrive at the scene of an accident, there is often chaos. Lives may be in danger. Many actions need to be taken, seemingly all at once.” He spoke with assurance. “As I step out to help, it feels like my

entire being slows down while I assess what should be done first and then go on from there. The crucial decisions are made quickly; it's like it all makes sense to me.”

Calmness and wise decision making under pressure seem to be my friend's forte. He added, “And when it is all over, there is such a great feeling as I know the the shards of glass and broken debris are being swept up and removed. I know all is taken care of, and our team and I can say, ‘All is done. Let's go.’” He loves his work as an EMT.



God knows us to our core. He knows that some of us are more prone to fear than others. He made each of us. Do you remember how the Israelites sorted out which men would go into battle? The timid men were discouraged from joining in.

“Then the officers shall speak further to the people and say, ‘Who is the man that is afraid and fainthearted? Let him depart and return to his house, so that he might not make his brothers' hearts melt like his heart.’” *Deuteronomy 20:8*

Leaders in battles knew that timid men could make even brave men become timid. Officers deliberately removed the fainthearted from going into battle. Those who lack courage can hinder those who have faith and courage as they face a battle.

The message was similar when God deliberately trimmed down Gideon's army. He actually told Gideon what to do.

“Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.’ So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained.” *Judges 7:1-4*

Notice how many more people returned compared to those who remained. The vast majority left the army—two-thirds were afraid and trembling! Only a third had the courage to

stay and fight. So, each of us who face the same fear-inducing situation will not have the same natural responses.

God has made us all differently in how we use our measure of faith. The men set aside due to fearfulness were not reprimanded for their lack of courage in the midst of their fears.

This has been true throughout history. A person is not necessarily more “full of faith” than another if he or she feels fearful or not. It is just a practical reality that some just don’t naturally fear when in dangerous situations like others do. And it seems like there are far more fear-prone people than courageous people.

Yet, sometimes people claim that those who are naturally “go after it” types surely have greater faith than others. “Look at how they went through that tough time. They say they never felt fear. They are courageous.” However, there is the possibility that their bold actions may only reflect that they are naturally wired to not be fearful. Or they may feel they have to act a certain way as a believer. Some people simply don’t respond to fear-inducing situations with much fear.

The naturally timid need more encouragement to press into fearful places. They actually may have to learn to trust God more deeply because walking in faith for them requires greater effort—to not live by their natural proneness to fear. God can see who is relying on him in the midst of fears.

Paul spoke to a young leader, Timothy.

“For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.”
2 Timothy 1:7

This Greek word for timidity is used only this one time in the scriptures. It conveys the idea of cowardice when contrasted with God giving us a spirit of power. Paul knew ministry was hard and exhorted this young believer, Timothy, to restore and fire up his ministry with the laying on of hands. He told Timothy, “God isn’t giving your inner self the feelings, emotions, or decision-making of a coward. No, God has given all of us all power, love, and discipline to do the work. Get out there and do it.”

Followers of Christ as the church was just beginning faced a lot of persecution and anger, and dangers. Peter likewise knew how persecution felt and how difficult it was, so he encouraged the people through his letters. He wanted his letters to be passed on from place to place where Christians had fled.

“But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled...” *1 Peter 3:14*

Peter knew that the new believers had fears of being persecuted and surely felt fear as they needed to flee from the known to the unknown, to find safer areas for their families. No

matter what, if they were going to live as a believer in their hostile world, they would have to deal with intimidation and real danger. His words would bring them courage.



Apostle John in his message to the churches in the book of Revelation encourages those facing persecution as well.

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” *Revelation 2:10*

Most of us have not had the experience of being cast into prison nor wondering if we will have to show faithfulness to God that could bring us death. Repeatedly throughout the book of *Revelation*, John speaks of persecution and how we followers of Christ will overcome through endurance, even martyrdom. We need to read and soak up these words, and pray for God to give us the courage needed.

Those of us more naturally timid can greatly benefit from those who are more courageous. We need to surround ourselves with those who can take us from living in fear and trepidation of the seen and unforeseen toward boldness and faithfulness. Paul did this for Timothy. Peter and John did the same for persecuted believers. It's important to not feel all alone when in the midst of a fear-inducing situation. Those who have experienced persecution can be a real encouragement to those who are about to experience persecution.

From fear to greater faith. We need the examples of Job, the EMT, Jesus, Peter, Paul, John and all those who walk in faith. Those who seem to have a greater measure of faith help us to obey God and do as he desires even in the midst of uncertainty and fear. These people of greater faith can encourage—“bring courage.”



The Moravians and John Wesley: Missionaries who faced their fears

The story of John Wesley on his journey toward faith includes an amazing story about dealing with fear. Real fear.

The year was 1735.

By the 18th century the worldwide influence of Moravian missionaries was extraordinary. It so happened that while John Wesley traveled by ship with his brother from England to America they encountered some Moravians from Germany onboard. John's plan was to become a minister in the newly founded city of Savannah. The Moravian believers were on their way to America to share the gospel with native American Indians.



As John and Charles and the other passengers traversed the Atlantic Ocean, their ship encountered a dangerous storm. Sea waters broke over the ship's bow and sides hour after hour. Here is an account:

“The Moravians were located down below in a worship service and praising God with much intensity. Wesley was also there, terrified. Wesley recounts the event in his diary; ‘In the midst of the Psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards; ‘Were you not afraid?’ He answered, ‘I thank God, no.’ I asked: ‘But were not your women and children afraid?’ He replied mildly: ‘No, our women and children are not afraid to die.’ The storm was boisterous, but the Moravians kept praising God. Finally, the storm subsided.”

The Moravians continued to calmly sing even as it seemed their ship would surely sink into the deep. Wesley was moved watching their faith in action. Their trust in God no matter the outcome was vividly demonstrated by their singing songs in the midst of the storm, even in the hold of a fiercely damaged ship.

Three days after landing, the Moravian pastor asked John, “Do you know Jesus?” He replied, “I know he is the Savior of the world.”

The pastor then asked, “Do you know if he has saved you?”

That was the bigger question, the most important question. It would not be until three years later (after Wesley preached and ministered to people in America and England) that he would finally come to really know Jesus on May 24, 1738, when he heard someone at a society

meeting on Aldersgate Street in London read Martin Luther's introduction to the book of Romans, and finally he knew that Jesus had saved him.

We will never know how our walks of faith impact others. But others are watching. The faith we see in one another can bring us to greater trust as we develop a deeper understanding of walking with God in the midst of fear-inducing situations. Those of us who struggle with fear greatly benefit from others to lead the way.

Warning systems. When Fear is a Friend

It's crucial to realize that fear is not the enemy. Fear can actually be a friend. Fear protects, provides, creates positive changes, sounds the alarm of danger, teaches, leads us to deeper faith, and causes us to learn to have greater reliance on God.



I knew of a family who moved to a new city and encountered real fears. Their teenage daughter began to develop friends of questionable character. She eventually began sneaking out of her house at night to hang out with her new friends. She was like a moth drawn to a flame.

Her parents' fears were quite real. "What should we do?" They prayed and sought advice from their pastor and other friends. In the end, they decided to move back to where they had formerly lived, as that was actually a viable option. Thankfully, when they did so, their daughter reconnected with her former close friends who were a positive encouragement to her life and faith.

These parents acted on their fears/concerns and fortunately their plan worked and provided a safer environment for their daughter. Fear led to prayers, to seeking advice, and to implement a plan. Thankfully, in this situation a good outcome came from that plan. There are no guarantees, but our healthy fears can often lead us to seek better ways of doing things or new directions. We, as humans, may respond to fears with wise actions.

Many times our fears need to be heeded, and quickly. They are God's warning system.

One night while staying in Damascus, real fears sent the Apostle Paul's friends into action. They had heard that guards in their city had been ordered to capture Paul. The believers quickly implemented a crucial plan. "Let's use a basket" was their practical idea. That must have been one huge basket. Thank goodness they didn't drop Paul as he was lowered down outside the wall to safety. Their fears led to a plan that worked. Fears turned to saving actions.

The story of Rahab in the Old Testament also demonstrates the value of responding to real fears with actions. This pagan woman, in spite of real fears, saved the lives of Hebrew spies. She didn't want the men of God captured when she realized their lives were at stake. Her quick thinking cover-up plan (hiding the men on her rooftop) was proof of her faith. Her courageous faith not only saved the men's lives, but also saved her life and her family as well. She is heralded as a woman who demonstrates great faith in Hebrews 11.

“By faith the prostitute Rahab did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.” *Hebrews 11:31*

Real fears or concerns are often beneficial. They can cause us to pray, to go to God, and seek others for wisdom, and decide on a plan of action. Fears can drive us to do the right thing.

God often helped the Israelites during times of dangers. The Israelite armies used various tactics as they dealt with dangers from their enemies. Their fears led them to creative plans and God was in the midst. Deception was often a smart tactic used in the midst of battle. Fool the enemy. Even fleeing can be a smart idea when in battle if the leaders and warriors realize they don't have the necessary resources to win.

Real fears do not always show a lack of faith, but demonstrate courage and great faith as we face dangers and threats and do what God directs us to do. Fears can drive us to deeper places of faith as we wrestle with God and ask for boldness to do what needs to be done. Fears can take us to the end of ourselves, force us to the ground in humility. Only there we may learn to rely on God in new ways. “Lord, give me greater faith, give me wisdom.”

Living in a state of chronic fear needs wise understanding. Is it due to a physical chemical imbalance or due to past trauma which makes our brain chemistry not function normally? That's a starting place. We need to look at the practical side, the physical side. There are gifted and wise counselors and experts who can bring practical and medical help.

We all know that living by fear is detrimental, so if the physical or past trauma are not a primary cause, our chronic fears may reveal that we have forgotten some important aspects about God. Our fears or concerns can become debilitating because we don't have a big enough or accurate view of God's nature, or God's power, or God's goodness, or His love. Such fears should drive us to focus on God more deeply. We need to read what others wrote in scriptures that record their thoughts during times of fear-inducing situations. David often writes about not having fear because of his reliance on God. His words are very encouraging.

Did David have fear? Yes. His fears caused him to leap out of the way of Saul's thrown javelin. His fears kept him wisely on the run from Saul for years. His fears gave him creativity in warding off his enemies. His fears drove him to write songs of his confidence in God. “When I am afraid I will put my trust in You.” (Psalm 56:3).

Five stones and a piece of leather against our Goliaths



J. I. Packard in his book *Knowing God* takes an entire chapter describing how our view of God directly affects how we approach the faith challenges of life.

Look at David as he faced Goliath. David had a mammoth view of God, tested through his short years, built strong by living out his faith and through meditating on God's words day and night. David's faith was specifically strengthened by seeing God give him the ability to kill a lion and a bear. His view of God, even as a young person, was far greater, far grander, and far truer than seasoned Israelite warriors, his older brothers, and even a king. All around him, grown men became paralyzed by the imposing sight and sounds of the giant, Goliath. Their fears of Goliath stopped them from moving forward into battle, but not David. His faith was based on all he reflected on about God.

I am not a David, but I like many of you have taken on a few less imposing Goliaths in our lifetimes. I expect David approached Goliath with adrenaline rushing through his veins, with his heart racing as he picked up five stones, not just one—extra ammo if needed. He did not need armor in his taking down of Goliath. He needed God to use his honed skill with his leather sling and some rocks. He had lots of practice with these items, his selected weapons of warfare.

You and I would not approach a giant and try to take him down with a slung stone. We would surely miss and our wimpy throws would most likely ricochet off his armor. But David used the weapon he was trained with. He was prepared. For years he practiced his skill in the fields. He was ready.

May we too, when going through our valleys, our mountains, our deserts, our wildernesses take what we have learned about God with us. God can use all the different ways that he has equipped us for our personal battles that require faith.

May we soak in God's word and use the examples of men and women who showed great faith in the midst of fears as reminders of humans facing giants, cruel enemies, dangers and death. May we record and reflect on the giants that God has already taken down in our lives as we have walked with him in growing faith.

And God wants us to develop skills, like David, in preparation to fight the battles where our faith and lessons of living have been honed. Then we can fight effectively where God wants us to.

Faith through Remembering What God has done

On many a Christmas Eve, our family gathers together in our family room. We sit on the sofas, chairs, and on the floor and share with one another the blessings that God has done during our lives over the past year. For years, I bring out our “Blessing Notebook” and take out a pen to record what each of us says about God’s work in their lives. One by one we get to hear and celebrate how we have seen God’s work, his protection, his intervention, his faithfulness during both the good days and the not so easy ones. Our sharing feels tender. Our faith is encouraged. Our faith grows more as we celebrate God in the midst of our lives. A sweet time. We then share our concerns for the upcoming year and pray with praise and asking.

The year of my facial trial was especially sweet as I recorded it in our book of blessings. I could look back thank God with our family for getting me and Tom through a tough year. God had helped me find a way out of my darkness, by providing the answer through a caring and gifted nurse, other medical staff, and along the way giving me a wonderful support system. The blessing that came after months of concern, fears, sadness, lack of hope, and confusion was an indescribably incredible blessing. Together our family gave God the glory that Christmas Eve.

So, as we look at faith and fear we must remember that some God-followers who encountered giants experienced a definite sense of fear. Some, when encountering fearful situations, felt less fear while others felt deeper fear. Whether more like a Rahab, a Job, a Paul, a David, or a Timothy—most importantly, men and women of faith obeyed God and walked with him fearful or not. We can see how people of faith grew in faith even as they experienced fear-inducing situations. If we need to hide or flee, that might be the wisest response to a fearful situation. But, if God says to us, “Do not fear. Be courageous! Go out! Move toward what is giving you fear,” may we pray for the faith to say, “Yes Lord, here I come.” May each of us put a stone in our sling and fling it as hard as we can.



Thought questions—

~Describe a time have you experienced the need for boldness in the midst of your fears. Were you ever in physical danger like Job, Paul, Peter, and other missionaries, such as John Wesley? How do Paul’s words in Romans 12:3 encourage you?

~Have there been times where you are in “doubting danger” as you encountered a lot of losses and setbacks, pain and suffering? What means have encouraged you or who helped you to keep your faith and keep growing deeper with your faith? Describe your faith walk—is it more like Job, David, Rahab, Paul, Peter, John, or Timothy?

~ “For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith” (*Romans 12:3*). Paul speaks of God giving each of us “a measure of faith.” On a scale of 1-10 (1= low faith and 10=tremendous faith) where do you see yourself? Would you be one of the men going into battle alongside Gideon, or one of the ones it was best to leave at home? Why or why not? Reflect on Deuteronomy 20:8 and Judges 7:1-4.

~After reading 2 Timothy chapter 1, reflect on 1:7, “For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline” and 2 Peter 3:14 “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled...” *1 Peter 3:14* describe someone you know who seems to exhibit strong, abiding mature faith. How has that person’s faith encouraged you to grow in yours? What words or actions did they use that helped you grow in your faith?

~What life experiences has God used, or is he currently using, to help you grow in maturity in your faith, so that your faith can become greater faith? Do you feel the need to come up with a wise plan as you are needing courage and wisdom? Do you have any past experiences and skills

that God can use through you in your battle? Do you need to run to safety for the time being? Ask God for wisdom as you list people to call, seek people who can encourage, look for scriptures to reflect on, and discover different ways to handle the fear-inducing situation wisely.

Images:

1. Men parasailing, by Vlad Hillatanu, <https://unsplash.com/photos/lIm5RtGPrQs>, (accessed 7/4/2021).
2. Photo of men in Jerusalem, by Dave Herring, Instagram: @daveherring, <https://unsplash.com/photos/Zs-L-Z5Sc94>, (accessed 7/4/2021).
3. Photo of storm, by Torsten Dederichs, <https://unsplash.com/photos/KrQJzrZiCak>, (accessed 7/4/2021).
4. Photo of farmer with sling shot, by Gregory Hayes, <https://unsplash.com/photos/ZVrTfykxBw8>, (accessed 7/4/2021).