

FEAR – FAMILY – FAITH 2

“Fear of The Future”

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A “Fear Filled” drama unfolded in this country and around the world in the year 1999. Do you remember what it was? Yes, Y2K. You remember the millennial “Bug” tragedy; as experts and professionals predicted mass turmoil as the computer systems all around the world were predicted to begin failing at the stroke of midnight, Dec. 31st, 1999. Airplanes would lose their navigational systems, trains would derail, banks would lose our deposit records, hospitals would lose their power...peoples lives would never be the same. You remember the fear that grew and swept across this land. Here is how one of America’s Major institutions made preparations: ([ESPN Sports Center Y2K Commercial Clip](#)). Not to be outdone, there were many Christian ministries that got in on the frenzy, and attempted to capitalize on this Fear-Full phenomenon ([Clip of Jack Van Impe Video: 2000 Time Bomb-Jesus needs your money! \(\(Stop clip at 1:47\)\)](#))

I don’t want to make fun of any who bought into this fear, but to make a point: Many times our fears of the future are not particularly founded. Even with the “crisis” we are facing right now; which is very real to those millions who have or are losing jobs; and real for all whose retirement portfolios have been plundered; perspective must be maintained. There is no better place to find balance and perspective than in the context of “family”. I’m fully aware that what we are dealing with right now has great potential for tragedy and traumatic eventualities...but I also see some similarities to Y2K.

The media is driving this madness! I’ve thought maybe we should fast from TV this Lenten season, and see if our perspective on the “Recession-Depression-Crisis”, might appear differently.

I know mistakes have been made, by both political parties elected leaders. I know mistakes have been made by corrupt corporate CEO's, and financial institutions. But I also know that our insatiable appetite for "more and better" has helped all of us produce this current "correction" we are feeling right now! We can blame it on someone else; but we'll never be guiltless or help solve the problem or discover the solution, while maintaining that attitude; we are part of the problem, and we must become part of the solution.

The future is scary to many folks, not just the immediate future, but the long term future; even the eternal future. Many people have yet to decide what they will do with Jesus; and until they do, their eternal future remains uncertain. Many people, even those who have decided to follow Jesus; still live in fear of the future...and that is what I want to address today. How can being part of a healthy family, and how can applying our holistic faith; help us deal with our fear of future? Well, I've discovered 4 answers I think might help us.

HOW TO OVERCOME OUR FEAR OF THE FUTURE:

1. TRUST IN GOD'S PRESENCE

The Psalms are a great collection of writings. They are filled with every emotion ever experienced by humanity. Fear is a familiar subject in the Psalms; including all kinds of fears, but especially our human fear of the future. Listen:

Keep me safe, O God, for I have come to you for refuge...No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice. My body rests in safety. For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your holy one to rot in the grave. You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever. Ps. 16:1, 9-11

How great is the goodness you have stored up for those who fear You...You hide them in the shelter of your presence, safe from those who conspire against them. You shelter them in your presence, far from accusing tongues. Ps.31:19-20

But I am trusting you, O Lord, saying, "You are my God!" My future is in your hands. Ps. 31:14-15

Our future is in God's hands! Part of the reason so many people maintain and retain a fear of the future is they fail to picture God as part of their future. We can worry and bemoan the crashing markets, but God is still here. We can worry and wonder what tomorrow may hold; but God is still there too! God is eternal, which doesn't just mean that he has existed forever, and will exist forever; it means that time for God does not exist! For God all time is now! God is with us, all the time, whether we acknowledge that presence or not. God is an ever-present help in our time of need.

We need God now more than ever; true or false? BOTH, we do need God now; but not now any more than yesterday or tomorrow! You see, we might be able to live above some of our fear of the future if we could just imagine, picture, realize, accept, remember...trust...that God is already there! We can walk safely and securely into the unknown, because it is not unknown to God. God has been to tomorrow...and now invites us simply to take His hand and follow! We might overcome some of our fears of the future by Trusting that God's presence is already there.

2. CLING TO GOD'S PROMISE

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ...No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom. 8:35, 37-39

Related to God's presence is God's promise that nothing can separate us from God's love. Do you believe that? Then should our fear of the future still scare the socks off us if we are loved by the God of the universe? If little old me, and little old you can never be separated from God by ANYTHING; why should we be afraid?

I think that one of the primary reasons so many people are intent on living in the past; is because of their fear of the future. And I think that one reason so many people choose to live in the past is they haven't figured out, or don't really believe, or can't actually internalize the fact that God loves them.

The past is completely unchangeable, and therefore completely manageable. Our recitation and remembrance and constant rehearsals of the past can be altered to make even an unpleasant past more palatable; but the future is completely unknown and totally uncontrollable, and therefore terrible to consider.

I would offer this antidote for dealing with the fear of the future: Give up so desperately clinging to the past, and instead choose to cling to God's promise of unfailing, unchanging, un-deterable love. If we are loved by God...if we are loved by God...what else really matters? If we are loved by God, then our lives are defined by His nature and character growing in us, not by our stock holdings or house mortgages, or job security. If we are loved by God, then our lives are marked by that love; not by our bank accounts, or automobiles, or political affiliations. If we are loved by God, then our lives are measured by that love; how much we love others, how much we give away, how much we share, how much we care, how much we improve the lives of others; instead of always only worrying about our own. Our fear of the future might be alleviated by Clinging to God's Promise of Love.

3. BELIEVE IN GOD'S PURPOSE

"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. ³ You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. John 15:1-4

I alluded to this point last fall during a sermon or two, but it is becoming more fully developed now. I'm not claiming to be prophetic or to snub "I told you so". But my word from God in the pew that Sunday morning may be coming true. Many of us have been praying for revival in this country; and this current economic mess, might just be part of God's plan to answer that prayer! Nothing separates people from God like money. Oh, not the command to tithe as much as the human self-sufficiency that produces independence, instead of what God wants: dependence. When our fiscal pins get knocked out from under us like they are right now; people start looking for answers, and I believe the best answer is Jesus.

Take note of this scripture: God prunes the branches that do bear fruit...so they will produce even more fruit. I believe that America has been and still is one of the most generous, compassionate, caring, loving nations in the world. Whenever and wherever international tragedies occur...who is the first to respond? We are. I don't think that will ever change. I believe this economic crisis might be part of God's pruning to make us more fruitful! Some are being pruned more than others...some need still more pruning; but at this time we need to join arm in arm and stand together through this pruning, ... because God has a purpose.

While I believe part of that purpose might be punishment for past sins committed; I believe the greater part to be a pruning process that will more strongly connect us to the Vine, and help us more faithfully produce fruit...its part of God's Purpose. Believing and living according to that belief, might make the future less fearful.

4. PRACTICE FOR GOD'S PERFECTION

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing...

God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him...

But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. James 1:2-4, 12, 22-24

Part of our fear of the future is based on the uncertainty that our lives may not measure up to God's standard; and we'll face the end judgment unqualified. This passage makes it quite clear that part of what happens when troubles come our way; is to make us stronger, to make us more dependent, to test and temper our endurance, and finally to make us more holy, even perfect...that's what it says! Think about Jesus; how the darker his days became at the end of his life; the more resolute became his commitment to fulfill His Father's commission. I believe it can be like that for us as well.

If our families rally together; if our faith is deepened and exercised, our faith will have an opportunity to grow...during these most difficult times. It might actually grow faster because of these difficult times.

But did you catch the closing caveat James mentions here? *Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise you are only fooling yourselves.* In times of uncertainty and difficulty; turn to what you know, and do what you know to do. God has not changed in the middle of so many changes affecting so much of our lives. So we must do what God tells us to do. The mandate of the Gospel has not changed, the mission of the great commission is not up for a vote, the call of God deep within each of us is ringing more loudly in our ears...lets not miss it or dismiss it; but answer it by obediently doing what God continually tells us to do. Love God, and love our neighbors. It's practice for becoming more like Jesus, more perfect.

On Christmas Day 1939, King George VI of England gave a brief radio address to his troubled nation. England was already at war with Germany. Soon all of Europe would be plunged into the horror of brutal, unrestrained warfare.

Hoping to calm the troubled hearts of his countrymen, the king offered words of encouragement as the storm clouds gathered overhead. He ended his remarks by quoting a hitherto unknown poem by Louise Haskins, "The Gate of Year." It has since become known around the world:

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: 'Give me a light, that I may tread safely into the unknown!' And he replied: 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.'

What a word that is for us today. No one but God knows what the future holds. Let us do as the poet suggested and place our hands in the hand of Almighty God. And let us go out into the unknown future with confidence, knowing that if God go with us, we need not fear the future. To walk with the Lord is the greatest of all joys, and it is indeed safer than any known way. Y2K or not...here I come! Amen.

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