

Fear vs Faith v2.0

The late Ann Landers' syndicated advice column received some 10,000 letters a month, seeking her counsel. Most dealt with the fear factor. They worried about their health, wealth, family and/or their life.

One of history's bloodiest dictators, Joseph Stalin, was crazy-paranoid that he'd be assassinated. His home had eight bedrooms, each locked like a bank vault, preventing anyone from knowing in which room he slept from night to night.

"Fear not" pops up in the Bible some 365 times as its most repeated phrase. Jesus' walking on water is recorded in three of the four gospels, each with details not found in the other two. **For the complete story, let's read all three records of this astonishing event:**

John 6:1-24 ...

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed Him because they saw the signs He had performed by healing the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with His disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"⁶ He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what He was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered Him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

⁸ Another of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹ "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there).¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, He said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴ After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make Him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself.

¹⁶ When evening came, His disciples went down to the lake ¹⁷ where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. ¹⁸ A strong wind was blowing, and the waters grew rough. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. ²⁰ But He said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." ²¹ Then they were willing to take Him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

²² The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with His disciples, but that they had gone away alone. ²³ Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor His disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

Next, Matthew 14:22-36 ...

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowd. ²³ After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. Later that night He was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was a considerable distance from land, buffeted by waves because the wind was against it.

²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were

terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ "Come," He said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

³⁴ When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. ³⁵ And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to Him ³⁶ and begged Him to let the sick just touch the edge of His cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

And now Mark 6:45-56 ...

⁴⁵ Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to Bethsaida while He dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After leaving them, He went up on a mountainside to pray.

⁴⁷ Later that night the boat was in the middle of the lake, and He was alone on land. ⁴⁸ He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn He went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw Him walking on the lake, they thought He was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰ because they all saw Him and were terrified.

Immediately He spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ⁵¹ Then He climbed into the boat with them, and the wind

died down. They were completely amazed, ⁵² for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴ As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. ⁵⁵ They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard He was. ⁵⁶ And wherever He went — Into villages, towns or countryside — they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged Him to let them touch even the edge of His cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Israel's King Solomon wrote, "The *fear* of God is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10; Job 28:23-24-28; Psalms 19:9). This fear differs from fright; it means we're to stand in awe of or to revere God. **In that sense whoever fears God need not fear anything or anyone.** As John, Jesus' friend, puts it: **"Perfect love ('God IS love') casts out fear"** (1 John 4:18).

DISCUSS: Describe a time when you feared for your life.

Fish'n Chaps

Crowds are clamor to hear Jesus speak and see Him heal the sick. This particular day 5,000 men plus some 15,000 women and children have been with the Carpenter from Nazareth for hours. They're getting hungry. Jesus takes two fish and five loaves of bread, gives thanks and passes out the food until *all* are fed.

As dusk arrives, sensing they want to make Him king to end Rome's occupation of their land, Jesus dismisses the diners, aware that their plan is not His Father's. Nor do the disciples still do not comprehend that He's the Messiah, God-in-the-flesh! At His command, Jesus' boys set sail across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum where He'll join them after setting aside some time to pray to His Father.

In this region the north wind barrels down from Lebanon and swoops south across this freshwater lake that's half the circumference of Seattle's Lake Washington. It's about 3:00 a.m. The weary men have been rowing for eight hours, battling a fierce northerly that's driving them off course farther south.

Bridge Over Troubled Galilee

Exhausted, Jesus' crew spots what seems to be a ghost walking on the waves. Scared spitless, they hear, "It's Me; don't be afraid." Since all creation obeys Him, so why panic? Peter gets an urge and shouts, "Lord, if it's You, invite me!" Hearing Jesus say, "Come," Peter leaps into the sea and *walks* toward the Lord!

With untimely hubris, he does a quick situation analysis and begins sinking, sputtering the Bible's shortest prayer: "Save me!" Predictably, Jesus reaches out, sighing, "Peter, what scrawny faith! Why all the doubt?" We fret over the past, the future, money, what others think of us. But we need never doubt that God loves us, or that He won't be there when we flounder. Your all-powerful Creator wants only the best for you. Recalling this brings you a settled peace.

When Jesus says, "Come," be assured that what He starts, He'll finish (**Hebrews 12:1-4; Philippians 1:6**). "Faith" is *not* an *event*; it's an unbroken reliance on God's character. Don't miss this ... When the Master comes aboard, the tempest halts, they're *instantly, miraculously* on the other shore, *miles away*! They erupt in worshiping this....this....God-man. Finally, they get it. **He IS the Son of God!**

DISCUSS: Tell us how you came to know Jesus as your Friend and Savior.

Subduing Life's Storms

• **Fear and faith cannot occupy the same space.** "Everything that happens in this world happens at the time God chooses" (**Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**; see **Job 14:4; Psalm 139:16**). Since God allows or creates our "faith exams," we need never let anything steal our peace. Jesus promised, "*You will have peace by being united with Me. The world will make you suffer but be brave! I've defeated the world*" (John 16:33). He knows when you're on the ropes (Mark 6:48; Hebrews 4:14–16). Jesus says, "Give Me your anxiety." He almost let His understudies capsize so that they could see that **what matters is that we have Him, and He has us.**

• **Nothing will separate us from the God who loves us** (Romans 8:38-39). Stewing about life's knocks is a waste and insult to our Maker. When we turn our lives over to Him in faith, His Holy Spirit resides with us as our hidden Resource. Experiencing the reality of God-with-us, we now can access divine assets about which the world has no clue. Through the darkest nights, on the most troubled seas, our Lord never abandons those who trust Him. Wrapped securely in His protection, we are billboards for God.

Ours is not *self*-confidence; it's totally a God-thing. We can even *welcome* problems because we've tasted the deep joy of God's response! We gravitate to people who radiate contentment and inner strength. Why? They've invited Jesus into their boat. When people do that, they discover that suddenly they've arrived at their far-off port in life's storm toward which others are still struggling.

• **The antidote for fear is the certainty that God can *always* be trusted.** Thanks to the cross and open tomb, we have the option to think and live like a victor, not a victim. For those who follow Jesus, "Things aren't falling apart; they're falling into place." Contrariwise, members of the "The-Sky-Is-Falling Club" tend to become what they dread. Job, history's Heisman winner for 'Most Undeserved Tragedies,' moaned, *"Everything I fear and dread comes true. I have no peace, no rest, and my troubles never end."* (Job 3:25-26)

DISCUSS: What seeming disaster turned out to be a positive for you?

Fear Knot

What about the *frozen chosen* eleven who, unlike Pete, stayed huddled in the boat? What keeps you from taking the plunge to trust Jesus? How can you move from just *admiring* Him to seeing Him as the only One who loves you unconditionally, who gives you right-thinking about who He is and who you are.

DISCUSS: What uneasiness haunted you about giving your life to Christ?

How can you avoid being tied up in dread-knots?

- In your weakness God's POWER is your strength (2 Timothy 1:7).
- Let God's LOVE flow from *Him* through *you* to *others* (1 John 4:18-19).
- Focus your MIND on Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 4:8-9)

When tempted to fear, let's reposition Jesus from being our *last resort* to our dearest Friend, Comforter, Savior and Lord. The storm did not end until Jesus got in the boat.

Have you invited Him in?

If so, are you inviting others to join you?

His Deal

November 8 & 22, 2016

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"FEAR NOT" VERSES

God: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I will shield you from danger" (Genesis 15:1).

God to Isaac: "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid; I am with you" (Genesis 26:24).

God to Moses: "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go to Egypt; I will make your descendants a great nation there. I will go with you to Egypt and bring your descendants back to this land" (Genesis 46:3-4).

Joseph to his brothers: "Don't be afraid ... You plotted evil against me, but God turned it into good in order to preserve the lives of many people who are alive today because of what happened. You have nothing to fear. I will take care of you and your children" (Genesis 50:19-21a).

"Don't be afraid for the Lord your God will fight for you" (Deuteronomy 3:22).

"The Lord will lead you and be with you. He will not fail you or abandon you, so do not lose courage or be afraid" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

God to Joshua: "Remember that I have commanded you to be determined and confident! Do not be afraid or discouraged for I, the Lord your God, am with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

"Elisha's servant saw Syrian troops with their horses and chariots surrounding them. He went to Elisha and exclaimed, 'We are doomed, sir! What shall we do?' 'Don't be afraid,' Elisha answered. 'We have more on our side than they have on theirs.' Then Elisha prayed, 'O Lord, open his eyes, and let him see!' The Lord answered his prayer. Elisha's servant looked up and saw the hillside covered with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:15-17).

"Even if I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for You are with me. Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me" (Psalm 23:4).

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; I will fear no one. The Lord protects me from all danger; I will never be afraid" (Psalm 27:1).

"I prayed to the Lord, and He answered me; He freed me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:4).

"God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not be afraid, even if earth is shaken and mountains fall into the ocean depths; even if seas roar and rage, and the hills are shaken by the violence" (Psalm 46:1-3; see Revelation 6:12-17).

"Be merciful to me, God, I am under attack; my enemies persecute me all the time. When I am afraid, O Lord Almighty, I put my trust in You and am not afraid; I praise Him for what He has promised. What can a mere human do to me" (Psalm 56:1-4)?

"When I am anxious and worried, You (Lord) comfort me and make me glad" (Psalm 94:19).

"The Lord is with me, I will not be afraid ... It is better to trust in the Lord than to depend on human leaders" (Psalm 118:6,7).

"You will not be afraid when you go to bed and will sleep soundly through the night. You will not have to worry ... " (Proverbs 3:24-25).

"It is dangerous to be concerned with what others think of you; if you trust the Lord, you are safe" (Proverbs 29:25).

"Tell all who are discouraged, 'Be strong, don't be afraid! God will rescue you'" (Isaiah 35:4).

"Do not be afraid—I am with you! I am your God—let nothing terrify you! I will make you strong and help you; I will protect you and save you" (Isaiah 41:10).

God to Israel: "Do not be afraid. I will save you. I have called you by name. You are Mine. When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you; your troubles will not overwhelm you. When you pass through fire, you will not be burned; the hard trials that come will not hurt you. I am the Lord your God, the holy God of Israel, who saves you" (Isaiah 43:1-3).

God: "I am the one who strengthens you. Why should you fear mortals who are no more enduring than grass? Have you forgotten the Lord who made you, who stretched out the heavens and laid the earth's foundations? Why should you constantly fear those who oppress you, those who are ready to destroy you? Their fury can no longer touch you" (Isaiah 51:12-13).

Jesus: "Do not start worrying: 'Where will my food come from? Or drink? Or clothes? Your Father knows you need them. Instead, be concerned above all with the Kingdom of God and what He requires of you, and He will provide all these things. Do not worry about tomorrow; it will

have enough worries of its own. There is no need to add to the troubles each day brings" (Matthew 6:31-34).

Jesus: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be in awe of God who can destroy both body and soul in hell. ... not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent. ...even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:28-31)!

"Martha welcomed Jesus into her home. Her sister Mary sat at His feet and listened to His teaching. Martha was upset over all the work she had to do and said, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!' The Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha! You are worried and troubled over so many things, but just one is needed. Mary has chosen the right thing, and it will not be taken from her'" (Luke 10:38-42).

Jesus: "Do not be worried and upset. Believe in God and believe also in me ... it is My own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does ... do not be afraid" (John 14:1,27).

"... there is nothing in all creation that will ever separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39).

"Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking with a thankful heart. And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6,7).

"For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us (fearful): instead His Spirit fills us with power, love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7).

"Do not be afraid of anyone, and do not worry. But have reverence for Christ in your hearts, and honor him as Lord" (1 Peter 3:14b-15a).

"Leave all your worries with (God) because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

"Perfect love (God's love) casts out fear ..." (1 John 4:18).

Jesus: "Don't be afraid! I am the first and the last. I am the living one! I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I have authority over death and the world of the dead" (Revelation 1:17,18).