

FEARING NOT IN THE FACE OF FEARFUL FACTORS

By Robert J. Tamasy

One of the most common emotions is fear. Psychologists have a term for our reaction to circumstances we perceive as threatening. It is called the “fight or flight” response. We either confront the persons or situations that threaten us in some way, or we flee, seeking to avoid or even escape potential calamity.

There is, however, a third response, one we are not likely to hear recommended by supposed experts on the human psyche. This reaction is simply to “fear not.” Not long ago I heard a speaker from the west African nation of Sierra Leone who noted the words “fear not” appear in the Bible 365 times, seemingly one for every day in the calendar year.

Since people in Sierra Leone have experienced any number of adversities in recent years, ranging from economic struggles to outbreaks of the Ebola virus to civil discord, the speaker was well-schooled in the subject of fear. And yet he repeatedly declared his determination to follow the exhortation to “fear not” – “do not be afraid.”

But what about the environment where we spend much of our time, the business and professional world? It is volatile, unpredictable, and can turn a prince into a pauper virtually overnight. Those possessing an entrepreneurial spirit know starting a business is risky. In the corporate world, executives and managers are constantly under pressure to produce; failure to do so can result in having to pack up their offices and find employment elsewhere.

Ambitious deadlines often cause considerable anxiety; fear arises when those deadlines seem unrealistic or unattainable. When a key client or customer becomes unhappy with our products or services, we fear losing their business, even if their reasons for dissatisfaction are beyond our control. Potential failure lurks at every corner. So how can we “fear not”?

Humanly speaking, this is difficult, if not impossible. But since the command comes from God, it seems accompanied by His promise to provide what we need during difficult times. Here are examples:

Rely on God’s presence. As David was preparing to surrender the leadership of Israel, he exhorted his son Solomon, his successor as king, “...*Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work...is finished*” (1 Chronicles 28:20).

Depend on God’s power. When trouble arrives, we are tempted to deal with it in our ability and strength alone. God tells us, however, to rely on Him and His resources. “*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand*” (Isaiah 41:10).

Trust in God’s purpose and plans. When unexpected setbacks occur, we wonder whether God cares – or if He is even aware. He promises He does know, and does care. He is never caught off guard by times of adversity. “*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future*” (Jeremiah 29:11).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What are you currently facing that is causing you some fear or anxiety? How are you dealing with it?
2. If someone were to look at your difficult circumstances and tell you, "Fear not," how would you respond?
3. Why do you think fear is such a common emotion? How can we discern whether fear is justified or not – and how can we avoid letting it control us?
4. Do you believe faith and confidence in God – trusting in His presence, power, purpose and plans – should have a significant effect on how we approach life, and whether we live in a state of continual fear and anxiety? Why or why not?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Genesis 46:2-4; Joshua 1:6-9; Matthew 1:18-21, 10:21-28; Luke 12:4-7; Hebrews 13:6