

MONDAY MANNA

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REFUSING TO LET FEAR GET THE BEST OF US

By Jim Mathis

U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." It is interesting that the Bible uses the phrases, "Do not fear" and "fear not," more than any others. Fear can be a motivator, but often it becomes a de-motivator. It can cause us to get moving or paralyse us into doing nothing. Rational action results when we put aside fear and act in a well-thought-out and pragmatic manner.

Chapman University in Orange, California conducted an annual survey asking Americans what are their greatest fears. I always assumed it was fear of public speaking, financial insecurity, or maybe dying. So, the results were a little surprising. Only two of the top 10 fears concern financial issues; five of the top 10 things we fear most are environmental issues.

Dying did not even make the top 10! I heard a speaker comment on this survey, suggesting environmental issues are not legitimate fears. As if only the fear of dying or fear of cancer or some other dreaded disease were real fears, dismissing pollution and the environment as not being worthy of concern.

Personally, I was very encouraged by this survey because it tells me people are not as afraid of the things that some politicians and TV news tell us we ought to be afraid of but see a bigger picture. According to this survey, the three biggest causative factors of fear are poor education; talk shows on both radio and TV, and crime TV programs. This apparently is why so many people fear things like crime, immigration, and natural disasters. If you want to be less fearful, turn off the TV and go to the library.

It is easy to get trapped by the fear of the day. We could term it, "the tyranny of the urgent." It takes discipline to stay focused on the big picture. My wife and I are always talking about five years from now: Where do we want to be and what do we want to be doing in five years? With these things in mind, what do we need to be doing today to get there? Here are a few things the Scriptures teach about why we should "fear not":

Remember we are not alone. When we start thinking we must face life's challenges and problems alone, we can remind ourselves that God promises to be with us. *"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).

Remember how we are valued. God places value on everything He has created, but the highest value by far is humankind. Because of this, we can trust in His guidance and provision. *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.... So, don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows"* (Matthew 10:28-31).

Remember God has a plan. When we feel fearful of what lies ahead, we have the assurance that God has His plans prepared for us and will see that they are fulfilled. *"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).

When Roosevelt talked about fearing fear, he meant do not panic. Do not let those fear-mongers who devote themselves to spreading fear get to you. We need to get back to work, focusing on things we can control and affect, rather than worrying about things we cannot control. Then trust in God who is in control.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

What are some of the things that cause fear and anxiety for you?

How many of these things that cause you to feel afraid can you control? What is the purpose in worrying about things you cannot control?

When you find yourself feeling fearful or anxious, do you ever find yourself turning to God and placing your concerns into His hands? Why or why not?

Which of the promises cited – we are not alone; we are highly valued, and God has a plan for each of us – is most meaningful or helpful for you in overcoming the fears that threaten to overwhelm us? Explain your answer.

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

Joshua 1:6-9

1 Kings 2:3

1 Chronicles 22:12-13

Isaiah 43:1-7

Luke 12:32

1 John 4:12,18