

## Thoughts on Fear

We have been hearing and talking quite a bit about fear these days. Perhaps some of us have been feeling real fear for the first time, or in a new way, or we are finding that we can't calm ourselves as usual. The coronavirus pandemic is a once-in-a-lifetime event for us and it is understandable that we are having strong reactions to it emotionally. So, I'd like to share some thoughts about fear, and a link to an excellent 15-minute podcast titled "Fear: How to Cope in Uncertain Times."

Before I get into that, please be reminded of what our state and local leaders have been saying: we don't have to be afraid. We really don't. The vast majority of us are healthy and feeling well, and will continue to be well. Our social distancing right now is to keep the virus from spreading and to give our health care workers the best opportunity to help those who are sick. So, we are all making necessary sacrifices to keep the bell curve of new infections as flat as possible. If we take the right precautions the chances of our getting sick are low.

And, we'll get through this. We always do. It will take some perseverance and adapting our lives for a few weeks, and perhaps beyond, but with God's help and each other's help, we will come out stronger on the other side. With some reflection we will have new insights and 'aha's' about ourselves and our world. Hopefully we will have figured some things out that create a better society and a better world. Let's pray for those things!

Yet for now, fear has reared its head and some are having a hard time releasing it or calming it. Here is a brief reflection on fear and some suggestions for how to handle it, if it seems to be a struggle for you right now. The link to the podcast is at the bottom of the page.

First, although it is true that Jesus said, "Fear not" more than anything else, it is important to know that not all fear is bad. There are healthy and appropriate kinds of fears—for example we want our kids and grandkids to be afraid of touching hot stoves and running out into busy streets. Healthy fears keep us from danger and can help us make wise decisions.

We have normal fears when we get married or relocate to a new area or a start new job or make new friends. God created us to be risk-takers, to live boldly and adventurously in his presence. When we do that, there will be some fear. This is healthy and can be creative and help us grow. It's a fruitful type of fear.

So the issue is not, will I have fear or won't I? The question is, will fear have control over me? Will I be controlled by fear in my thinking, in my decisions, my actions, and in my relationships and how I treat others? Can I break through patterns and cycles of fear that prevent me from experiencing the abundant life that Jesus promised? *This* is why Jesus consistently told people, "Fear not." What Jesus means is: don't *remain* in fear. Don't be *crippled by* fear. Don't let fear dictate your life and your decisions. Maybe let fear tell you something useful, but then let it go. Otherwise we get twisted in knots and our bodies suffer and our minds struggle to think clearly.

If fear is something that remains with you these days, or any days, and you feel like it is beginning to adversely affect you, here are some ideas that may help you regain a sense of peace and calm. When you listen to the podcast, the speaker will talk about your circle of influence. These are circle of influence ideas.

I compiled these from various sources, and many of them will be simple reminders of things we already know but may not think do to when fear has taken occupancy of mind and heart.

- Remember to breathe. Anxiety causes us to take shallow breaths and even sometimes hold our breath without knowing it. Take a couple moments each hour to stop what you're doing, turn off whatever noise or distractions are around you, and take a few relaxed, deeper breaths. It gets oxygen to our brain and vital organs, and just the action of breathing, especially exhaling, feels soothing. When exhaling, say a sentence prayer. For example, "God is my refuge and strength" or "Be still my soul" or "God is love" or remember Jesus' promise, "Peace I leave with you." You get the idea.
- Eat well, and drink water. Stay hydrated. When we are stressed, we forget to drink water and eat good food. A little stress eating is understandable, but not all the time!
- Exercise. Going outside is not only okay right now but recommended if it is physically possible and as long as we maintain social distancing. It's a sunny week, so take a walk and observe how amazing earth is, especially at this time of year. You can make it a gratitude walk, or a "wonder walk." That is, be in wonder at what you see and hear and sense. Let it clear your mind. Wave at others out walking and exchange friendly smiles and greetings—from six feet away 😊.
- Listen to some relaxing music, listen to or watch something funny. Exchange jokes and funny stories with family and friends. Laughter truly is a great medicine. As is good music. You can access just about anything online.
- Work on a project you've been putting off. Continue that craft, or go through items you've wanted to donate to Goodwill.
- Think of others. Make a phone call, write a letter or card to someone. Make a donation to a cause that you care about.
- Make a gratitude list. This is a good daily practice at any time, but particularly now. Make a list in the morning, then at bed time each night speak out loud the three things you were grateful for from that day. Vocalizing it makes it stick better.
- Imagine that fear is a person knocking at your door, wanting to come in. Calmly tell them you don't want what they're selling. They can go away. Then go back to what you were doing. We don't have to let fear in. It has no real power over us. The peace of God guards our hearts and minds like a sentry guarding a building (Philippians 4:7). Claim that!
- Read the psalms. The Psalms express a wide variety of emotions and meditations and prayers to God, with nothing held back. Read psalms until you hear your voice and your

emotions in one or two of them. Then pray those psalms each day until you feel better.  
The Psalmists always did!

Friends, keep well in heart and mind and body, and remember:

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?”*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?”* Psalm 27:1

Read the entire psalm, and in the place of the words “enemy,” “evildoer” and words like it, put the word “coronavirus” or whatever it is that you feel is coming against you right now, and pray that Psalm. Make it personal, and let God assure you and give you confidence and peace.

Here is the link to the podcast. It’s a helpful perspective, and he offers a couple of good meditative exercises to help with calming and letting go of fear:

<https://www.oneyoufeed.net/fear-how-to-cope-in-uncertain-times>

Joyfully in Christ,

Hallack