

## FACING YOUR FEARS

Dr. Jerome Frank was a professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University. He told the story that years ago he was flying across the US to attend a lecture. This was back in the 1960s before all of the modern security measures were installed at airports. He sat beside a man on a coast-to-coast flight who told him, "You know, I used to be deathly afraid of flying ever since that incident back in 1955." In 1955 a guy called Jack Graham planted a bomb in his mother's suitcase so he could claim the \$37,000 of life insurance he had purchased for her. All 44 people on board that flight died. The man said "I could never get it out of my mind that someone on board one of my flights might also be carrying a bomb." Dr. Frank asked, "Well, how did you deal with that problem?" He replied, "Well, I went to one of those special schools for people who are afraid of flying and they told me there was only one chance in 10 thousand that someone would bring a bomb on board my flight. That didn't make me feel much better. The odds were still too close. But then I reasoned that if there was only one chance in 10 thousand that one bomb would be on the plane, there was only one chance in 100 million that two bombs would be on board. And I could live with those odds." Dr. Frank said, "I do not understand. What good would that do you?" He replied, "Ever since then, I carry a bomb on board with me -- just to improve the odds." It is amazing what people will do because of fear. For many fear rules their life.

These are interesting and unprecedented days that we are living in. I never thought I would see anything like this in my lifetime. So how do we respond to the COVID-19 pandemic that is all around us this morning. We respond in faith and not fear.

1 Sam 17:45 David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. 47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands." 48 As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. 49 Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground. 50 So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

In this passage, the nation of Israel faced and feared a giant. Their fear of Goliath kept them from seeing victory. Often fear does the same to us – it keeps us from seeing spiritual victory in our lives. We must learn to face our fears the same way David did.

### 1. FACE YOUR ENEMY – don't run from your problems

For 40 days the Israelites and Philistines had faced each other and every day at morning and evening Goliath had come out to taunt and ridicule the soldiers and their God. His effect on the army was clear:

1 Sam 17:11 On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

For 40 days this giant had ridiculed the soldiers. For 40 days his words rang in their ears and they imagined the very worst that could happen. The human mind is an amazing thing.

Our minds can take us to the highest hopes or the deepest fears. What often happens in times like this is that our minds quickly take us to the worst possible scenarios.

You walk into a grocery store to pick a few things up, and you see that there is no bread, no meat, no milk and no toilet paper. Now, you did not go into the store to purchase any of these things, but as soon as you see that they are not there you realize you must immediately have them. So you panic. What if you cannot find these things? What if they are never available again? What if you have to go into isolation for the next 3 months with nothing? Fear.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

It is easy when we see a challenge to take it to the very worst scenario. Instead of prayer, we lose our peace. It means we have to control our minds. We have to bring every thought into captivity. Does this thought have any basis in reality? If it does not, then you take it captive. You do not dwell on it. We see things as they are, not as they could be or even might be. Rational caution can turn quickly into irrational hysteria. I read this in a Facebook post recently;

I am a doctor and Infectious Disease Specialist. I have been at this for 20 years seeing sick patients on a daily basis. I am not scared of Covid-19. I am rightly concerned for the welfare of those who are elderly, in frail health, or disenfranchised who stand to suffer most. What I am scared about is the loss of reason and wave of fear that has induced the masses of society into a spellbinding spiral of panic. But mostly, I'm scared about what message we are telling our kids when faced with a threat. Instead of reason, rationality, open mindedness and altruism, we are telling them to panic, be fearful, suspicious, reactionary and self-interested. The fact is the virus itself will not likely do much harm when it arrives. But our own behaviors and "fight for yourself above all else" attitude could prove disastrous. I implore you all. Temper fear with reason, panic with patience and uncertainty with education. Facts not fear. Clean hands. Open hearts. Our children will thank us for it.

So how do you walk in faith and not fear? You make sure that you face your enemy. You face the fear and take it captive. The other soldiers were not doing this. They were allowing the enemy to taunt them and ridicule them. They were giving in to fearful thinking. David did not.

1 Sam 17:48 As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.

David did not sit around thinking about what might happen to him. He knew that the Goliath was big, but he knew that God was bigger. He knew that he could be killed, but he trusted that God would be with him. He faced his fear head on and ran towards it instead of away from it. Running from problems never makes them go away. It only makes them stronger and bolder and you weaker and more defeated. A fear unfaced will become an enemy foothold in the future.

Do the thing you fear and the death of fear is certain – Ralph Waldo Emerson

The only thing we have to fear is fear itself – Franklin D Roosevelt

Fear imprisons, faith liberates; fear paralyzes, faith empowers; fear disheartens, faith encourages; fear sickens, faith heals; fear makes useless, faith makes serviceable - and, most of all, fear puts hopelessness at the heart of life, while faith rejoices in its God. -- Harry Emerson Fosdick

One of things you notice in times like this is that fearful people tend to create fear in those around them. People of courage likewise tend to build faith and courage in those around them. David's faith carried him through life and resulted in other's of faith joining him along the way.

1 Chr 11:11 this is the list of David's mighty men: Jashobeam, a Hacmonite, was chief of the officers; he raised his spear against three hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter. 12 Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men. 13 He was with David at Pas Dammim when the Philistines gathered there for battle. At a place where there was a field full of barley, the troops fled from the Philistines. 14 But they took their stand in the middle of the field. They defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the LORD brought about a great victory.

Eleazar and the other mighty men took their stand in a barley field. One of the tactics of the enemy was to destroy the crops of the Israelites and starve them into weakness. This is also the plan of the devil. He seeks to destroy whatever strengthens us. It is time to take a stand. The church has been running for to long and letting the devil destroy what God created to be good and bring joy.

## 2. FOCUS ON GOD – measure problems against God and not yourself

There is no question that Goliath was a formidable opponent. He was a giant. He stood over 9 feet tall and wore bronze armor that weighed 125 pounds. He wore bronze shin guards to protect his legs, and had a javelin and a spear with an iron point that alone weighed about 15 pounds. He was MASSIVE! Compared to any other man he was a giant, but to God he was nothing.

Words like pandemic and virus can spark fear in us because they are unseen and unknown. It is one thing when you have a giant that is standing before you. It is another when all you see everywhere is people who may or may not be infected with something that can kill you.

The important thing is to put your life into perspective. You look at the facts. There are very few people who are currently infected. Given the population of this city, the overwhelming odds are that you will not even get it. However, even if you did get it, unless you are already very sick the overwhelming odds are that you will just have the symptoms of a cold or flu. The worst case is that you get the virus and you get very sick and die from it. That is the worst possible case. Even then we know as believers that death is not the end for us. We have a future that is fixed and sure.

Through history Christians have been at the forefront of helping people who were sick and dying. This is because of the hope that is in us. The early church would care for victims of disease and plague. They did this because they knew they were secure in Christ. Throughout the centuries it was Christians who started the first hospitals and centers to treat leprosy and other contagious diseases.

Back in 1527 a deadly plague hit the town of Wittenberg. Martin Luther responded to the plague in faith, even having infected people brought and cared for in his own home with his wife and young son. He wrote to a friend these words, "I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of other. If my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. This is God-fearing faith - it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God."

Martin Luther responded in wisdom and faith, not fear. The problem with fear is that we lose sight of God and focus only on our own strength.

In 1875 an outlaw struck terror into the hearts of thousands in the American west. Like a tornado through the Sierra Nevadas he terrorized the Wells Fargo stage line for 13 years. His very name Black Bart was enough to spook even the most rugged frontiersmen. He robbed 29 stagecoaches and he did it without ever firing a shot. His weapon was his reputation. His ammunition was fear. A black hood hid his face. No victim ever saw him. No sheriff could ever track his trail. He was the most notorious, most feared man in America. However, when the authorities finally caught up with him and his mask came off they didn't find a bloodthirsty bandit from Death Valley. They found Charles E. Bolton was a mild-mannered druggist from Decatur Illinois. The man the papers pictured storming through the mountains on horseback was, in reality, so afraid of horses that he rode to and from his robberies in a buggy. He never once fired a shot because he never once loaded his gun.

Many of our fears are tissue-paper thin, and a single courageous step would carry us clear through them. -- Brendan Francis

There was once a mouse that was terrified of cats until a magician agreed to transform him into a cat. This resolved his fear, until he met a dog, so the magician turned him into a dog. This was fine until the mouse-turned-cat-turned-dog met a tiger. Once again the magician turned him into a tiger. But when the tiger came complaining that he had met a hunter the magician refused to help. He said, "I will make you a mouse again, for though you have the body of a tiger you still have the heart of a mouse".

Like the mouse, sometimes we try to build formidable exteriors only to tremble inside with fear. We face our fears with force thinking that somehow muscles create for us security but it does not. If military power meant strength then Joseph Stalin should have been fearless. Instead, the Russian premier was afraid to go to bed at night. He had seven different bedrooms, all locked and he slept in a different one each night to prevent assassination. He employed a servant whose sole task was to guard and protect his tea bags.

### 3. FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE – remember God's many blessings

When David told Saul that he would go and defeat the giant, Saul thought he was crazy;

1 Samuel 17:33-37 Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth." 34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, 35 I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. 36 Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. 37 The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you."

David was not focusing on what he DID NOT have, he was focusing on what he DID have. He knew that God had used him in the past and that God was able to use him in the future.

I have never seen anything like what I am seeing today. Never in my 56 years on this earth have I seen this. That should say something.

I have never before walked into a store and thought “I wonder if they will have any food left to buy.” I know that there are many people around the world who daily live with what we have seen in the past weeks. They live in places where they do not know if they will have a next meal. The very last thing on their minds is “I hope I have enough toilet paper.” I say this to remind us all that God has been good to us. God is faithful, and His faithfulness will continue long after this crisis has come and gone.

You know the old map makers, before they had the modern instruments that we have, when they would draw maps, they would draw maps as far out as they had been, as far out as they had explored, and then when they reached the nether point of their exploration, they had not known what would be beyond. And you can see this on old maps, they would write on there, "Beyond this there be dragons." Now they'd never seen a dragon, but they didn't know what was out there so they imagined the worst. The imagined dragons, when what actually lay beyond was a new land full of new possibilities.

We do not know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future. We do not know what tomorrow brings, but when we remember God's goodness to us in the past it reminds us and reassures us that we need not be afraid.

In the story, Saul tries to give David his armor, but it does not fit. There is nothing wrong with armor and swords, if you know how to use them. David didn't. He did however know how to use a staff and a sling. He used what he had to defeat the giant. Likewise in our lives sometimes we think if only we had this or that we could defeat the giants that face us. If we only had more money or the right spouse or more education then everything would be easy. What we fail to see is that God chooses to use what he has already given us.

Don't fight your battles with other people's armor. Don't rely on others to face your fears – this only leads to dependence and a lack of maturity.

#### 4. FAITHFULLY POINT TO CHRIST – give God the glory

1 Samuel 17:46 This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head... and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. 47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

Notice how clear David was that it was God and not himself that would defeat Goliath. His hope was in God and not his own resources. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can truly live the Christian life. The giants we face can only be conquered in Jesus.

Eph 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

When I think of the issues facing our nation we recognize that there is no way in and of ourselves that we can meet the needs. It is so easy to get discouraged by what we see around us. At times like this we need to remember that God is in control.

What God requires of us is faithfulness, nothing else. We are to stand up and face the giants which stand in the way of the gospel bringing life and hope to the people around us. So where are you at today? Are you facing any giants in your life?

Don't run – face them head on. Measure your giants against God and not yourself. Remember how God has already blessed you and give God the glory when they fall.

During the coming weeks it is important that we focus on witnessing, not worrying. That we focus on helping, not hiding. Be wise – but don't be fearful. Use this as an opportunity to not pull back but to share your faith with others like never before. God is with us. We do not need to be afraid.

Alexander McLaren, was a great Scottish preacher. He once told the story about when he was a boy living near Glasco. When he was sixteen he got a job, away from home. His family lived on a farm outside of town, and his new job was in town. He didn't have a horse to ride to work, so he would stay with a friend during the week and walk the six miles home on the weekend.

He said that the first week of work went well, but then the weekend came. His father had said to him "When Friday comes, I want you to walk home because you're mother and I will have missed you. This is the first time you've been away from home and so on Friday night when you get off work, we want you to come home." Between the city and the farm where they lived, there was a deep ravine. It was a scary place, dark and foreboding looking. A place where you would expect robbers to be. There were people that had been murdered down in that deep ravine. As a sixteen year old boy, he began to imagine all the dangers that could await him there. He knew that coming from the city of Glasco to his home, he would have to go through that ravine Friday night. And he didn't want to walk through it at night time. So he said to his dad, "I will be tired Friday night after work, so can I just spend Friday night and then come home Saturday morning." His dad had said, "No son, your mother and I want you to come home Friday night."

That Friday after work he began to walk toward his farm house. The whole way he was thinking about that ravine, imagining all the terrible things that awaited him there. He tried to whistle to make himself feel better, and that didn't seem to help very much. When he got to that ravine, and he looked down into that dark valley. He just stopped. He did not want to go down there into the darkness. As he stood there afraid to go forward, he heard a sound coming up from the darkness. He heard a stirring on the road ahead. He was so frozen with fear that he could not move. Something was moving towards him.

Then out from the darkness came a form that he soon realized was his father. He said, "son, I came to meet you. I was so lonely for you. I came to meet you, and I just thought we'd walk home together." And Alexander McLaren said, "You'll never know the difference that made." He said, "with my dad there by my side," he said, "we walked through that valley and I had not a fear in this world."

Deuteronomy 31:8 The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.