

Introduction

Several years ago, Gallup Inc. conducted a survey to determine people's biggest fears. They are as follows: snakes, public speaking, heights, being enclosed in a small space, and spiders and insects. Gallup assumed something in conducting the survey, people have fears, and that's right. They do don't they? The fact is that fear is a universal human experience that routinely affects people for ill. But it doesn't have to affect us for ill. We can lay our fears to rest and David teaches us how to do just that in Psalm 27:1-6.

Fear

Verses 2 and 3 cite the circumstance that gave rise to this psalm, which was likely David's desperate situation in 1 Samuel 23-24. His enemy King Saul and his troops were pursuing him as a pack of wild animals does its prey.

Two synonyms in verses 1 and 3 identify how people normally respond in circumstances like that one. It's with "**fear**" or "**dread**." The word "**devour**" in verse 2 shows us the content of David's fear. It was King Saul killing him, which assists us in defining what fear is. It's the anticipation of harm. We think something bad will possibly, probably, or certainly happen to us. That is fear.

Author Ken Albrecht contends in that regard that there are five basic fears: (1) *Extinction* – the fear of annihilation or ceasing to exist; (2) *Mutilation* – the fear of bodily pain or harm; (3) *Loss of Autonomy* – the fear of being controlled by outside factors or forces; (4) *Separation* – the fear of being rejected, disrespected, or devalued by others; and (5) *Ego-death* – the fear of humiliation, shame, or disapproval. According to Albrecht, those five form a simple hierarchy that he calls a "**feararchy**." Every particular fear, he argues, is nothing more than an aspect of one of those five.

He's essentially right. A relative of mine, for instance, fears

dentists and won't go to them. What he actually fears is "**mutilation**," that they'll inflict pain on him if he does. Or a woman I know fears telling her children that they're overly intrusive in her life. What she actually fears is "**separation**," that they'll reject her, if she does.

However we analyze it though, what fear is generally is clear. We anticipate being harmed.

When Fear Is Smart

And it's beneficial that we do. Fear is what is called a "**self-correcting mechanism**." It's an internal warning system that danger is near. Its purpose is to compel us to take action that avoids things harming us. That means that it's smart to fear some things, implying that it's foolish not to fear them.

Let's go back to David. His small cohort of men was no match for King Saul and his troops. He knew King Saul would kill him if he confronted him and so, fearing that, he didn't. He fled from him instead, which was the smart thing to do. It would have been foolish not to.

It's the same with us. It's smart to fear some things. One fear in fact is the very foundation of knowledge and wisdom. According to Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10, "**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of 'knowledge' and 'wisdom.'**" Or to say it another way, fearing God is the beginning of smartness. God isn't mean but He is dangerous. It's smart, therefore, to anticipate harm if we displease Him. It's foolish not to. But it isn't just God. It's countless other things as well such as electricity, tornadoes, high blood pressure, final exams, worn brakes, hornets, and so on. Fearing those things is smart. It compels us to take action that avoids the harm they can do to us.

But it's here that a critical issue arises. I read an interesting factoid. The commands "**Do not fear**" and "**Do not be afraid**" occur 103 times in the King James Version of the Bible. I don't know of any other command as frequently repeated as that one. It's implied three times in our text, twice in the rhetorical questions in verse 1, "**Whom**

shall I fear,” and **“Whom shall I dread.”** The assumed answers are **“No one and nothing.”** It’s also implied in the declaration in verse 3, **“My heart will not fear.”** Don’t fear, David teaches, even when **“evildoers come upon us”** and **“a host encamp against us.”** But how do we reconcile that with the idea that it’s smart to fear some things?

It’s simple. In our fallen state, what is beneficial can become detrimental, which is the case with fear. It’s something good that’s beneficial. But it can become something bad that’s detrimental if we let it. So, we don’t let it. We do two things instead.

Be Bold

The first is to be bold. Notice the word David uses in verse 3, **“confident.”** The Hebrew word translated **“confident”** suggests boldness in our deciding and doing.

Recall something I’ve said before. God has given each of us the leadership over our own lives – the freedom to decide and do. The problem is that we commonly surrender that freedom of ours to fear. We allow fear alone to dictate what we decide and do.

A family member of mine, a “B” and “C” student in high school, felt God calling him to go to college, play basketball, and then become a teacher and coach. But he decided not to because **“I’m not smart enough to get through college.”** He feared failure particularly and Albrecht’s **“ego-death,”** being humiliated, more generally. And he allowed that fear, not God’s call, to dictate what he decided and did.

So many people are just like him. They surrender the leadership of their lives to fear, allowing it alone to dictate what they decide and do.

But David didn’t. According to verse 3, he was **“confident”** instead. That is, he was bold in his deciding and doing. In 1 Samuel 24:1-7, for instance, he had the opportunity to kill King Saul and end the threat to his life. But he didn’t. He spared him declaring, **“Far be it from me to stretch out my hand against Yahweh’s anointed.”** Fear didn’t dictate what he decided and did. What was good and right dictated it.

David is our model. We should be bold in the context of our fear just as he was. We allow what is good and right not what is fearful dictate our deciding and doing. By what is good I mean what is most beneficial to God, others, and/or us. By what is right I mean what is moral. Sometimes, circumstances arise in which doing what is good and right will possibly, probably, or even certainly cause us immediate harm. But we do it anyway, knowing that, sooner or later and in one way or another, the benefit will outweigh the harm.

A 38 year-old woman was engaged to a man she had dated for five years. She came to realize though she shouldn't marry him, primarily because she was a follower of Jesus and he wasn't. So even though her **"biological clock was ticking"** and she might spend the rest of her life alone, which were fears of hers, she broke off the engagement.

Grasp what she did? She allowed what was good and right, being equally yoked (2 Corinthians 6:14), not what she feared dictate what she decided and did. She was bold in other words and so should we be.

Be Joyful

We should be something else in the context of our fear – joyful.

People often aren't. On the contrary, they often allow fear to drain them of their joy. A 50 year-old woman I knew in Canton had had breast cancer. A surgeon had removed the tumor, given her follow up treatments, and declared her free of it. But she was afraid she'd get it again. **"I have a nagging sense of doom,"** she told me, **"It's always in the back of my mind that it's going to return. It's a curse."** Her comment reflected an inner and outer striving. She lived in a covert state of alarm that effectively drained her of joy.

Fear will do the same to us if we allow it. So, don't allow it. Look at the triumphant note that ends our text in verse 6. It's stirring. David was hunted by a malevolent and powerful enemy. Yet, he was able to **"offer sacrifices with shouts of joy"** and to **"sing praises."** He had joy in other words and so should we.

Joy is a condition not a feeling. It's a pervasive and habitual sense that all is well with us. It isn't the same as happiness, which is a feeling, though it does make us happy. Happiness is specific to an object, circumstance, or experience, such as having a sweetheart, making the dean's list, getting a raise, or being on vacation, to name a few. But joy is overarching. All is well when we have it even in the face of harm.

We anticipate that our child will marry poorly, that we won't have enough money to pay this winter's gas bill, that our cancer will return, that our company will downsize and make cuts, that our bodies will age and decline, that a loved one will die, that terrorists will attack, and on it goes. We anticipate harm in other words.

Nevertheless, we have an overriding sense that all is well with us. Joy not fear prevails in us and dictates the emotions we feel.

How to Be Bold and Joyful

So there we have it, the call of Psalm 27. Don't let our fear become detrimental. Be bold and joyful in the context of it instead, which is where verses 5 and 6a come in. David expresses something about which he's certain. It's that God will "**conceal**" and "**hide**" him and "**lift**" him up. We call that certainty of his "**trust**" in God. Now look at the conjunction "**For**" that begins verse 5. It links verse 5 to the previous verses, which implies a defining insight. Trust in God is the source of boldness and joy when we fear something.

We all know that of course, which is why we advise alarmed people what we do, "**Trust God.**" We know that boldness and joy, not fear, will prevail if they do. They know it too, which is why they frequently reply the way they do, "**I trust Him but . . .**" Scores of alarmed Christians have told me that over the years, the word "**but**" implying something. They know they need to trust Him in order to have boldness and joy and they want to. But they don't because they can't.

And you know what? They're right. They can't and here's why. It's because trust is an indirect freedom. People can't just choose to

trust God in the moment of fear and instantaneously trust Him. They have to do something else first. If they haven't done it, they can't and won't trust Him. And if they won't do it, they never will trust Him. So, we do an injustice to people if we only tell them to trust God. We must also tell them the something first they must do in order to trust Him.

What is that? David reveals it in verse 4. Note the opening line, **"One thing I shall seek."** It expresses what we call **"singleness of purpose."** We will one thing, that is, we focus our will on one thing. Verse 4 goes on to disclose what that one thing is. It's two actions that are so strongly linked David considers them **"one thing."** Those actions are to **"behold"** God and **"inquire"** in His temple. The words **"behold"** and **"inquire"** pinpoint two priorities within our singleness of purpose – the person and will of God. We focus our will on Him and His will. We preoccupy ourselves with engaging Him and doing what he wants.

The *First Aim* study on our church's website explains in detail how to do that. But for now, recognize we must do it in order to be bold and joyful in the context of fear. We must focus our will on engaging God, that is, acting upon and interacting with Him, and doing what He wants.

Focusing our will on that brings us into an increasingly deepening relationship with Him. We come to know Him, which in turn causes us to trust Him. We don't have to try to conjure up trust in the moment of fear. It's already there in us as a consequence of knowing Him. And boldness and joy naturally prevail because it is.

Conclusion

The devoted friend of Jesus, F.B. Meyer, captured the essence of this and I quote him in closing: **"The heart that realizes that God incarnate is in the midst will be quiet in the middle of alarm."** You and I can have just that, a quiet heart in the middle of alarm. And we will when we focus our will on the person and will of God. It will lay our fears to rest – make us bold and joyful in the midst of them – if we do.