



# Give It Up - Fear

Psalm 27

## TRINITY PULPIT

**W**hen I googled how many phobias there are, the list was endless. One list suggests that there are 530 documented phobias. However, the idea that there are endless subjects of our fear might mean that fear has no limits. If you look at a list of phobias you will find everything. There are those who fear heights, the dark, walking, driving, flying, insects, gold, insanity, mirrors, toads, women, men, confined space, money and even going to bed. I think you get the picture. When it comes to fear, it is many times individually experienced and fear does not seem to have limits. I do not in any way want to belittle the difficulty and uneasiness that certain fears inflict on so many people. As a young man in my early twenties, I struggled with anxiety attacks for almost two years. I have counseled many people over the years that have suffered from anxiety attacks and I can attest they are very real causes of fear. Fear is real and for some people it is not merely a passing thought and can be debilitating.

It is arguable how many times “fear not” or “do not be afraid” are found in the Bible. There are websites that include 365 “fear not” statements from the Bible. The interpretation of this is that God gave us one for every day. This is a wonderful thought and to be honest goes to the heart of our loving God and God’s promises. However, the problem is that it just is not true. Some claim there are only about 80 such statements found in the Bible. There are others who suggest that “fear not” is found in some form over 400 times in the Bible. Why the discrepancy? It depends on whether you are counting the word for fear, or the word fear with “fear not” or how you interpret various Hebrew and Greek words. This, of course, is a useless argument. It really does not matter how many times the statement “fear not” is found in the Bible. Are we to imagine that if God said, “fear

not” only once in the Bible we are to view it as a lesser statement? Of course not. However, God says fear not over and over again. God speaks to our fearful people who are afraid for their lives, afraid of their calling and afraid of their situations.

The Bible speaks of numerous moments when God or God through Jesus speaks those words of comfort “do not be afraid.” However, we must admit that fear accompanies us throughout our lives. Our fears are sometimes valid and sometime they are not, but in each case God speaks to us in words of comfort.

We have been considering this Lenten Season as to what it means to give it up. In particular, we have considered giving up control. We learned that to try to be in control of everything and everyone is exhausting, disappointing and useless. We considered last week what it meant to give up idols. We identified how many good things we have in our lives; yes even the good gifts of God like family, children, money and provisions can become idols. We talked about how to keep that perspective when it comes to idols.

Today we consider what it means to give up fear. Fear is real. There is no doubt about it. In fact, fear actually has a positive side like every other emotion we might feel. Fear in its basic form can inform us to pay attention, to act, or to self-preserve. The Fight or Flight process that occurs naturally in our brain is an incredible gift from God that enables us to recognize danger and then how to react.

Fear in the sense of reverence is also a positive aspect of fear. We are to fear the Lord. That is to reverence the Lord knowing that God is God and God is all-powerful and God is judge. However, we also know that fear can control our lives, so much so that we are paralyzed to act and to live.



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The kind of fear we are speaking of is a fear that comes with all of the cares and anxieties of life. Here in Psalm 27, David begins where we must begin when we are dealing with fear. We can imagine that David had learned how to turn to God in his fear. The Psalms of David are filled with David crying out to God for help, comfort, deliverance and even sleep. David would have learned how to overcome fear. As a young shepherd boy, how many times do you think he was afraid and yet found courage? Whether it was fighting off wild animals or that day as a mere boy he stood face-to-face with the giant Goliath. Then, as a man, he would find himself hunted by King Saul and Saul's army. Twice there was an attempt on his life. Maybe his greatest fear was to face his own sin with Bathsheeba, which as a very different kind of fear... a fear of being discovered and exposed. David knew fear. Listen to these first two verses again:

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?

David begins where we must begin in regards to fear. David begins with the Lord. The Lord is my light and my salvation. David turns to the Lord in his fear. David does not try to carry his fear by himself. David does not think he is going to overcome his fear by himself. David turns first to the Lord.

Why should we turn to the Lord in our moment of fear? We turn to the Lord because we know that God cares for us. In 1 Peter 5:6-7, Peter writes "Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxieties upon Him because He cares for you."

We turn to God in our moments of fear because we know God cares for us. The instruction of Peter is interesting because he gives us a word picture. He says first of all we humble ourselves before God. When we are fearful we begin with humility. We acknowledge that we need God to help us. We humble ourselves under God's almighty hand. Then Peter says cast your anxieties upon Him. What does that mean practically?

The word cast is our key word. It is used in other places in the New Testament. When Jesus is entering Jerusalem in what we call the Triumphant Entry, we are told that the people took off their cloaks and cast them upon the colt or on the ground where Jesus was riding. The picture there is to take something off and actually place it somewhere else.

One commentator says that casting our cares, fears and anxieties upon God is a moment of trust. It is to trust that God cares for us and here is the key... that the God who cares, acts. We trust the God is active and not inactive. Now God's actions may not be on our timing or even our first choice, but God is God and we trust God cares for us.

In our fear, we turn where David turns. The Lord is my light and my salvation. The Lord is the stronghold of my life. If we want to give up fear, we must begin with turning to God.

David continues that we must turn to God because God is our light and our salvation. What does it mean for God to be our light and salvation? As I have reflected on those words, I believe they are an indication of God's presence now and forever. There is a sense that we need not fear because God is with us now and God will be with us forever. That is God's promise.

God is my light. The Bible is filled with night and day, dark and light imagery. Although there is much that God does in the darkness and sometimes God's presence is felt the most in the darkness, light still is the image that we get about God. When I think about light in regards to fear, I think about the great statement from Psalm 119:105 that simply says "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." The concept there is the Lord gives us light to where we are and where we are going.

God's word is a lamp unto my feet. It is a beautiful picture of God's presence with us right where we are. Wherever we find ourselves, God is with us. A lamp unto my feet is the picture of light shining down upon our feet in the dark, and all we can see is where we are right now and what is going to be our next step. Sometimes that is all we get. God helps us to see where we are right now and what is our next step and that is all we have.

Maybe you are going through something right now and you don't know what to do next. You don't know what the future holds. You are fearful of the next step. God's word is a lamp unto our feet. When we turn to the Lord and ask for God's help, God illumines our situation and takes us to the next step. Sometimes just being able to take the next step is the difference between fear and trust.

The Psalmist continues and is a light unto my path. This is the picture of seeing down the path. We might now see the destination, but it is a picture of God

leading us down the road. In that place of fear, we learn that God gives light to our present situation, gives us the courage to take the next step and shines a light on down the road even as we continue to follow Him.

David, in his fear, turns to the Lord because the Lord is with us right here and now. God brings to us clarity, understanding and peace that comes with it.

David continues, the Lord is my salvation. The term here is important. The term means to deliver us. David was convinced that not only God would shine a light upon his fear and his situation, but God would also deliver him. Let's consider this for a moment. God is our salvation. Not that only God will provide salvation, but God is our salvation. Now for us to be saved, we have to be being saved from something. This indicates that our fears are real, and in many instances they are credible.

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In a culture that has become violent, fear of violence is real. In a relationship that has become volatile, fear is real. When you get a diagnosis that is serious, fear of dying, fear of living with the disease and the changes that will come are real. When we think of the future and the future is unknown and uncertain, those are real fears.

God saves us from our fears. God delivers us from our fears. This word is a word of what is to come. David turns to the Lord and the Lord gives light. That is God is present to us here and now and shines a light for us to keep moving. David, however, adds to this that God's deliverance will come.

We cannot see to the end, but God is already there. We cannot see where it is all going, but here is what we can know... God is there. For God is our salvation. God is our deliverance.

Let's think about it in regards to our own mortality for a moment. We don't know when we are going to die, nor do we know how. We cannot see to the end. Yet, when we trust God with our salvation through Jesus, we have an assurance that once that day arrives... God will save us. God will deliver us from death to life.

That is David's point. I can count on God not only

today, but forever. So, why should I fear?

David's last description is that God is the stronghold of my life. Others translate this "God is the strength of my life." Now we know a stronghold was a fortified city. It was a place of safety. When you were in a fortified city, you could feel safe going about your life knowing that your enemies were being kept at bay. So, to say that the Lord is my stronghold is one way of saying I can live today without fear. However, using the other translation is also powerful. The Lord is the strength of my life. This suggests that God is fully and totally our strength.

He's the stronghold of my *life*. No part or season in life is excluded from His protective power! He's not partially strong for a portion of our lives; He's the stronghold of our lives. It's precisely why the psalmist can immediately ask the question (needing no answer) about the future, "Of whom shall I be afraid?" Nothing in the present or the future that came David's way could subvert God's hold of him.

David, in his moment of fear, gives us a great example to follow. Turn to the Lord and not to our self. God will give us light right where we are for the step ahead. God even will be waiting for us when we reach the end. God will walk with us every season along the way. If this is true, "then why should I fear?" asks David.

The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.

--Oswald Chambers in *The Highest Good*, cited in *Christianity Today*, February 9, 1998, 78.

As we come to the Lord's Table today, we do so remembering that fear is real but God is greater and so are God's promises. I think about Jesus on the night he was betrayed. He knew the cross was coming. He knew the pain that would be is. He knew the pain of being betrayed by all who had vowed to follow Him. He knew what was coming and yet, He had the courage and obedience to follow God's will for His life.

