



HELP! – My Fear, His Protection
Psalm 56

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas
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HELP! – My Fear, His Protection Psalm 56

All of us have fears, and suffer from various phobias. So this morning, I want to take a quick survey of our church. So, how many of you are afraid of spiders? This picture is for you, from the famous movie *Home Alone*. How many of you are afraid of snakes? This picture is for you. Be careful next time you go to the bathroom. How many of you are afraid of heights? This picture is for you. How many of you are afraid of close spaces? You might not want to take up caving as a hobby. And I hear that some people are afraid of clowns. Anyone here really afraid of clowns? I suppose the scariest thing would be ... meeting a clown in a cave.

Beyond the fear of snakes and spiders and clowns, are other very real fears. A cancer diagnosis is a real fear. Your house being hit by a meteor, not so much. Most of the things we fear never happen, and I'm going to talk more about worry in a couple of weeks. But this morning, I'm talking about real fear. Being eye to eye with real problems and real danger. I'm talking about real life issues that give us good reason to fear.

When we're afraid, we cry out to God. And what do we want Him to do? We want Him to fix it! We don't want a Bible verse; we want Him to fix the problem. But why do we believe He will fix it? Because of Bible verses like Psalm 46:1, which is a promise of God's help. ***“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”*** God gave His word that He would show up when we need Him most. He promises His comfort, His strength, His guidance, His help, and always His love. He promised! Each week, we're looking at a promise from Scripture, learning how to pray that verse, and learning how to trust Him to help. So, whatever you're going through, and whenever you cry out to God for help, you can know that ***He promises to be there when you need Him most.***

This morning, we're going to look at Psalm 56. David, the great warrior-king was afraid. So if you're afraid, you're in good company. And if David can cry out to God when he's afraid, so can we. Listen to Psalm 56, to David's admission of fear and his cry to God for help.

¹O God, have mercy on me, for people are hounding me. My foes attack me all day long.
²I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are boldly attacking me.
³But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. ⁴I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me? ⁵They are always twisting what I say; they spend their days plotting to harm me. ⁶They come together to spy on me – watching my every step, eager to kill me. ⁷Don't let them get away with their wickedness; in your anger, O God, bring them down. ⁸You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book. ⁹My enemies will retreat when I call to you for help. This I know: God is on my side! ¹⁰I praise God for what he has promised; Yes, I praise the Lord for what he has promised. ¹¹I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me? ¹²I will fulfill my vows to you, O God, and will offer a sacrifice of thanks for your help. ¹³For you have rescued me from death; you have kept my feet from slipping. So now I can walk in your presence, O God, in your life-giving light. (Psalm 56, NLT).

FEAR IS ...

What is fear? Fear is the anticipation and dread that something bad is going to happen. Sadness is about the past, what has happened; fear is about the future, what might happen. Fear is also the reaction to sudden surprise or shock. Fear is an emotional response to an intimidating power or an overwhelming circumstance. Fear is also a sense of uncertainty, helplessness, and lack of control.

And if we're honest, all of us live with this tension between faith and fear.

Fear produces chaos and anxiety.

Faith produces calm and peace.

Fear dreads. Faith rests.

Fear is the anticipation that something bad is going to happen.

Faith is the conviction that God is there no matter what happens.

Fear anticipates trouble. Faith anticipates God.

Fear looks at circumstances and panics.

Faith looks at God and trusts.

“When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You.”

There are examples of fear throughout the Bible. David is one of them. David was a man of great faith. His faith was born on the plains of Bethlehem as a shepherd boy. His faith demonstrated as he opposed the giant Goliath. His faith jumps from the pages of the Bible and from the many psalms he composed. The Bible describes David as a “man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22). But he admits his fear. Psalm 55 and 56 are twin psalms. The same theme. The same peek into David’s heart. “Hear my prayer, O God ... the pressure of the enemy is intense ... My heart is in anguish ... Fear and trembling overwhelm me, and I can’t stop shaking ... I wish had wings like a dove, so I could fly away ...” So, if you’re afraid, you’re in good company. David would say, “I know exactly what you’re going through.”

And when he was afraid, he asked God to hurry. I love the honesty of that. “O Lord, come quickly to help me” (Psalm 40:13, NIV). “O Lord, I am calling to you. Please hurry! Listen when I cry to you for help!” (Psalm 141:1, NLT). “Please hurry to my aid, O God. You are my helper and my savior; O Lord, do not delay” (Psalm 70:5, NLT). “Answer me quickly, for I am in deep trouble!” (Psalm 69:17, NLT). When we’re in trouble, when we’re afraid, we want God to show up NOW.

Even Jesus expressed fear – or since He was God, if not fear, uncertainly distress – and He cried out to God. He knew the crucifixion was coming, and He prayed in agony. Three times He asked His Father to “remove the cup” of suffering, to find another way. And from the cross, He cried out, “My God, my God, why have You abandoned Me?” The Bible says, “While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the one who could rescue him from death. And God heard his prayers because of his deep reverence” (Hebrews 5:7, NLT). If Jesus can cry out to God, with fears and tears, then so can we.

BUT GOD SAID ...

But God said, “Do not fear.” Over and over again in the Bible, He tells people, “Do not fear.” He does not expect to deny our fear or be naïve. When He says, “Do not fear,” He is reassuring us that He promises to show up when we need Him most.

- When Abraham was afraid to follow God, the Lord reassured him, “Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you” (Genesis 26:24, NAS).
- When the Lord delivered the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery, they were still afraid. So Moses said to them, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today” (Exodus 14:13, NAS).
- When the Hebrews feared their enemies, Moses reassured them. “Do not fear them, for the Lord your God is the one fighting for you ... The Lord is the one who goes ahead of you” (Deuteronomy 3:22, 31:8, NAS).
- The Lord called Joshua to lead the Hebrews into the Promised Land. It was a big task and he reassured Joshua, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not (fear) or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9, NAS).
- David passed the promise to his son Solomon, “Be strong and courageous, and act; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God, my God, is with you” (1 Chronicles 28:20, NAS).
- The Lord reassured King Jehoshaphat, “Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God’s” (2 Chronicles 20:15, NAS).
- The Lord reassured King Hezekiah, “Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed ... for the one with us is greater than the one with him” (2 Chronicles 32:7, NAS).
- And, as the Lord reassured Israel, He reassures us. “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand ... Do not fear, I will help you ... Do not fear, for you are Mine!” (Isaiah 41:10, 13, 43:1, NAS).

Time and time again, the Lord reassured His people, “Do not fear.” God knows what you’re going through. He knows what you’re worried about. He cares about what you’re feeling and He cares about what happens to you. And because He promises to there when we need Him most, He says, “Do not fear.”

PSALM 56

David was facing real danger. This was not some irrational fear or unfounded worry. David was eye to eye with real danger. That may be your situation too.

Here is David’s prayer in Psalm 56. “O God, have mercy on me, for people are hounding me. My foes attack me all day long. I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are boldly attacking me” (Psalm 56:1-2, NLT). “O God, Have mercy on me ... Look on me with compassion. Look at what I’m going through and take pity on me.”

David mentioned his “foes.” David faced real enemies, who were hounding him and chasing him. Who wanted to trample him and crush him. He was under attack. And that’s how you may feel. Your fear, your foe, is hounding you and you feel like you are under attack.

David said, “They are always twisting what I say; they spend their days plotting to harm me. They come together to spy on me – watching my every step, eager to kill me. Don’t let them get away with their wickedness; in your anger, O God, bring them down” (Psalm 56:5-7, NLT). His foes were distorting his words and conspiring to ambush him. He felt the pressure “all day long.” And in all honesty, David demands, “Don’t let them get away with it Lord! Bring them to their knees.” Jesus said something about turning the other cheek, but David did not hesitate to ask God to annihilate his enemies.

Even though we’re not going through what David was going through, our fears are real. So, what are you afraid of? I’m not talking about snakes and spiders. And I’m not talking the ultimate fear we all share, of losing a spouse or a child. What is your fear? As a pastor, this is what people have told me.

- “My company is not doing very well and I’m afraid of losing my job.”
- “I just lost my job and I’m afraid my savings is going to run out before I find a new one.”
- “When the market tanked a couple of years ago, we lost a lot of money. Now I’m afraid we won’t have enough for retirement.”
- The child who said, “My parents fight all the time, and I’m afraid they’re going to get a divorce.”
- The wife who said, “Now that the divorce is final, I’m afraid of being alone.”
- The parent who said, “I was in a bad car accident when I was young, and I’m afraid every time my teenager leaves the house.”
- “My daughter has a strange boyfriend, and I’m afraid of the influence he’s having on her.”
- “We tried to teach our children about God, but my son has drifted so far from God, I’m afraid he won’t come back.”
- The student who said, “I’m studying as hard as I can, but I’m afraid I won’t have the grades to get into the college I want.”
- The woman who said, “My mother died of breast cancer when she was 45 years old. I’m afraid I’ll get cancer too.”

All of us are afraid of our children getting hurt or drifting from God. All of us are afraid of losing our job and not having enough money. And all of us are afraid of losing a loved one. The list goes on.

But, right now, today, what is your greatest fear? What is hounding you? Worrying you? Has you really afraid? This includes toughest of us too. The wealthiest, the manliest, and the most mature. Identify it and listen to how David responded to his fear.

David said, “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you” (Psalm 56:3, NLT). Trust is saying *when afraid, I will turn to God*. That’s what David did. Superman is not going to show up. Neither is Iron Man or Captain America or Wonder Woman. In the face of real danger, David turned to God. He trusted in God. What does that mean?

Does trusting God mean He promises to protect us and that nothing bad will ever happen to us or our children? Does it mean God will always perform a miracle? Or, are we to trust when life sucks and even when the worst happens? Does trusting God only mean He will greet us when we get to heaven after the world has beat us up?

It’s trusting that God is sovereign and that He is in control. It’s trusting that God is just and good. It’s trusting that God loves us and cares about us. It’s trusting – yes even when the worst happens – that He will be with us, and that as we suffer the consequences of living in a fallen world He will bring us through, and that one day we will see Him face to face and live with Him forever in heaven. Because we believe that God is good, and that He loves us and cares about us, it’s trusting Him with what we do not understand. Therefore, we can say with David, “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You.”

Trust is saying *God is bigger than my fears*. “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?” (Psalm 56:3-4, NLT). God is bigger than what I fear. He is bigger than the economy. He is bigger than your boss. He is bigger than cancer. He is bigger than anything we fear.

Trust is saying *God cares about my tears*. “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book” (Psalm 56:8, NLT). Tear bottles were common in ancient times. “Archaeologists have unearthed small ‘tear bottles’ in which mourners collected their tears and then deposited the bottle at the gravesite.”¹ This is a picture of tear bottle from Roman times, around the time of Christ. And here are several tear bottles, mostly old perfume bottles, from the time of the American Civil War. Women would save tears in these bottles while their men were off to war, ready to put them in the coffin if their husbands or sons died, or to show their men how much they missed them and loved them when they returned.

A couple of weeks ago, you wrote down your hurt, your pain, your worry, and your problem on a card. The elders and the staff prayed over every one of your cards. It broke our hearts to hear what breaks your heart. And we put those cards in this vase, as a reminder of the promise in Psalm 56:8, which says, “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle” (NLT). These are our tears. These are our hurts, our pains, our worries, our problems. And God knows about every one of them. He cares about our tears. And that’s why we say, “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You.”

Trust is saying *God is on my side*. The NAS says, “God is for me.” David said, “My enemies will retreat when I call to you for help. This I know: God is on my side!” (Psalm 56:9, NLT). Be careful with this. This does not mean God is on your side when you have a fight with your spouse. It does mean that God wants the best for us. This is a very emotional statement from

David. In Hebrew, he would have said, “*Yare loh, Elohim ani.*” In English, “I shall not be afraid, for God is for me.”

CONCLUSION

Every one of us is afraid of something. And so is everyone in your family. So let me suggest something around the kitchen table. At your next meal together, go around the table and ask each member in your family to identify their current fear. Listen. Empathize. Offer wisdom. Pray. And remind each other that God is bigger than our fears, God cares about our tears, and that God is on our side.

And remember, whatever you’re going through, and whenever you cry out to God for help, you can know that ***He promises to be there when you need Him most.***

So let’s stand and declare our faith together. “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?” (Psalm 56:3-4, NLT).

NOTES

¹ Warren Wiersbe’s comment, in Thomas Constable’s online commentary on Psalm 56.