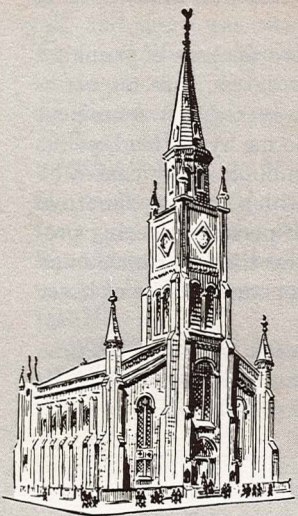


Deepen Faith and Drop Fear



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DEEPEN FAITH AND DROP FEAR

Scripture: Mark 6:50; Romans 8:31; Ephesians 6:13

WOULD you like to drop all your fears, all kinds of fears about all kinds of things?

Fear is one of the most pervasive diseases of mankind and, in spite of all our scientific progress, it seems to be reduced, but on the contrary to increase. A prominent journal, a copy of which was sent to me by a friend, points out that there are at least ten million Americans who suffer from anxiety neurosis - which means abnormal fear, anxiety in depth. Ten million persons suffering profoundly from fear ... Then of course there are uncounted millions haunted all their lives by pervasive fears of lesser depth.

It is for this reason that we preach from time to time on this subject. A great British man of letters, Gilbert K. Chesterton, said that if he could preach one sermon

and only one - it would be a sermon against fear. And a prominent New York physician said that if he were a preacher he would preach once a month on overcoming fear and anxiety. That might be overdoing it a bit, but perhaps not. Everywhere I go I meet people who speak to me of the fears which plague them.

At an airport not long ago I noticed an impressive looking group of young men. I was told by the check-in clerk that they were the basketball team of one of our great universities. Every one of them stood at least 6' 6" tall, and there was one who must have been 7' 0". They were magnificent specimens of young manhood. As I stood

looking at them with admiration, one of them approached me. He asked, "Are you Dr. Peale?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well," he said, "I read one of your books and I'd like to shake hands with you." Then he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other and said, "I'd like to ask you something. In that book you said quite a lot about overcoming fear. Do you really think it's possible to get over fear?"

"Why?" I asked. "Are you troubled with it?"

The most painfully haunted look came over his face.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "Ever since I was a little boy I've suffered from it. Now I'm on this basketball team and I'm doing well in my studies and getting on all right, but I'm miserable because of this fear that's in me."

I took his name and told him I would send him something I had written on the subject. (A description of this sermon is at the end of this sermon.)

At the end of this sermon, I arrived at a convention dinner where I was to speak. I arrived too early. A cocktail party, which I always avoid, was still

in progress. I shook hands all around. There was one

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fellow who was fairly well intoxicated. He grasped my hand and said, "I'm sure glad to meet you." Then he said, "You know, it's rotten stuff, isn't it?" - pointing to his cocktail. "Rotten stuff. I don't know why I ever drink it. But I seldom get plastered like I am now."

"Why are you plastered now?" I asked.

He looked me in the eye and suddenly became sober. "I've been advanced to a higher position in my company," he said.

"Congratulations!"

"Don't congratulate me," he said. "Commiserate with me. I'm not up to it. I'm trying to build myself up, but I just know I can't handle it. I'm afraid of it. I'm full of fear about it." And his face had a most pathetic quality written across it. I took his name and told him I would send him something to read.

Then I met a woman who told me she was getting old. I said she didn't look it - which is the usual polite remark, but she really didn't. She said, "I'm alone in the world. I have friends, but my husband is dead and my children live in other places. Sometimes in the middle of the night I wake up and think to myself in terror, 'What's going to happen to me? Suppose I get sick? Who will take care of me? What is my future?'"

So it goes, from youth to old age, dogging the footsteps of mankind is that ancient enemy of man's spirit known as fear.

How would you like to drop all your fears - all kinds of fears of all kinds of things? I'm sure there is no one who wouldn't say that would be simply wonderful. But you would say it is expecting too much. I beg to disagree. It is not expecting too much. It is possible to drop fear.

The two greatest forces in the world, ceaselessly contending with each other, are fear and faith. But faith is stronger than fear. By deepening your faith, you can drop fear. In Mark, the sixth chapter, the fiftieth verse, the Bible tells us Jesus said, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear."*

The secret is that when you really take Jesus Christ in depth into your life, fear comes under control. Fear goes away, it is dropped.

Now, lest you think I'm exaggerating, let me tell you about one of the greatest men in this country - in fact, in my judgment he is one of the greatest men this country has produced in all of its long history. His name is J. Edgar Hoover. He is the head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. And he continues in that post from Administration to Administration. Why? Because they can't find anybody better - would be my appraisal of the situation.

In his early career he was famous for the in 'trepid' risking of his very life in the pursuit of vicious criminals. The newspapers were full of his exploits in the capture of notorious killers such as one especially dangerous public enemy by the name of Dillinger. Hoover was a courageous young man, and through the years and under all circumstances he has remained fearless.

Well, I have enjoyed the friendship of Mr. Hoover over many years. One day in his office in Washington he was showing me some of the mementos of his long and adventurous life. I said to him, "I'd like to ask you a question. In those days when you were out hunting those gangsters, were you ever afraid?"

"Why of course I was afraid," he answered. "Every man experiences fear. It is a problem for every human being. There were many times when I might have been

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shot to death at any moment. Of course I was afraid. I posed to tell the truth and you know it wasn't good."

"Did you overcome your fear?" I asked.

"Yes," he smiled, "I did."

"How?"

Instantly he replied with this sentence: "I lost my fear in the power of my Lord." He added, "Get the power of the Lord in your heart and you overcome your fear." Today he is an accomplished public speaker. But what interested me was that he wouldn't put up with being

Now, you may have had certain fears for a long time and, while these great words may appeal to you, they may hit the fear straight on. If you're afraid of something, not wholly convince you. I suppose if you were to remember those words of Emerson: "Do the thing you fear and the death of fear is certain."

they are, it might take you half a day to give me the whole story. But the big question is: How much longer are you going to carry those fears? There is only one thing to do about a fear, and that is to stand up to it and overcome it unless you stand up to it. And do you know when the time to stand up to it is? Right now! Kill a fear. Emerson told us that anybody can kill a fear. "Do the thing you fear," he said, "and the death of fear is certain."

I once heard a man make a speech to the Chicago Rotary Club which was by all odds one of the worst speeches I ever heard in my life. He didn't put it together very well; he was nervous; his hands shook; he got mixed up (as I do at times); and he stammered and stuttered. I thought, This is a big Rotary Club: 700 men. How come they have a guest who isn't more adept at speaking than this man? But I loved the man: I could see he had a message and he was a very outgoing person. So after the meeting I introduced myself and told him I had been interested in his speech.

"Don't tell me it was any good, because you are supposed to tell the truth and you know it wasn't good."

"Well," I replied, "it had some points."

"I'll let you in on something," he then said. "The one thing that scares me more than anything else is to stand in public and make a speech. So that is exactly what I'm doing. I'm making speeches in order to kill my fear."

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There is a thrilling story about a fellow in Africa by the name of Courtenay, a gold miner. He had started out as a plain, humble miner, and eventually he owned a gold mine. As he was working his way up, in the days before he owned his mine, he was tough as nails. But after he acquired the gold mine he became rich and fat and soft. Then one day he went down into the mine and there was a rumbling in the earth. It was an underground cataclysm. The other miners ran. They were lithe and lean and got away. But he was fat and slow and got trapped by falling rocks, tons of them. And all the lights went out. Fortunately, there was a piece of metal above his head that he shoved up the rocks directly above him, giving him space enough to stand erect with about five inches clearance above the top of his head. But the rocks grating and settling all around him closed him in with just enough room to move his elbows. Dust filled the air. He managed to tear off a piece of his shirt and put it over his nose to avoid suffocation.

Then he realized his predicament: many feet beneath

the surface of the earth, entirely alone, entombed by these rocks. That old devil of claustrophobia, which reaches many people in small spaces, seized him. He wanted to shriek and scream. But his mind told him that would be of no avail and he must preserve his strength. He had just enough air to sustain life for a while.

After a long time, he heard in the silence the tap of metal on stone and he knew relief was coming. By a herculean effort of prayer and faith he sustained himself until the rescue squad reached him. Finally cool sweet air came in and he was taken out into space. And the first thing he thought was, Ah, space! I'm no longer pinned in.

But that night in bed, in the middle of the night, all of a sudden it seemed as though the darkness was closing in on him again; it seemed that the bedclothes were rocks falling all around him. With a cry of terror he threw back the covers, leaped out of bed and ran outside. He breathed the fresh air and looked up at the stars and the moon. The terror subsided. But he sat up all night.

Night after night he tried to sleep, but always the terror would come over him. He was a man of faith, but that didn't seem to help. He knew his faith must be deepened. He prayed and asked the Lord to guide and direct him.

One day he told his friends that he was going to be gone for a little while - that he was going out to kill a devil. He went to the mine shaft and told the man who ran the lift to take him down to the fourteenth level. The man refused, "But, Mr. Courteney, I can't take you to the fourteenth level. It's not shored up properly down there. We haven't worked it for a long time. It's very dangerous. I can't take you down, sir."

Courteney said, "Look, my friend, I own the mine. Take me down to the fourteenth level. Reluctantly, the

man took him down. Then Courteney said, "Now take the lift up and leave me here."

The darkness crept around him and with it the old terror. He started walking down a tunnel. He could hear the water dripping. He knew that this tunnel was shored up with very old timbers that had been there for many years. He heard a rumble in the earth. His heart beat faster. Cold sweat came upon his face. Terror seized him. But he prayed, "Lord, Lord, help me. I've got to kill this devil or I will die." And he stayed there until the devil lay dead. Then he signaled for the lift and was taken up. He said to the man, "There's a dead devil down below." He walked out into peace, in control of himself.

Kill a devil, the devil of fear, the devil that drives you and haunts you all your life. There has to come some time when your faith becomes so deep that you can kill that fear and drop it, leaving it inert, dead, finished. Only faith in depth can do it. "Take heart". What a text! "Take heart, it is I;" (I'm with you) "have no fear." {Fear no more.}

FINALLY, perhaps a less dramatic way to accomplish the same purpose is simply to put your life in God's hands and trust Him to guide and take care of you. Everyone has worrisome problems. Do all you can about a problem: think all you can, pray all you can, work all you can, endeavor all you can. And "having done all," as St. Paul said, put it in God's hands and leave it there. He is with you. You need not be afraid. Try these simple little devices for strengthening your spiritual life.

Last Sunday I was talking with my very dear friend Paul Rossier, who is managing director of one of the most beautiful hotels in the world, the Montreux-Palace at

Montreux Switzerland, where I have often spent vacations. Paul is a French-speaking Swiss who also speaks German, English, Italian and seemingly everything else. All great Swiss hotel men put us to shame with their linguistic facility. Paul Rossier has a sign in his office with the letters D E A M. If he is having a meeting in which there is some difficulty or some problem, he will bring that sign out and put it on the table. D E A M. That in French stands for "Dieu est avec moi," which means "God is with me." Whether you say it in English or in French, it is the truth, and the belief and acceptance of it dispels fear. "God is with me."

WHAT great thing do you want to do in the world? God is with you. What great good do you want to create among men? God is with you. What evils do you want to destroy? God is with you. "It is I;" said Jesus, "have no fear." That is the secret.

In conclusion I want to read you a letter from a woman who lives in Pennsylvania. I never saw this woman. I don't know her, but I like her. Her letter is written on very plain paper - just sheets ripped out of some kind of tablet.

"I have long been a doer of the things you recommend," she says. "And I want to share something with you. I have never been troubled by fear. I was raised by holiness people who taught me a deep faith in God. I was very poor, but God supplied our needs. I am still poor, but God still does, above all things. There are many miraculous things that happened to us. My father and mother were invalid when I was growing up. I took over the house and family at the age of eleven. God was very real to me."

"One morning after breakfast there was nothing left."

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to eat for the rest of the day and the rest of the month. So I told God about it. I had been praying about it for days, for I could see it was coming. That day a woman drove up. I had never seen her before, nor have I seen her since. She said God had given her a dream and had shown her where we lived and told her that we had no food. She opened the trunk of her car and it was full of flour, potatoes and plain food. Nothing fancy, just plain stuff like we were used to. I have never doubted for food again.

Later I questioned some friends of mine who lived where she said she was from and they said most of the people in the community thought she was crazy, for she was always doing odd things for people. I know better.

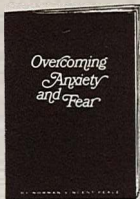
There are many, many things God did for us and is still doing. Three of my brothers are ministers," and in parentheses she adds, "(old-fashioned kind) and two are college professors (by their own hard work). One is a estate broker (successful), one is a dentist and one is a high school teacher. Each one earned his own way. Quite an accomplishment for the sons of a disabled coal miner who never knew where the next meal was coming from.

Yes, people can still make it in America. If God is for them, who can be against them? I know what God can do and no one could ever convince me otherwise."

There you have the saga of a human being whose faith enabled her to have no fear in meeting the problems of life. "Take heart, it is I; have no fear."

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, drive out from our hearts that thing which You never put there, for You put only love and faith into our hearts. This dark thing has crept in. Help us to cast it out through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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