

The Man in the Mirror

Solving the 24 Problems Men Face

Fear

Unedited Transcript

Hebrews 4:15-16, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Timothy 1:7, Proverbs 3:25-26, Matthew 14:22-31

Good morning, men! Today, we're going to celebrate the annual Jim Seibert Distinguished Service Award, and we're going to include you people who are online. We've not done this in the past, but it has occurred to us that this might be one more model that you could use to have an improvement in your own ministry as well. The person we're going to honor today is somebody who loves money. Well, let me put this way. He loves to collect money, so our recipient this year is Steve Hall. I want to tell you a little bit about Steve.

Steve is married to Rika and has a son, Mickey, who's five and a daughter Katy, who is two. We all went snorkeling last year, several of us, and Mickey went along and that was great to meet that young man. Steve is a Ph.D. in Industrial Organizational Psychology. He loves to fish, he's got a bass boat. He likes restoring cars. He has a GTO and he's currently working on a 1972 Plymouth 'Cuda in the area. As far as things you would love to know about Steve, that's one of the big ones. He loves airplanes and flies as a hobby.

We're recognizing Steve; in fact, every year for those of you online, we recognize someone who has distinguished themselves by serving others. I wonder if you would give a very warm and a rousing round of appreciation to this year's recipient of the Jim Seibert Distinguished Service Award, Steve Hall. Steve, would you please join me. Well, congratulations, Steve. We have this beautiful leaded vase that we put together each year. It says, the Jim Seibert Distinguished Service Award, Steve Hall, man of the year bible study 2015 Ephesians chapter 3 verses 14 to 21, so congratulations to you. Thank you so much for the investments that you made into all of these men's lives. God bless you.

All right, and so you guys online maybe you could do something like that in your ministry that might just help give you a little bump. Let's do a couple of shout outs this morning. The first one goes to State Authentic Manhood of Dominion City Church International in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria. 35 men who have been meeting at the church for 2 years on the last Saturday each month using the Video Bible Study and they are led by Chibuke Obiekwe. We want to welcome these guys!

Then the second shout out today goes to Blend Men of Northland Church in Longwood, FL. 5 men who meet at the church on Wednesdays at 7:00pm using the Video Bible Study. Led by David Bonnell and Pat Leupold is the Area Director for the Longwood, FL region. I'm sure you've probably already met Pat. Would you join me in giving a rousing men of the year welcome to these two groups? One, two, three hoorah! We're glad to have you men with us.

The Smell of Fear

All right, you should be in your bibles at Hebrews Chapter four. Let's go to verse 14. The topic today is fear and so the first thing we're going to talk about is just the smell of fear. I found an article in the Washington Post from last fall that talked about the different kinds of fears that people have. It does say that the biggest predictor of fear is low education and then another big predictor of fear is watching television, so what do you think is the number one fear that people report? Fear of public speaking. I guess that explains why I wake up at 1:30 all the time on Friday mornings! Another one is heights. Almost equal, the fear of heights, and then it goes into things like flying, bugs, snakes, drowning, blood and needles. Some of it depends on if you're a Republican or Democrat by the way, go figure that out!

There are other kinds of fears, too, that are very gripping and we feel these fears very deeply. For example, you can tell things are not going well at your company. There have been some layoffs. You can just smell that there are pink slips in the air and you have a fear that you're going to lose your job. How will I pay my mortgage, how will I buy groceries or maybe you wounded your wife deeply by trying to control her, by trying to fix her. Not because you were necessarily doing that out of evil intent, but you were never trained. You never knew how to build into the life of your spouse, and so she's told you that she doesn't feel safe with you anymore.

Now, you're filled with this anxiety, this dread, this fear. Will my wife ever feel safe with me again? Or maybe you look around and you see how the world is turning out and you're wondering how are my children going to get along in a world like the one that we've created, and so you worry for their wellbeing in the future. Is it cancer? Life threatening situations of all kinds can create a deep sense of fear. Fear is a normal human emotion. This is not a talk about how you're going to get rid of fear in your life. It's built into our human nature. Everybody fears even though for many men at least it's customary to pretend that we're not afraid; this whole macho thing and that varies by culture, too.

Everybody is afraid, everybody has fears. It's a normal human emotion. Is fear sinful? I suppose it can be if you allow your fears to overwhelm you to the point that you stop trusting God, then yes, but no in the general course of human life, fear is not a sin it's just an emotion. It's an emotion that is better when it's under control, and so that's what we're going to talk about today is how we get there. I'll just point out here at this early part of the message that there's a difference between fear and a spirit of fear. There's a difference between being afraid; having fears and being paralyzed by a spirit of fear. God has not given a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. We'll get to that again later.

Here's our Big Idea for today. This is an idea that may not roll off your tongue, but this is an idea that if you can grasp it and make it your own, then you will have power over fear. The Big Idea today: **Faith in the promises of God will render fear impotent, even if our circumstances don't change.** Let me say that again, faith in the promises of God will, not maybe, but *will* render fear impotent even if our circumstances don't change. Notice that I didn't say may render, but will render and notice that I didn't say will make fear go away, but rather will render it impotent. Fear is never going to go away, it's always going to be there. What we want to do is put fear in its proper place.

The Conundrum of Fear

Now, let's talk about the conundrum that fear presents us. I want to begin with the promises that God has given us. Hebrews chapter 4 verse 14 and following: therefore, since we have a great High Priest, that's Jesus, who has gone through the heavens. Jesus the son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess, for we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. In this

particular instance, the weakness is the adverse effects of fear. We do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our fears. In fact, we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we have been yet was without sin, so Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane was tempted to be afraid. He was smelling death. He had the smell of fear. In fact, the bible says that he literally sweated drops of blood. You realize this is a scientifically documented phenomenon?

In times of extreme anxiety and extreme stress, it has been recorded that some people actually sweat blood. It's called hematidrosis. It's a medical condition or situation. Jesus was filled with such anxiety; such fear, such dread and a temptation to succumb to that that he actually sweated blood yet he did not sin and stop trusting God. He is able to say, but it doesn't make any difference. Unless you face the firing squad, then you have not yet been confronted with the same amount of fear that Jesus was confronted with here.

That's why the bible says that Jesus is able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses. He experienced the kind of dread, the kind of anxiety, the kind of fear that you experienced when you lost your child, when your wife had a double mastectomy. Jesus is able to sympathize with the fear that comes from that. Verse 15: let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Because of Jesus and what he has been through and his ability to sympathize with what we're going through, we therefore can approach the throne of his grace with confidence, and receive mercy and find help in our time of need when we have fears.

There are other promises. 2 Timothy 1:7 I already mentioned: God has not given a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. He doesn't give a spirit of fear. Romans 8:15: We are not again slaves to fear, but we have been given the spirit of adoption. We've not been made slaves again to the spirit of fear, but have been given the spirit of adoption by which we call Abba, Father. 1 John 4 verse 18: we are made perfect in love, but 1 John 4:18 says this. I'm going to look it up because I can't remember it. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear. Perfect love, Jesus drives out of you, because fear has to do with punishment. 1 Peter chapter 5 verse 7: cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. Luke 12 verses 47 ends up by talking about: and the very hairs on our head are numbered. Two sparrows are bought and sold for a penny and yet not one of them falls to the ground without God knowing it. Proverbs chapter 3 verses 25 and 26: have no fear of sudden disaster or the ruin that overtakes the wicked for the Lord will be your confidence and He will keep your foot from being snared.

The bible is rife with promises about fear, so what's the problem? Let's turn to Matthew chapter 14 verse 20 ... Well, it starts at verse 22, Matthew 14 verse 22; the problem is we have these great promises of God about fear and so in faith we step out. We step out of the boat. We take on the project; the calling that we have and we start on this project. Maybe it's a new job, maybe it's starting your own business, maybe it's getting married, maybe it's having kids for the first time, maybe you're going to start a family, or maybe you're going to start a big family. You are filled with hope, you're filled with joy and you're filled with high expectations. Then, reality begins to set in and in the midst of the promises of God, even though they are there, bad things happen. We see the wind and we begin to sink.

Let's take a look at how this is described in this story about Peter and Jesus walking on water. Jesus has been up praying and He sends the disciples away. Down in verse 25: during the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake and when the disciples saw Him walking on the lake they were overjoyed... No, it says they were terrified. It's a ghost they said and they cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them, "Take courage, it is I don't be afraid." Peter, who is our impulsive friend,

the one that gives all of us who tend to go ready, aim, fire a little encouragement. Peter replies at that point, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water."

This is the same Peter that when Jesus is on the mountain of transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, they become bright and they're having this conversation, the Bible says he doesn't even really know what to say, so he said, "Lord, it's really good for us to be here with you. If you want let's build three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." The bible says that while Peter was still speaking, God interrupted Him and said, "This is my beloved etc..."

This is Peter, "Here comes the ghost." Everybody is terrified. Jesus must be pretty close to the boat at this point right, because they're talking and they're hearing him. It would be normal for Peter to say, "Well, Jesus c'mon, get into the boat quick before you sink." Peter doesn't do that, he says, "Lord, if it's really you let me come to you on the water." Jesus says, "Come." Now, this is actually a command. Jesus says, "Come." I guess Jesus saw an illustration in the making. Peter steps out of the boat and ... We can always think about Jesus walking on water, but Peter, a human man like us, also walked on water, so this is a miracle. This is one of the miracles in the New Testament.

Then Peter got down out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus, but reality set in. He saw the wind. He had the faith to do the big task. Maybe you have the faith to take the new job, but then reality sets in, you saw the wind. They didn't tell you about the fact that your major account was teetering on the brink of going with the competitor, and that 50% of your income was dependent upon your being able to figure out how to retain their major client. These things happen. People do lie. He saw the wind. Step one in the cycle of fear, reality sets in, and secondly what happened? It says he was afraid. You went in again with high hopes, but then when reality sets in then you find yourselves in the grips of fear. Often it's because you feel like you've been betrayed, but often it's because you realize, how could I have been so stupid? How could I have been so naïve? There you are and that's the second phase of the cycle of fear. That's our response, reality sets in and we respond in fear.

Then, it says he was beginning to sink. There you go, reality sets in, our response, gripped in fear and the result is we start to sink. We start to cave. The fear paralyzes us. We can't do what we were hired to do. Everything we say to our wife comes out different than we intended it, so instead of making her feel safe, we make her feel even more unsafe, or whatever the case may be. We have the reality of seeing the wind, the response of being afraid, the result of beginning to sink and then the return. Peter cried out simply, "Lord, save me." Then, the next step is that Jesus reached out immediately and pulled Peter up out of the water, the rescue. Being afraid is not a sin, it's a normal human emotion.

Notice what Jesus says in verse 31: immediately He reached out His hand and caught him and then He said, "You of little faith. Why did you doubt?" There you have it, that's the key. The key is to truly believe. To become a true believer in these promises of God that we can live by faith. Here it is again the big idea: faith in the promises of God will render fear impotent even if our circumstances don't change. I was going through a cycle of fear. Our company had rehabbed a shopping center. As soon as we finished with the rehab, the major tenant moved out, leaving half of the building empty. I was so new at it, so new at this business and so naïve at it. I had no idea what to do, but I had put my entire reputation on the line putting this deal together. I saw my entire career about to go down the drain as this project would implode on itself. I had investors that I had raised money from and they would lose their money if this deal didn't go right. It was going to be a disaster, a big disaster, a sudden disaster.

At that time as a new Christian, I was reading in the book of Proverbs every day. I came to the third day of the month, so I was reading Proverbs chapter three and almost everybody is familiar with the very famous passage in verses 5 and 6: trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding, but acknowledge Him in all your ways and He will direct your paths. I was right in the middle of a sudden disaster and that was not leaning on my own understanding. That was somewhat comforting, but later in the chapter 3 of Proverbs verses 23 and 24, maybe it's 25 and 26 it says this: have no fear of sudden disaster or the ruin that overtakes the wicked for the Lord will be your confidence, and He will keep your foot from being snared.

Men, you and I can read that 100 times and think it's a beautiful thought, a quotable quote, something worth remembering, a verse to pass on to somebody else, but it's a whole different matter to believe it. On that day, the Holy Spirit gave me the gift of faith and I believed it. It moved from abstract to personal; it moved from beautiful to true. Have no fear of sudden disaster or the ruin that overtakes the wicked for the Lord will be your confidence and He will keep your foot from being snared. There's no promise that He's going to change the circumstance, but there is every promise that if I depend on it that He will render my fear impotent. That's the big idea. Faith in the promises of God, that's a promise of God; have no fear. Faith in the promises of God and all the other ones we talked about and all the others ones we didn't, will come to pass, if we become true believers in the word of God; in the trustworthiness of God and His word.

Gaining the Upper Hand on Fear

This talk didn't have any humor in it, though I searched and searched. I couldn't find anything funny to tell you today, so there you go laugh at the balloons floating around me from the party held here previously. So the promise is not that bad things won't happen, but that He will be with you. The point I'm trying to get across to you this morning is that there is a way to gain the upper hand on fear and that's to become a true believer. I'm not talking about salvation, eternal life and all of that. I don't have any problem with that. It's these next 10 days that are terrifying me, so how do you get the upper hand on that kind of fear? It's to become a true believer. It's to believe the word of God. It's to actually believe in the trustworthiness of God and His word.

It's not just to read these incredible texts on the paper and believe that they are beautiful ideas, but to believe that they are actually true. To be a true believer in the character of God Himself, so that when you read Romans 8:28; for all things, not 99.8% of things, all things work together for good. For those who love God and are called according to His purpose. If you're called to salvation you've been called according to His purpose and if you've been called to salvation you love God, so this is for every Christian. He promises to work everything in your life, every circumstance in your life together for good, even if the actual thing does not turn out well, He is going to use that in some way as an ingredient for something that is good in your life, and so be a true believer in the character of God. God is great, God is good and we thank Him for this food, amen.

Be a true believer not only in His character, but in His trustworthiness. God is not a man that He should change His mind. Jeremiah 1:12: God is watching over His word to perform it, to actually be a true believer that God keeps His word. Now, we have a problem there because you're a liar, everybody you know is a liar, you've been lied to all your life and it's hard to believe that somebody is not a liar, and there are other reasons that make it difficult too, but God is not a liar, He's not capable of lying. To trust that, to be a true believer in the trustworthiness of the word of God.

I suppose there are many other things that I could say and I see that I'm out of time. Let me close with this Admiral James Stockdale. Survived eight years in the Hanoi Hilton. The highest ranking military officer, three stars. Admiral Stockdale when he returned was having a conversation one day with Jim Collins, the author of *Good to Great* on the campus of Stanford University, where the Admiral was dragging his leg that had been disfigured in the torture. Jim Collins asked him, "How did you get through this?" He said, "I never lost faith that I would ultimately prevail no matter what happened." They walked a little further and then Collins said, "Well, who didn't make it out?" He said, "That was easy; the optimists."

Now he was really confused because it sounded like what the Admiral said was that it was his optimism that had allowed him to survive. He said, "What do you mean? I don't understand." He said, "Well, the optimists would come into the prison and they would think, well, we're going to get out by Christmas, surely we'll get out by Christmas. Then Christmas would come and Christmas would go and they would still be there. Then, they'll say, surely we'll get out by Easter. Then, Easter would come, and Easter would go and they'd still be in prison. Surely we'll be out by Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving would come and Thanksgiving would go, then another and then they died of a broken heart."

The big idea today is this: it's faith in the promises of God that will render fear impotent even if our circumstances don't change, and so the idea is to have faith that you are going to prevail while at the same time facing the most brutal facts of your circumstances whatever they might be. You don't have to be afraid. You can have the courage that comes from faith by believing in the promises that God has given us, you and I can render fear impotent even if nothing else changes. Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Our dearest Father in heaven, I want to thank you for your word. Lord, we all want to be able to be true believers in your character, in the trustworthiness of your word, even that we can believe in the face of horrific circumstances, so would you help us to do that? Would you give us, Lord, the faith that can render fear impotent no matter what the circumstances? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.