

# Fear and Faith

## Psalm 56

### Introduction

Pastor Diogenes Allen – came to find out that he had an incurable kind of Leukemia and small cell lymphoma.

Diogenes Allen: ‘Like other people I had to learn how to cope with this situation and, like most people, I got along more or less all right much of the time, in spite of the fatigue that goes with leukemia. The worse times are when you wake up during the night with symptoms that mean the disease is progressing. On one of those occasions when my usual ways of dealing with the rising fear had failed, including heartfelt prayers, I was driven to say, “I cannot carry this load; over to you, Jesus, it’s yours.” To my surprise the next thing I was aware of was waking up, not because I had been dreaming, but because I had simply fallen into a peaceful sleep until morning.’

He reminds us a common human condition or emotion – that of fear – fear in the face of cancer

Fear has many faces in our world

A Chapman University study – polled people as to their greatest fears [2023]

The list included things like:

- Nuclear war / world war
- People we love getting seriously ill / dying
- Economic / financial collapse / not having enough money
- Corrupt government

Other fears that are common:

- Fear of people / crowds
- Fear of death
- Fear of earthquakes / tornadoes / hurricanes
- fear of heights / flying / spiders / snakes
- fear of failure

Michael Jordan: “I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions I have been entrusted to take the game winning shot, and I missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

i.e. – He didn’t let fear of failure keep him from doing what he did best

We have fears about safety

What if this roller coaster goes off track – or this plane door flies open? / I get in a car crash

If you live in Israel – you have to live with the sound of missile sirens

- Fear of public speaking
- Fear of germs - Covid

Howard Hughes was a germaphobe - - - washed his hands constantly -- - never touching a doorknob except with a cloth -- - even towards the end of his life - - - he did not wash his clothes - - - he simply burned them!

Ed Welch: 'Scripture assumes that we will be afraid and anxious at times. What is important is where we turn, or to whom we turn when we are afraid.'

Psalm 56:3, 4 - 'When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee. In God whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?'

We have noted the Psalms cover the spectrum of human emotions and conditions: joy, anxiety, depression, tranquility, anger, grief - - - and show us how to deal with such things in relation to our faith

Psalm 56 provides us with a powerful treatment of the human emotion of fear

Charles Spurgeon: 'David was no braggart, he does not claim never to be afraid.'

What he shows us – is how to deal with fear when it comes - to hand it over to God

### I. David's Remedy to Fear - vv. 1-7

This Psalm is called a Mikhtam of David

Luther argues this refers to a 'a golden Psalm' – or a choice song of David

This Psalm was written during a dark period in David's life – Saul is trying to kill him

Saul has posted his picture: Wanted: dead or Alive! / David goes on the run

It is out of this period - - that we get some of David's greatest Psalms!

It is often in times of threat / or difficulty – that the greatest lessons of the faith are learned

John Piper – as a young man - was deathly afraid of public speaking - - - if he ever made the attempt – in High School or college - - - he simply froze up in fear

He attended Wheaton College – in his 2<sup>nd</sup> year as a Lit. major - he was thinking about changing to a premed major - - - but in June of 1966 – something happened

He was asked to pray in chapel - he agonized over this – he should be able to do this – but it’s in front of people - - - he reluctantly agreed to it

He prayed to God: ‘God – if you will just get me through it so that I don’t freeze and my voice doesn’t stop, I will never turn down a speaking opportunity for you again out of fear.’ He survived the chapel service and kept his vow ever since.

That Fall he switched to a ministry track in school

It was only after he conquered his fear of public speaking that he decided it was safe to go into ministry

David does not feel real safe - - - right now – when he wrote this Psalm

When he first went on the run - - - he went to the priests at Nob - - - they gave him the bread from the tabernacle - - - but when Saul found out about it - - - he had the priests put to death

David then went to the Philistines - - - for a brief stint - - - and was in fear for his life there - - - pretended to be a crazy person - - - to avoid being seized there

This Psalm is written during this period of David’s life

David is surrounded with dangers

Man has trampled upon Him – v. 1

There are real dangers in this world - - - and there always have been for God’s people - - - we cannot ever fully escape danger and risk in this world - - - but in Psalm 56 we are instructed as to how to live in a world with danger

The problem with fear is revealed by asking a question:

Does fear cloud our judgment and even our moral compass? / leading us to make foolish choices we otherwise might not take?

One classic example - - - Peter denying the Lord

**Matthew 26:69-75**

Peter made poor moral choices there - - - why?

He denied knowing Jesus [he was afraid he would be arrested]

Today we might compare this peer pressure - - come on – go ahead and smoke / drink / swear / watch this dirty movie with the rest of us - - - don't be different for Jesus - - - don't be a goody goodie!

Fear says we think too much of what man thinks - - - and too little of what God thinks

Fear clouds judgment

Abortion is a big political football in our day

What is rarely addressed is why someone might want to consider an abortion

Oftentimes it will be some kind of fear of motherhood / poverty / of how life will change - - - some underlying fear

So the baby takes one for the team - - - and simply disappears – while the mother goes her way - - - sometimes riddled with guilt over her moral choice - - - and she misses out on ever knowing the joy of raising that child - seeing how he or she would turn out

James Robison – was conceived by rape - - his mother did not believe in abortion – he grew up in poverty - - - went on to become a pastor and President of Life Outreach intl.

Mark Levin – was the product of a teen pregnancy - - raised with the help of grandparents - - today he is one of the great conservative voices on talk radio

What can we do with our fears?

David makes the conscious choice - - - to put His trust in God - v. 3

Derek Kidner: 'Faith is seen here as a deliberate act, in defiance of one's emotional state.'

Psalm 56:3, 4 - 'When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee. In God whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?'

'When I am afraid - - I will not be afraid'  
Why? Because I put my trust in God

This is the one true remedy to fear

Richard Phillips: 'Silence your fear with the voice of faith. Trust in God; trust in His Word.'

David puts things in perspective

What is the worst thing that can happen? / What can man do to me?

Well – He can kill me - - - not cool - - - but that's as far as he can go

John Paton wanted to take the gospel to the New Hebrides islands

One church elder raised a concern – ‘The cannibals – you will be eaten by cannibals!’

In fact – it was just about 20 years earlier that two missionaries named Williams and Harris - - went to the island of Erromanga – one of the New Hebrides - - - and they were killed and eaten - - - so the threat was not unfounded!

Young man – you might die!// have some sense!

Paton's classic response reflected great faith:

John Paton: 'Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.'

That's faith!

Fear at times – has to do with where our treasure is

Is it in this world - - - or in heaven?

Sometimes fear indicates that we are too attached to this world - - - we think too much of earth and too little of heaven

Too much of temporal / fleeting pleasures - - - too little of the true and lasting joys in heaven

Should we make sacrifices / risks here – so that we can obey God – and trust that the reward will be worth it in glory? [absolutely]

*C.S. Lewis: 'All those toys were never intended to possess my heart. My true good is in another world, and my only real treasure is Christ.'*

Is heavenly bliss greater than anything this world has to offer?

The Apostle Paul once said

Acts 20:24 - 'But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.'

Paul – who had been stoned and left for dead / endured beatings / dangers from robbers

In Acts 21 – he faced the prospect of being arrested in Jerusalem

#### Acts 21:10-14

Paul – says - - If that is God's will – so let it be done – and it was

In the Lord of the Rings – in a scene where Frodo was in danger – Aragorn suggests a diversionary tactic – of attacking the enemy right at the Black Gate of Mordor.

Then Aragorn asks if his friends are willing to join him

Gimli – the dwarf replies:

**\*\*\* Gimli: "Certainty of death? Small chance of success? What are we waiting for?"**

That was Paul's response to the Agabus prophecy. What are we waiting for?

Sometimes God does call us to die – 10 of the 11 disciples did die for their faith

**Matthew 10:28 - 'And do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.'**

The only thing we should really fear is being an enemy of God / offending Him / arousing His wrath

An eternal perspective – puts the fear of all other things in their proper place

We might think of the Hebrew midwives in Ex. - - - they refused to put the baby boys to death because they feared God [more than pharaoh]

**Exodus 1:17 - 'But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live.'**

We are going to leave this world - - - in a relatively short time [that's a certainty]

We will dwell in eternity forever - - - either in the bliss of God's presence and glory - - - or under His wrath and judgment in hell

No other considerations compare to that

## II. *God is for Us* - vv. 8-13

Here - David refers to God's loving care for him – v. 8

He sees every tear / He does not ignore you and your concerns

He sees your sleepless nights / He hears your prayers

**Matthew 10:29-31** - 'Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows.'

Jesus often taught the disciples lessons on fear

### **Matt. 14:22-33**

We see the disciples struggling – the wind is contrary

Then – they see Jesus walking to them on the sea - - cry out in fear

It was a teaching moment

All our fearful circumstances are designed by God to teach us something about Himself – and our faith

Peter gets out of the boat – and walks on water – for a moment – but then looks at the wind and waves and becomes afraid

Where was his focus? On the wind and the waves

The difference between fear and courage – was simply a matter of focus

Maybe God is calling you to get out of the boat - - take a step of faith - - you're hesitant / maybe you're afraid of something – God has called you to do

'I know what God wants – but I'm afraid of . . .'

Jesus says: 'Don't be afraid – trust – follow Me'

Let the promises of God sustain you

That's what David does here

Psalm 56:9, 10 - '... This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise.'

He reminds himself of what is true and what God says

Fear is diminished when we remind ourselves that nothing can come into our lives apart from God's permission

John Paton faced hostile natives on the island

**John Paton:** 'A wild chief followed me around for four hours with his loaded musket, and though often directed towards me, God restrained his hand. I spoke kindly to him and attended to my work as if he had not been there, fully persuaded that my God had placed me there, and would protect me till my allotted task was finished. Looking up in unceasing prayer to our dear Lord Jesus, **I left all in His hands, and felt immortal till my work was done.** Trials and hairbreadth escapes strengthened my faith, and seemed only to nerve me for more to follow; and they did tread swiftly upon each other's heels.'

Paton said he paid him no heed – he felt immortal until his work was done - - - and in fact – strengthened his own faith

\*\*\* You and I are immortal until God says it's our time - - until we have accomplished our assigned task in this world

The antidote to fear is to focus upon what is actually true

What is true – is what we find in God's Word

We don't put our trust in money or gold – that'll lead to fear! / such things can disappear

We don't put our trust in politicians – that'll lead to sheer panic and terror

We don't put our trust in man

We put our trust in God and His Word

Proverbs 3:5, 6 - 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.' [kjv]

Conclusion



In March, 1943 – an air raid siren went off in the city of London [which had endured many bombings from the German air force – people scrambled for cover - - - many trying to take shelter in a subway tunnel - - - too many people in fact - - - as one person fell down the stairs - - - the press of people led to chaos and confusion - - - with many getting trampled - - - 173 men, women and children died in the chaos - - - the really sad element was that no air attack ever came – the siren was a false alarm

The only reason 173 people died that night was fear

**John 16:33 - 'These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.'**

In Christ Jesus – our fears can be laid to the side [lay them down] - - - as we rest in the grace and goodness of our God - - - as we trust in His shed blood

To trust in Jesus - - - we must know Him as our Savior - - - believe He died and rose again