

## QUESTION #25: “WHAT IS FEAR?”

11.17.19

### INTRODUCTION

Fear. That is our question today: “What is fear?” In some sense this is a difficult issue to talk about because fear is such a basic component of this thing we call “being human”; we have all felt fear at some time — and it’s never been a fun experience. Nobody brags about how scared they were at something, or tells how great it felt to be terrified. Now the thing itself might have been anywhere from an annoyance in the moment to a debilitating experience that literally froze us in place or caused us to run like a madman in the opposite direction, never wanting to deal with that whatever-it-was ever again.

The dictionary defines fear as: a feeling induced by perceived danger or threat that occurs in certain types of organisms, which causes a change in metabolic and organ functions and ultimately a change in behavior, such as fleeing, hiding, or freezing from perceived traumatic events. Simply put, it is a painful, distressing and almost always uncomfortable emotion and agitation in the presence or anticipation of someone or something that signals danger, evil or pain — whether real or imagined. Fear is a sense of danger or trouble that makes us change the direction we were going.

In many cases, fear can be a good thing; it is designed to keep us from danger, injury or pain (i.e., stepping out into traffic) and to protect us. However, it is not confined to any one age in that we will always, at some level, be having to deal with and confront something we fear — something that, whether we like it or not, whether we can admit it or not, makes us afraid.

The Greek word for “fear” is where we get our English word “phobia.” Now a phobia is an extreme or irrational fear or aversion to something — and there are a whole pile of those out there. These are some that I found the most interesting:

- Fear of heights (me): Acrophobia
- Fear of riding in a car: Amaxophobia
- Fear of men: Androphobia
  - o Fear of women: Gynophobia
  - o Fear of teens: Ephebiphobia
  - o Fear of children: Pedophobia
- Fear of numbers: Arithmophobia
- Fear of technology: Technophobia
- Fear of computers: Cyberphobia
- Fear of imperfection: Atelophobia
- Fear of failure: Atychiphobia
- Fear of sleep: Somniphobia
- Fear of crowds: Agoraphobia
- Fear of people or society: Anthropophobia
- Fear of being alone: Autophobia

Some fears kind of make sense:

- Fear of doctors: Iatrophobia
- Fear of dentists: Dentophobia
- Fear of hospitals: Nosocomophobia
- Fear of needles/injections: Trypanophobia

- Fear of blood: Hemophobia
- Fear of accidents: Dystychiphobia
- Fear of pain: Algophobia
- Fear of disease: Pathophobia
- Fear of gravity: Barophobia
  - o Fear of knees: Genophobia
  - o Fear of feet: Podophobia
  - o Fear of the color “black”
  - o Fear of the color “white”
  - o Fear of colors: Chromophobia
  - o Fear of peanut butter
  - o Fear of the sun: Heliophobia
  - o Fear of rain: Ombrophobia
  - o Fear of darkness: Achluophobia
  - o Fear of snow: Chionophobia (Minnesota is NOT a good place to live with this)
  - o Fear of cooking: My wife has an offshoot of this one; she has a fear of MY cooking.
- Fear of marriage: Gamophobia
  - o Fear of love: Philophobia
  - o Fear of kissing: Philematophobia
  - o Fear of touch: Haphephobia
  - o Fear of being touched: Aphenphosmophobia
  - o Fear of beautiful women: Venustraphobia
- Fear of what I’m doing right now — speaking in public: Glossophobia
- Fear of phobias: Phobophobia
- My all-time personal favorite: The word for “the fear of long words” is a word 35 letters long, and contains parts of the word “hippopotamus” and “monstrous.”

Fear is one of the great common denominators of the human race; virtually everybody has something that scares them. Some real-world, famous examples:

- Muhammad Ali, who feared nobody in the boxing ring, was afraid to fly.
- Marilyn Monroe suffered with stage fright.
- Gustave Eiffel, the designer of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, was afraid of heights.
- Tennis great Rafa Nadal of Spain is afraid of the dark, and admits to needing to sleep with the lights on.
- Walt Disney, the creator of Mickey Mouse, was afraid of mice.
- Adolf Hitler, who caused terror for millions, was himself afraid of cats.
- Oprah Winfrey is afraid of chewing gum, and mandates that no one can be chewing it in any studio in which she is working (including anybody in the studio audience).

Now for Christians, fear is a more challenging issue. We claim to know Somebody more powerful than all our problems. No matter how big the challenge, we claim to know Somebody bigger. So what do we do with when fear comes calling? It’s an important consideration because, when fear keeps us from doing what we know we should be doing, it is not a good thing. And more to the point — fear can be a defining characteristic of who we really think God is — how powerful, how present, how trustworthy, how loving. Are we really willing to place our lives in the hands of the God the Bible describes? That’s our particular focus as we look at this

topic. And to help us address some of these issues, one of the most famous of all Bible stories is going to accompany us on our journey: the story of David and Goliath. If you got your Bibles, head on over to I Samuel 17.

Before we get started, just a quick look at something: You know, I think the story of David and Goliath was one of the first Bible stories I ever heard growing up. That may be true for many of us. And a lot of times, with those stories, we come to know them so well, and look at them with such familiarity, that it's easy to overlook the lessons those stories contain; they're almost clichés for us. But there is some really rich stuff in this story, so let's try to look at it as if we're hearing it for the first time. Now, while this story pretty much covers the entire chapter of I Samuel, we're not going to read it word for word. Instead, if you'll allow me, I'll sort of do a retelling of it. So let's get started:

### **TEXT (I Samuel 17)**

***Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled . . . Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped . . . and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them — I Samuel 17:1a, 2-3.*** This is all taking place about 24 miles west of Bethlehem in the tribal area of Judah.

So who were the Philistines? They were a very aggressive people who originally were from the isle of Crete in the eastern Mediterranean. They had initially had the presence of a trading colony in the area of Gerar in the time of Abraham. However, they settled in force along the west coast of Palestine around 1200 BC. Beginning with the time of the judgeship of Samson (about 1080-1075 BC, about 40 years before the birth of David), they were Israel's principal enemy. It wasn't until David defeated them in about 980 BC that their military dominance over Israel was essentially ended. However, they continued to remain a constant, nagging, harassing presence over the next 360 some-odd years. In fact, it wasn't until the time of Nebuchadnezzar that the Philistines were ended by Babylon's military might, their leaders and population deported.

The Philistines were organized around the rulers of five major city-states: Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath and Gaza. They had two distinct advantages over the Israelites with whom they so often fought:

- 1) They had very tight coordination between the people of their cities, their leaders essentially serving as their military leaders during times of conflict. This gave them a great advantage at a time when Israel was essentially leaderless aside from the temporary leadership of the judges.
- 2) They had weapons of iron, and kept their abilities as iron workers a secret until forced by David's conquest to surrender all their knowledge.

Now, what about Israel at this same time?

- 1) Israel was led for about 20 years by the prophet Samuel. However, at the end of his life, Israel, skeptical that Samuel's two sons could lead Israel as effectively as had Samuel, had demanded of him: ***"[N]ow appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have" — I Samuel 8:5b.***
- 2) A man of the tribe of Benjamin named Saul was the first king of Israel. However, due to his disobedience of God's specific commands, the kingdom was taken away from him by God.

- 3) Samuel was led to the village of Bethlehem, and the family of a man named Jesse. God directed Samuel to anoint Jesse's youngest son, David, as the next king, identifying him as **"a man after [the Lord's] own heart"** — *Samuel, I Samuel 13:14a*.
- 4) By the time of this particular episode, three things had happened that would define Israel moving forward:
  - a) ***Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed [David] in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David — I Samuel 16:13a.*** In other words, the Spirit of the Lord, which had come intermittently upon Saul, came continuously upon David.
  - b) ***Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him — I Samuel 16:14.*** In other words, the Spirit of the Lord was no longer empowering Saul to rule Israel effectively and to lead the nation in war. Instead, an evil spirit (all spirits are under God's command) would be impacting Saul as a punishment for his sins of disobedience.
  - c) ***David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armor-bearers. Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, "Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him." Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him — I Samuel 16:21-23.*** One of the ways God blessed David was in allowing his music to bring soothing, spiritual relief to Saul.
- 5) All of this sets the stage for today's story!

In this corner: Goliath of Gath. The Philistine champion (with a "tale of the tape"):

- 1) Goliath's height: 9 foot, 9 inches.
  - a) Tallest MN Viking: Brian O'Neill (OT) — 6'7".
  - b) Tallest MN Timberwolf: Karl-Anthony Townes (C) — 6'11".
  - c) Robert Wadlow (Guinness Book of World Records) — 8'11".
- 2) Goliath's estimated weight: 500-600 pounds.
  - a) Heaviest MN Viking: Linval Joseph (DT) — 329 lbs.
  - b) Jon Brower Minnoch (Wikipedia), heaviest human ever — 1,400 lbs.
- 3) Weight of scale armor of bronze: 125 pounds.
- 4) Weight of shaft of spear: 17 pounds.
- 5) Weight of iron tip of spear: 15 pounds.
- 6) Secret weapon:
  - a) Years of military/combat experience.
  - b) Intimidation factor: Like having to face a tree; he was a big, scary guy. And the intimidation just kept on growing as Goliath repeated this challenge twice a day for 40 days!

In this corner: David of Bethlehem.

- 1) David's height: Estimated to be from 5' to 5'6".
- 2) David's weight: Unknown but one theory of it not being mentioned is that essentially there was nothing remarkable PHYSICALLY about David.
- 3) Weight of armor: We know that Saul's armor, which was attempted to be shared with David, was too big and/or cumbersome for him to feel comfortable. Instead he went out comparatively very lightly armed — with his staff and a sling.

- 4) Secret weapons:
- a) Fighting experience defending his father's sheep.
  - b) Highly skilled when using a sling as a weapon.
  - c) Known to be **"a brave man and a warrior"** — *Servant of Saul speaking of David, I Samuel 16:18b.*
  - d) **[T]he Spirit of the Lord [was] powerfully upon David** — *I Samuel 16:13a.*

Goliath's challenge: **"Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us. . . . This day I defy the armies of all Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other"** — *Goliath, I Samuel 17:8-10.*

The reason for Goliath's confidence: **"[H]e has been a warrior from his youth"** — *King Saul, I Samuel 17:33b.*

The rules: Goliath was putting out an offer of "representative combat," where the result of the individual contest translated into the final result of battle between armies, thus saving much bloodshed. This kind of combat, where the outcome of a fight to the death between two individuals determines the outcome of battle, was seen as the revealed will of the gods who actually fought or decided the battle. It is relatively rare in the OT but was a more frequent occurrence among Israel's pagan neighbors.

Israel's response: FEAR! ***On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed(1) and terrified(2)*** — *I Samuel 17:11.*

- 1) CHATHATH (khaw-thath<sup>^</sup>) — a verb meaning to be shattered, to scare, to terrify.
- 2) YARE (yaw-ray<sup>^</sup>) (3966) — a verb meaning to fear, to be afraid, to make afraid, to frighten, in the intensive to impart fear.

David's response: **"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God? . . . Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him. . . . [I] have been keeping [my] father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. [I have] killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God"** — *David, I Samuel 17:26b, 32, 34-36.*

The reason for David's confidence: **"The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine"** — *David, I Samuel 17:37a.*

Goliath's response to David: **[Goliath] looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks (David's staff)?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. "Come here," he said, "and I'll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!"** — *I Samuel 17:42-44.*

David's response to Goliath: **"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defiled. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered**

***here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands" — David, I Samuel 17:45-47.***

The battle and the result: David killed Goliath with a stone thrown by his sling.

- 1) Sling stones found at biblical sites are 2-3 inches in diameter (slightly larger than a baseball).
- 2) Weighing approximately one pound, a sling stone could be hurled at 90-100 mph.
- 3) ***So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him — I Samuel 17:50.***

Where the Israelites saw a man too big to defeat, David saw a target too big to miss.

## **APPLICATION**

The Bible is a supremely honest book; it pulls no punches. If somebody was an idiot, it tells us. If somebody was great, it tells us that too. And if somebody was afraid, we are left with no doubt that they were terrified. Some great Biblical examples of fear:

- 1) ***"[A] great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to . . . the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you" — Rahab, speaking to the two Israelite spies, Joshua 2:9b-11a.***
- 2) Belshazzar, the final king of Babylon, when he saw the writing on the wall from God on the final night of his rule, ***watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking — Daniel 5:5b-6.***
- 3) In the NT, when the disciples in the midst of a very difficult storm on the Sea of Galilee, when they saw Jesus walking out toward them, walking on the water, ***they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear — Matthew 14:26b.***

The Bible also tells us of some incredible bravery:

- 1) Moses going multiple times into the court of Pharaoh, telling him to let the Israelites go.
- 2) Daniel continuing to pray to God under the threat of being sent into the lions' den (Daniel 6).
- 3) In the NT, Paul being stoned and left for dead outside the city of Lystra after ministering and healing in that city; when he revived, he went right back into the city (Acts 14).

But the issue is not about being brave or courageous. It is about trusting God in all circumstances, despite what visible, visual evidence might be arguing to the contrary. We need to remember that Goliath is not just some metaphor for something that frightens or challenges us in some way. This was a real guy — a really big, scary, intimidating, experienced combat veteran who knew what to do with anybody who crossed his path. That is why this one particular verse from the apostle Paul in his second letter to the church at Corinth is so important: ***[W]e fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal — Paul, II Corinthians 4:16.***

So why did Saul and the Israelites see one thing, and David see something entirely different? Saul and his troops saw nothing more than a physical impediment that petrified them right down to the ground. What David saw was Someone far bigger than this Goliath guy — no matter how big or scary or intimidating. The fact is, what overcoming fear really boils down to is, Do I really believe that God is everything the Bible claims he is? He has given us an amazing inventory of

great verses that declare in no uncertain terms who God is, what he is capable of, the power in his very words, the depth of his love and his grace. The Bible spells out all those things — but it's so much more than just knowing the words. David didn't just know what God could do; he trusted what God could do. As Psalm 33 says: ***No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine — Psalm 33:16-19.*** That's what David saw. If that was his vision, how could Goliath be a deal-breaker? How could he make any difference at all?

What it comes down to is this: Is what God has said, Jesus has said, all the Bible says, about how God is with us, how he loves and how he will watch over us, two question:

- 1) Are these words true?
- 2) If these words are true, then what do they look like?

So, moving forward (is that true, what does that look like):

- 1) ***“If you listen carefully to what [I say] and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you” — God speaking, Exodus 23:22.***
- 2) ***“When you are about to go into battle . . . Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not panic or be terrified by them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory” — Moses, Deuteronomy 20:2a, 3b-4.***
- 3) ***Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me — David, Psalm 23:4a.***
- 4) ***“I am with you always, to the very end of the age” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 28:20b.***
- 5) ***“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world” — Jesus Christ, John 16:33 (NASB) (note the PRESENT tense in “I have overcome the world”).***
- 6) ***God had power to do what he had promised — Paul, Romans 4:21b (looking forward to what God can do by looking back at what God has already done).***
- 7) ***What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? — Paul, Romans 8:31.***
- 8) ***For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power — Paul, II Timothy 1:7a.***

## CONCLUSION

Folks, we are all going to face things that cause fear. David knew this well; that's why he wrote: ***When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise — in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? — David, Psalm 56:3-4.*** The question for the Christian is: Does fear rule the moment, or is fear simply the moment you leap into God's caring arms and let him rule? That's exactly what God told Isaiah: ***[D]o not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand — God speaking, Isaiah 41:10.***

So what are you going to do with your fears? Do you trust God, that he will win, that this life is NOT all there is, that a moment here doesn't take away one moment from eternity with him? Let's pray!