Overcoming Fear

Text: Deuteronomy 31:6-8; Joshua 1:9; Isaiah 41:10; Isaiah 41:13; II Timothy 1:7; John 6:16-21

In his book *The Science of Fear*, Daniel Gardner wrote, "We are the healthiest, wealthiest and longest lived people in (modern) history and we are increasingly afraid." This is one of the great paradoxes of our time. It can actually take a toll on our health. This worry and fear stems from a part of our brain that is a gift from God. The amygdala is that part of the brain which is an almond-shaped mass of gray matter inside each cerebral hemisphere, involved with the experiencing of emotions. The amygdala comes from the Greek word for almond and is believed to control autonomic responses associated with fear and has been linked to neuropsychiatric disorders, such as anxiety disorder and social phobias. It is the early warning system called "the flight or fight mechanism." It works much like an emergency alarm. Sometimes this system goes off when it is not necessary, like a fire alarm going off due to malfunction. This is called Generalized Anxiety Disorder. It is estimated that fifty-seven million people suffer from this more commonly known panic attack. The people who experience this can't see or feel anything that is wrong, but the heart is beating faster, breathing becomes shallow, strange ticks and overall discomfort takes place.

One of the signs of the end times that Jesus gave us is found in Luke 21:26, when our Lord described, "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." In this same time period the Lord admonishes His people in Luke 21:19, "In your patience possess ye your souls." And also our Lord said in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." By nature the unbelieving residents of this world do not have peace. Isaiah 48:22: "There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked." On the other hand, those who have received Christ have peace. I John 5:4 states, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Therefore we may claim Philippians 4:6, 7: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the

peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Let's talk about three common fears that people live with and discuss what our response should be:

1. FEAR OF LOST RELATIONSHIPS

This is a fear that many would rather not talk about. In truth, no one is comfortable talking about the loss of relationship with a spouse, a parent, a child or a close friend. The Psalmist expressed the torture of being left alone in Psalm 102:7, "I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top."

Man was made for fellowship--fellowship with God and fellowship with each other. Everything God made and did as recorded in Genesis was declared good. The first time God said something was not good is found in Genesis 2:18, "And the LORD God said, *It is* not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." Then the first time God declared things were very good is found in Genesis 1:31, "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, *it was* very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day." This declaration was made after Adam had the company of "…an help meet for him." (Genesis 2:20).

The first nine months of our life is in the body of another person. We hear the beating of our mother's heart and the sound of our mother's voice. We wake up in the first few months of our life crying. Many times, just because we just want to be held. In the last days of life sometimes people just long for you to touch them or talk to them, even if they don't remember your name. We all want someone to connect to.

Einstein said, "It is strange to be known so universally, and yet to be so lonely." Ann Hathaway, the actress said, "Loneliness is my least favorite thing about life. The thing that I am most worried about is just being alone without anybody to care for and someone who will care for me." We often withdraw from life to protect ourselves and end up making ourselves even lonelier. This seems to be a practice of many in our modern culture. Some researchers are calling this the age of loneliness. Researchers in Great Britain are showing that the impact of chronic loneliness on a person has roughly the same effect on their physiology as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. Experts are saying you can actually die of loneliness. Many years ago, you were born in a town, grew up in a town, lived in town, died in that same

town and were buried in the town. The average American now days will move 11.7 times in their lifetime. In that same long gone era it was not unusual for a person to have one job. As modernity came into being, people would hold two to three jobs. Statistics are showing now that people change jobs every three years. In this day in which we live, we hardly stay put long enough to nourish lasting relationships. Now 40 percent of all marriages end in divorce. Retirees are often surrounded by strangers. Their life has radically changed as they are no longer around people with whom they spent forty to fifty hours a week. It is believed by studies that the secret to happiness in retirement is how many relationships you have, not the exotic location you move to. Why do you see so many sample givers at Costco and Sam's? You know many, if not most of the people that do this don't need the money. They are looking for fellowship. The answer to loneliness is relationship with the church and above all, Christ.

2. FEAR OF FAILURE

Paul said in Romans 8:15, "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." To live in fear is bondage. One of the most enslaving fears is living with the fear of failure.

In Exodus 4:10 through 12 we see Moses was afraid he would fail. In Judges 6:11 through 16, we see that Gideon was afraid of failing. In II Chronicles 1:10 we see that even Solomon was afraid of failing. Have you noticed? Man's apprehensions did not change God's intents and purposes for how He would use Moses, Gideon or Solomon. Man's small thinking never supersedes God's big plans.

Mary Tyler Moore said, "Take chances, make mistakes, that's how you grow. Pain nourishes your courage. You have to fail in order to practice being brave." Wayne Gretzky, the great hockey legend said, "You miss one hundred per cent of the shots that you don't take." Winston Churchill once said, "Success consists in going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm." For the Christian, trust in God will alleviate our fear of failure.

3. FEAR OF DYING

Hebrews 2:14 and 15 the Bible says, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that

had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." This is a beautiful passage telling us that Christ partook of our humanity and went through death and through His death and resurrection destroyed the consequences of death for the believer. I Corinthians 15:26, 27a says, "The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death. For He hath put all things under His feet…." Jesus so thoroughly defeated death that He alone could promise, "And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die…" (John 11:26a). Through Christ we can say, "O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory?" (I Corinthians 15:55). No other religion in this world can offer this peace. As Peter said, "These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever." (II Peter 2:17). Jeremiah 2:13: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." When we trust in the true and only living God the result is peace and freedom from all fear of man. Isaiah 26:3: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee.

Pastor Jerry George told me that there was an atheist by the name of Chuck Aurora who was attending the funeral I preached for our church member, Peter Higgins eighteen years ago. The atheist told Pastor George he could never get away from the message he heard that day and after much contemplation, he renounced his atheism and accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He now has a peace that passes all understanding and the fear of death has been removed. He, like all children of God, may be able to say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me…" (Psalm 23:4a).

The fear of this world is not to be confused with the fear of God (Proverbs 29:25; Matthew 10:28-31). Remember the fear of the world by this simple acrostic, "False Evidence Appearing Real." We close with the words of Jesus, "Fear not, little flock…" (Luke 12:32a).

-Johnny Pope-