

**15 SERMON STORIES  
TO OVERCOME FEAR  
& ANXIETY**

**CHURCHLEADERS**

# Stop And Face Your Fears!

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**Scripture:** Philippians 4:6-7

**Story:** A few years ago, a canoeing friend of mine and I went to a talk one evening at the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Center. I could hardly wait to hear the couple that was to speak. It was Verlen and Valerie Kruger. They had recently completed a 21,000 mile trip by canoe. I had read about this amazing couple, but did not know until the lecture that they were Christians. They began at the top of Canada, wound their way through that country to the Great Lakes. On down through the United States they paddled until the Mississippi River emptied into the Gulf. They continued down the western side of Florida, and then through the keys and across the ocean to South America. They paddled down the Amazon and then the other rivers heading south, until 33 months, and 16 million canoe strokes later they came out at Cape Horn, the southernmost part of South America. There were times when they paddled for 55 straight hours.

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They had many adventures and wonderful stories to tell, and I sat spellbound.

They told of the ice that formed on their canoes and bodies during a winter storm on Lake Superior. They told of floods on the Amazon, as well as huge snakes and alligators. But one story stuck in my mind.

They were in South America, and just as they rounded a bend in the river they came across a large flock of black swans. When the birds saw them they went into a complete panic and began to flap their wings while they scooted across the top of the water down the river. The Krugers chased the screaming birds for miles, because the birds were running from them. To their amazement, only a few dared to face them and fly over them, even though they were created to fly. The rest just continued to run and scream.

Valerie said, "I learned something from those swans: You have to face your fears if you are going to get over them.

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If you run from them, they will chase you your whole life, but if you turn to face them, you will learn that you can fly over them by the grace of God.”

We were not meant to run, we were meant to fly, but we will never fly as long as we are running from our fears.

(From a sermon by Rodney Buchanan, From Death to Life, 4/10/2011)

**Point:** How much different are we than these black swans? We have been given immeasurable graces poured out unto us by our Father in Heaven. And yet, we can still live in terror as if the world and its problems are greater than our God. We are called not to a life of fear and worry, but a life of peace and faith. So, how do we face our fears? How do we overcome our problems? We take them to the Lord in prayer, because he is our deliverance!

# Pursue Holiness By Fearing

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**Scripture:** 1 Kings 18:20-40; Revelation 3:21

**Story:** John Wesley once said, "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God... such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of God upon earth."

**Point:** Though this story is but one sentence it packs a powerful message that could fill a book. For instance, in the story of Elijah facing the prophets of Baal, consider how easy it would have been to be shaken to the core at the thought of being one person against the 450 false prophets of Baal. The winner(s) is proven to worship the true God, the loser(s) is put to death. While this would be terrifying to most, Elijah was not afraid of a powerless, false deity along with all his minions. Instead of being afraid of the enemy, Elijah was courageous and received strength from the only true God. This story, along with its Scripture reference, is a call for us to

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not look to the things that are seen, but to the unseen realm where we are already ruling and reigning with Christ through faith. Because this is true, where then is there any room for fear?

# Where I Am, You Also Will Be

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**Scripture:** Hebrews 11:1; John 12:26

**Story:** A sick man turned to his doctor, as he was preparing to leave the examination room and said, “Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side.”

Very quietly the doctor said, “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? You, a Christian man, do not know what is on the other side?”

The doctor was holding the handle of the door; on the other side of which came a sound of scratching and whining, and as he opened the door a dog sprang into the room and leaped on him with an eager show of gladness.

Turning to the patient, the doctor said, “Did you notice my dog? He’s never been in this room before. He didn’t know what was inside. He knew nothing except that his master

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was here, and when the door opened he sprang in without fear. I know little of what is on the other side of death, but I do know one thing: I know my Master is there, and that is enough. And when the door opens, I will pass through it with gladness, but with no fear.”

**Point:** A recent survey revealed that 10 out of every 10 people will die. Knowing that one’s life will one day come to an end on this planet causes many people to live in fear of the “other side.” Depending on one’s standing with Christ, this fear can be a good thing! It is right to be afraid of death when our sins have not been dealt with. But, if the Apostle Paul wrote that in Christ death has lost its sting, what is it that we should be afraid of as Christians? While we may not know of the exact details of the life to come, we do know of one detail that trumps over them all. While we are going to be united with the universal body of Christ for all eternity, we will also be able to walk with our God, hand in hand. What is awaiting the Christian for all of eternity is joy and fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!



# Everyone Can Win Someone

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**Scripture:** Acts 1:8; Jonah 3:4-5

**Story:** George W. Truett was the beloved pastor of Dallas' First Baptist Church for more than 60 years. He tells of a woman who came to him after a service. She was a poverty stricken widow with several children. She said, "Pastor, I have never known you to be unfair -- yet you were so in your sermon." He inquired as to why she felt that way. Her reply, "You said during your sermon that everybody can win someone to Jesus. Certainly you can't mean me. I am a poor widow. I work long, long hours just to squeeze out a living for my children and me every day. I cannot entertain, or spend time winning souls to the Lord. I can barely exist. You are not fair when you say, 'everybody can win someone.'"

Truett replied, "Madam, does anyone come to your house?"

She said, "Yes, a few -- the mailman, the milkman."

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Truett ended the conversation, "Then you do have an opportunity. You simply have not tried."

The woman went home troubled and thought about the conversation most of the night. By dawn she heard the milkman at her front step. Convicted, she threw open the door, and greeted the man. As they exchanged small talk, the woman was nervously trying to think of some small word to put in for the Lord -- but the milkman turned to go. She began to close the door, but threw it open again. "Come back," she asked. He did so, and she said, "I wanted to ask you something, but I have been afraid. May I ask you a question?" He agreed. Stumbling, she began, "I just want to know if you know Jesus. Have you been saved?" He looked at her with incredulity, "What in the world made you ask me that? Oh, woman," said the milkman, "I didn't sleep at all last night worrying about my soul. Do you know how to find God's light?" In a short moment, she was sharing with her new friend how to come to Christ.

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(George W. Truett, *A Quest For Souls*, (NY, George H. Doran Co, 1917), 58-59. From a sermon by Russell Brownworth "Part One - Tenth Hours" 1/19/2009)

**Point:** For a plethora of different reasons, one of the hardest things for some Christians to do is share the Gospel. But, stories like this give us great encouragement as to the power of God in evangelism. This woman said nothing profound. She was not expositing Scripture or walking this mailman down the "Roman's Road" of evangelism. Instead, she simply asked him the wonderful question, "Have you been saved?" That was all that it took for the lid of conversation and salvation to be torn open. We can put so much stress on ourselves because we want to say just the right thing to lead someone to Christ. Instead of looking to our own actions and perfect presentations that can cause fear and worry to stir up in us, we ought to direct more of our attention to the help and comfort of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who applies Christ's work to the hard hearts of men, not us. Therefore, let courage triumph over fear because of God's power!

# Thy Will Is My Will

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**Scripture:** Isaiah 26:6; Philippians 4:11-13

**Story:** Alistair MacLean quotes a story from Tauler, the German mystic: One day Tauler met a beggar. "God give you a good day, my friend," he said. The beggar answered, "I thank God I never had a bad one."

Then Tauler said, "God give you a happy life, my friend." "I thank God," said the beggar, "I am never unhappy."

Tauler in amazement said, "What do you mean?" "Well," said the beggar, "When it is fine, I thank God; when it rains, I thank God; when I have plenty, I thank God; when I am hungry, I thank God; and since God's will is my will, and whatever pleases Him, pleases me, why should I say I am unhappy when I am not?"

Tauler looked at the man in astonishment. "Who are you?" he asked. "I am a king," said the beggar.

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“Where then is your kingdom?” asked Tauler. And the beggar answered quietly: “In my heart.”

(Source: From a sermon by Ajai Prakash, “First Things First” 2/18/2009.)

**Point:** After hearing this story we may have to go to the Lord in prayer to ask that he forgive us of our envy of this beggar. While this beggar has nothing: no home, no family, no wealth; he is yet content. He has set his mind upon his God in heaven rather than the circumstances right in front of his face. But, if you’re like the average church goer, you can easily be swept up in fear and anxiety as you consider your job, marriage, school, mortgage, car, etc. the list goes on... The mind that is consumed with its problems is a mind that will be consumed with fear. In and of ourselves, we only harbor and generate sin. But, if we set our minds above, where Christ is seated, where Christ is presently ruling and reigning over everything from subatomic particles, to the nations, to the ordering of solar systems, we can be freed from our fears.

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Because Christ is good, and because Christ is in control, we can rest in whatever he should will for our lives. For the Christian resting in Christ there is peace.

# Because God Is Awake, I Can Sleep

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**Scripture:** Joshua 1:6-9; Psalm 127:1-2

**Story:** A mother and her little four-year-old daughter were preparing to retire for the night. The child was afraid of the night. The child was afraid of the dark, and the mother, alone with the child, felt fearful also.

When the light was out, the child caught a glimpse of the moon outside the window, "Mother," she asked, "is the moon God's light?"

"Yes," said the mother, "God's lights are always shining."

The next question was, "Will God blow out His light and go to sleep?"

"No, my child, God never goes to sleep."

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Then, out of the simplicity of a child's faith, the little one said that which gave reassurance to the fearful mother, "Well, as long as God is awake, I am not afraid."

(Source: Sunday School Times. From a sermon by Bill Butsko, "Bread from Heaven" 7/28/2009)

**Point:** This is yet another example of a time when the simplicity of a child has put an adult to shame. While we may no longer be afraid of the dark, or at least some of us, we can live in fear of many other things. We fear the unknown. Will I ever find a spouse? Will my spouse and I ever be able to have children? Will I get into that college that I really want? Will I get that dream job I applied for? Questions like these are the reason many are struggling with fear and anxiety. While we may not have the answers to those questions, we can know the one who is overseeing and ordering our life. Though our decisions can cause our life to be in disarray, our God is not asleep. He has not forgotten about you. You can lay down your head on the pillow at night and find rest not because you've got everything figured out, but because he is always watching over you.



# Here Be God

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**Scripture:** Isaiah 41:8-10

**Story:** Before 1492 when Columbus sailed the ocean blue, the common belief was that if a ship from Europe sailed too far West, they would either fall off the edge of the world or face terrible danger. There was fear of the unknown. In England, there is an ancient nautical map dating back to the time of King Henry IV. On it, the mapmakers wrote these words over the Atlantic Ocean: "Here be dragons; Here be demons; Here be danger." And based on those superstitious warnings, sailors were afraid of sailing there. But there was an English navigator named John Franklin who was a mighty man of God. He knew the Word of God that says God sits above the circle of the earth. He took that same map and crossed out those fearful words and added these three words: "HERE BE GOD!"

(From a sermon by Fred Markes, Praise God, 8/30/2011)

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**Point:** If you are a servant of God, you need to know that as you sail toward your darkest fears and deepest worries, here be God! He is there to keep you and sustain you. Job discovered that. He was able to look through his tears and say: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth” (Job 19:25). Our universe is so large scientists can’t measure it. But the Bible says in Isaiah 40:12 that God measures the heavens with the span of His hand. So, when your world crumbles in, the most important thing you can do is to simply place yourself in the safest place in the universe--God’s hands.

# A Dangerous Flight

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**Scripture:** 1 Peter 5:7

**Story:** I am a very nervous flyer. During a trip from California to Indiana, it didn't help that my connecting flight from Denver was delayed twice because of mechanical problems. Then, after we were aloft, I noticed the lights began flickering. I mentioned this to a flight attendant.

"I'll take care of it," she said. Moments later the lights went out. Clearly she had solved the problem by turning off all the lights.

A passenger across the aisle who had been watching me leaned over and said, "Whatever you do, please don't ask about the engines."

(<http://www.cybersalt.org>)

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**Point:** This funny little story playfully, yet truthfully, illustrates the prayer life of many Christians. Some of us may be like a nervous man on a plane afraid that the engines will fail. Instead of lifting up that fear to Christ, we can far too often bury that fear in our hearts hoping that it will go away. That fear hastily grows to produce anxiety and worry. But we are not called to bury our fears, but to lift up our fears to the Lord in prayer. He knows our burdens and the pressures of life that press down upon us. Instead of trying to deal with it yourself, take it to the one who is able to deal with it for you. Go to the Lord in prayer and trade your fear for peace and your worry for courage.

# The Work Of The Shepherd

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**Scripture:** Psalm 23

**Story:** Philip Keller says that in order for sheep to lie down, four things are required:

First, they must be free from all fear. Sheep are very easily frightened. A stray jackrabbit jumping out from behind a bush can stampede a whole flock. When one startled sheep runs in fright, all of the others will follow behind it in blind fear, not waiting to see what frightened them. But nothing quiets a flock like seeing their shepherd in the field with them.

And sheep will not lie down unless there is harmony in the flock. When there is this tension between rivals, the sheep can't lie down and rest. They must always stand up and be ready to fight. But when the shepherd is around, they forget their rivalries and stop fighting.

And sheep will not lie down unless they are content. If flies or fleas are bothering them they will not lie down. The shepherd must provide them with relief.

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And sheep will not lie down unless they are full. A hungry sheep is always on its feet, searching for another mouth of food, trying to satisfy its gnawing hunger. Shepherds had to search hard for green areas to feed their sheep.

(Source: Philip Keller, A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, From Rick Crandall's Sermon: Part 2 – Living in the Overflow of the Lord)

**Point:** In Jesus Christ we have a Good Shepherd who will do all these things and more! He calms our fears, gives us peace and harmony, grows us in our contentment, and satisfies our hungry and thirsty souls. He feeds us with life-giving spiritual food--the Word of God. He even gave His life for us. Yet again, we have to ask ourselves the question--because this is true, where then is there room for fear?

# Worried to Death

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**Scripture:** Matthew 6:25-34, 10:29-31

**Story:** Are you suffering from a chronic disease without even knowing about it? Well, one chronic disease you might be carrying right now is called “chronic worry.” Unfortunately, this is a real thing. Worry can cause serious physical problems such as: ulcers, heart attacks, and high blood pressure. Dr. Charles Mayo, of the famous Mayo Clinic, wrote, “Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands and the whole nervous system. I have never met a man or known a man to die of overwork, but I have known a lot who died of worry.”

(From a sermon by Jonathan McLeod, “You Can’t Control the Future” 2/16/2009)

**Point:** We are living at the height of technological advancement with only more and more advances to come. At the same time, it can be argued that mankind has never been more anxious, worried, and fearful than we are right now.

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Though our problems are much different than the anxieties we would be facing with regional food shortages, there is much anxiety over our endless emails, countless children's games and practices, and an infinite news feed to catch up on. While our productivity may be increasing, downtime and rest are fleeing many of us. The world may offer some helpful solutions, but only in Christ can there be true peace and freedom from the worries of the world. If a sparrow does not fall to the ground apart from the will of God, how much more will our faithful and loving Father keep us and bless us in his Son? The heavy weight of fear and worry vanishes from the heart that is resting in Christ alone.



# No Fear

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**Scripture:** Matthew 14:22-33

**Story:** Brian Simo is a race car driver, and most of you have probably never heard of him. However there is one thing about him with which you are probably familiar. In 1985 he created the “No Fear” clothing line and found an idea that appealed to many Americans.

We have a lot of respect for bravery and for those who are willing to take challenging risks. But when does “No Fear” really mean “Darn Fool”? Last week a woman fell to her death on a very steep day hike at Yosemite National Park. The hike does not require any special expertise, but it is challenging, and it should never be attempted if there is any chance of rain. The granite dome becomes very slick and dangerous in rainy weather. Still many hikers attempt the climb ill-prepared, over confident of their skills and of the weather conditions.

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(From a sermon by Michael Walther, Lord, Save Me!, 8/8/2011)

**Point:** The Gospel teaches us that “No Fear” is not just a decal or a T-shirt. It is not just a spirited hope of getting lucky. It is not at all about taking foolish risks. The real “No Fear” lifestyle is found in those, who like the Apostle Peter would say to Jesus, “Lord, Save me!” If we call upon the name of our Savior while turning from our sin we can be delivered from the kingdom of sin and misery and brought into a kingdom of redemption.

# Martin Luther Thoughts On Fear

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**Story:** Martin Luther made this interesting observation in his Table Talk. God and the devil take opposite tactics in regard to fear. The Lord first allows us to become afraid, that he might relieve our fears and comfort us. The devil, on the other hand, first makes us feel secure in our pride and sins, that we might later be overwhelmed with fear and despair.

{Morgan, R. J. 2000. Nelson's complete book of stories, illustrations, and quotes (electronic ed.). Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville}

**Point:** If you're looking for a witty quote about spiritual things, you need to look no further than Luther. This short story from Luther falls right in line with his classic cleverness and vigor. But, oh how true it is that pride and security are such master deceivers! They are able to trip us up and make us stumble over our own feet. Though fear and troubles may come, it is the Lord who delivers us! May we rid ourselves of all pride and all other sins that would cause fear and unholiness.

# Fear And The Deceits Of The Heart

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**Scripture:** Isaiah 51:11-16

**Story:** I think Edward Welch chose brilliantly the title for his book on overcoming the fear of man: When People are Big and God is Small. Maybe you can relate to his personal awakening to this problem when he was a high-school senior:

“I had always been shy and self-conscious, controlled by what my peers thought (or might have thought), but I never considered it seriously until the day of the awards assembly. I was up for an award, and I was scared to death I would get it!

“The auditorium bulged with over two thousand high-school juniors and seniors. From the back, where I like to sit, it seemed a good mile or two up to the platform. All I could think of was what my classmates would think of me while I walked to the front. Would I walk funny? Would I trip going up the stairs? Would one person -- I prayed it would not be a girl I liked -- think I was a jerk? What about those who were also

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nominated or who thought they were deserving? What would they think of me if I won instead of them? What would I ever say for a brief acceptance speech? 'God, please don't let me get this!' I prayed.

After a number of lesser awards were announced, the vice principal went to the podium to introduce the winner. He began with a short, somewhat cryptic biographical sketch. It did not sound exactly like me, but it was generic enough to fit. I was starting to sweat, but I sat motionless for fear that someone would think I was getting interested. Finally the announcement came: "And the winner of this year's senior award is...Rick Wilson."

Rick Wilson! I could not believe it! Of all people. No one even thought he was a candidate! You can imagine my reaction. Relief? No way. I felt like a total failure. Now what would people think of me? They knew I was up for the award, and someone else was chosen. What a loser I was.

Immediately my mind began thinking of justifications. If I had

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worked at all this year, I would have won. I certainly had the potential, I just didn't want to win. I'm a late bloomer; when I get to college, I will show them. I was ashamed to go back to class. Pitiful, isn't it?

(From a sermon by Glenn Durham, How Fear Controls People, 5/31/2010)

**Point:** Dr. Welch describes well the deceit of the heart. Many fear success, for it would put us on display; yet we also fear failure, for then we are shown to be less wonderful than we had hoped. The Bible often mentions this heart-struggle. Almost 600 verses contain the word, "fear" and related synonyms. One of the profound comments comes through the prophet Isaiah: "And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. [So God promises to restore and revive his people, to protect and deliver them. Then he says,] 'I, I am he who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is

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made like grass, and have forgotten the LORD, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth?" (Isaiah 51:11-13).

# Sinatra's Fear And Worry

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**Scripture:** Philippians 4:6-7

**Story:** Frank Sinatra's daughter, Tina Sinatra, recalls her father's unceasing drive to succeed and make money, even when his health was at risk:

His health was in tatters and his life mired in financial wrangles, but my father refused to stop giving concerts. "I've just got to earn more money," he said.

His performances, sad to say, were becoming more and more uneven. Uncertain of his memory, he became dependant on tele-prompters. When I saw him at Desert Inn in Las Vegas, he struggled through the show and felt so sick at the end that he needed oxygen from a tank that he kept on hand. At another show he forgot the lyrics to "Second Time Around," a ballad he had sung a thousand times. His adoring audience finished it for him.



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I couldn't bear to see Dad struggle. I remembered all the times he repeated the old boxing maxim, "You gotta get out before you hit the mat." He wanted to retire at the top of his game, and I always thought he would know when his time came, but pushing 80 he lost track of when to quit. After seeing one too many of these fiascos, I told him, "Pop, you can stop now; you don't have to stay on the road."

With a stricken expression he said, "No, I've got to earn more money. I have to make sure everyone is taken care of." Since his death there have been constant family wrangles over his fortune.

(Source: Tina Sinatra with Jeff Coplion, *My Father's Daughter* (Simon and Schuster, 2000))

**Point:** Isn't it interesting that the people of one of the richest and most prosperous countries in the world are often worrying about money and leaving a massive inheritance? In a society that is as well off as America, there is still so much fear about money. Is this a fear of yours? Are you fearful that

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you won't leave your children with a big enough inheritance so now you are working hard while sacrificing your relationships? There is an ever increasing call for our prosperous country to trust in the Lord that he will provide for all our, and our children's, needs. Thankfully, when we stop looking to ourselves and start looking to him, we can have true peace. He is our provider.

# A Bold Preacher

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**Scripture:** Luke 12:5

**Story:** Hugh Lattimer once preached before King Henry VIII. Henry was greatly displeased by the boldness in the sermon and ordered Lattimer to preach again on the following Sunday and apologize for the offence he had given. The next Sunday, after reading his text, he thus began his sermon:

“Hugh Lattimer, dost thou know before whom thou art this day to speak? To the high and mighty monarch, the king’s most excellent majesty, who can take away thy life, if thou offendest. Therefore, take heed that thou speakest not a word that may displease. But then consider well, Hugh, dost thou not know from whence thou comest—upon Whose message thou art sent? Even by the great and mighty God, Who is all-present and Who beholdeth all thy ways and Who is able to cast thy soul into hell! Therefore, take care that thou deliverest thy message faithfully.”

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He then preached the same sermon he had preached the preceding Sunday—and with considerably more energy.

(Evangelism, A Biblical Approach, M. Cocoris, Moody, 1984, p. 126)

**Point:** Whether we are a preacher, or simply the average Christian who loves the Bible, we are called to cast off fear and to declare boldly the Word of God that saves man's soul from the fires of hell. Hugh Lattimer had courage not because he was heralding forth his own message, but because the Lord was speaking through the preacher as he heralded forth the living and active Word of God. We are called to speak truth and life. We are called to obey God rather than man. May fear be cast aside this day, and would boldness and power take its place with the help of the Holy Spirit.

# Bonus - short quips:

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“Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear not absence of fear.”

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/48792/endurance-by-sermon-central>

Oswald Chambers once said, “The remarkable thing about fearing God, is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.”

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/61414/forgiveness-general-by-sermon-central>

“Worry is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.”

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/50273/guilt-by-sermon-central>

He that lives to live forever never fears dying.

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/49698/death-by-sermon-central>

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Samuel Chadwick once said, “The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/26165/prayer-adoration-by-sermon-central>

Havner stated, “Worry, like a rocking chair, will give you something to do, but it won’t get you anywhere.”

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/12030/guilt-by-michael-mccartney>

A day of worry is more exhausting than a week of work.

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/50267/guilt-by-sermon-central>