

What If I Do Trust, But I'm Still Afraid?  
By Larry Augsburger  
Philippians 4:4-13  
January 18, 2009

- I. One of the first Bible verses most children learn is, *I will trust and not be afraid*, from Isaiah 12:2.
- A. Now I learned that verse just as well as everyone else in my toddlers' Sunday School class. But.....(Don't tell anyone....Keep it to yourselves)...I still get afraid.
1. I'm afraid of cancer.... a heart attack..... something bad will happen to my wife or daughters.... more tears in my retina.... health care expenses will outstrip our ability to pay.... our pension program will not be adequate.
  2. I'm afraid of a whole bunch of stuff.
  3. I think you all know what I'm talking about.
  4. We all have fears about our own personal situations.
- B. And beyond that, we Americans have general corporate fears.
1. We're all afraid. We live in a time of generalized anxiety and fear.
    - a. Although there was already a lot of fear in our culture, our fears have gotten far worse since 9-11.
    - b. And that says nothing about the fear of what's going on in our world *economically right now*. *Are we going into a depression? Are we going to have jobs? Are our pensions worth anything?*
  2. This is a time of high anxiety.
  3. And we Christians are afraid right along with the rest of everyone else.
- C. And yet, there it is in Isaiah 12:2—*I will trust and not be afraid*.
1. And we're left with the question, "What if I do trust, but I'm still afraid?"
  2. "What do I do with my fear and anxiety?"
- D. We Smile on Sunday/ we act brave and confident and without any worries on Sunday/ but Come Monday....we're left to grapple with our fear.
1. This is the first sermon in a "We Smile on Sunday, but Come Monday..." series in which I want to address topics on which we act like we've got our act all together, but we really have a lot of questions and fears.
  2. I have identified nine topics for this series, but if you have any other topics you think should be part of the series, let me know about it.
- E. Now I would like to suggest two answers to the fear problem in today's sermon.
1. First answer is a collection of strategies for how to manage our fear.
  2. The second answer is a call to rise above our fear.
- II. First, let's look at the strategies for managing our fear.
- A. There are four fear management strategies I'd like to suggest.
1. All of these have to do with working on our perspective.
  2. Working on consciously adjusting our perspective is something we can do,

and it can make a significant difference.

- B. Now the first fear management strategy is to put things in perspective.
1. The first step of putting things in perspective is to realize that anxiety and worry achieve nothing.
    - a. This is the point that Jesus makes in Luke 12:25, *Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his or her life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?*
    - b. The net result is going to be the same whether you stew over things or not, so why not cancel the stewing?
      - (1) I think about this every time our daughters are traveling.
      - (2) I could stew and worry, but they'll arrive at their destination at exactly the same time whether I stew or not.
      - (3) Nothing about my worrying helps them.
      - (4) So I just consciously cancel the worrying.
  2. A second way to put things in perspective is to realize that the chances that many of the things we worry about will happen to us are minuscule.
    - a. Airline crashes are a wonderful example.
      - (1) The airline industry often goes years between crashes.
        - (a) It has an incredible safety record.
        - (b) There are thousands of flawless flights a day.
      - (2) Yet some people are afraid to fly.
      - (3) Yes, there is a chance that something can go wrong, but that chance is so small that it should be no more than a minor caution and not a major red flag for us.
    - b. Why be incapacitated by 100% worry about things that have a .0000000001 percent chance of actually happening?
  3. The point of putting things in perspective is to realize that there's no use investing emotional energy in worrying about something if worrying can't make an ounce of difference *and if there's little chance that it will happen.*
  4. Just put things in perspective and cancel your anxiety.
- C. The second management strategy for dealing with anxiety is to broaden our perspective because we fear what we don't understand.
1. Ignorance is a major component of anxiety, so becoming informed is a major way of controlling anxiety.
  2. Best biblical example of this is found in 2 Kings 6 where the king of Aram besieges Dothan in an attempt to capture or kill the prophet Elisha.
    - a. Elisha's servant is highly distressed when he wakes up to find the city besieged. All he can see is doom and destruction.
    - b. But when Elisha prayed that the Lord would open the servant's eyes, *he looked and saw the hills full of horses and*

*chariots of fire all around Elisha.*

- c. There was more going on here than the servant perceived, and as soon as Elisha informed him of the broader perspective—that there was a spiritual reality behind the physical reality—he lost his fear.
  3. Best way to broaden our perspective is to learn about the thing we fear and strategies for handling those problems when they do crop up.
    - a. We can learn symptoms of cancer, diabetes, heart attack and stroke so we can do early detection and minimize their effects.
    - b. One of the things I especially fear is an attack of shingles.
      - (1) That's because I've ministered to quite a few people in misery with shingles attacks.
      - (2) So I paid attention when I learned that there is a vaccine available that prevents shingles attacks, and I plan to ask about it at my annual physical next Monday.
    - c. Rather than worrying about things, take steps to manage them.
  4. We can learn about strategies for what to do if something does happen.
    - a. We aren't helpless victims when something goes wrong, and we are capable of responding intelligently to situations.
    - b. As a clueless teenager I jumped out of the car and stood there not knowing what to do when my boss and I discovered there was a fire under the hood of his work car.
      - (1) But he knew what to do and calmly handled situation.
      - (2) As a paint crew, we had all kinds of paint covers in the back seat and they were perfect for smothering the fire.
  5. Broadening one's perspective is a significant way of controlling fear.
- D. The third strategy is to change our perspective and learn contentment.
1. By this I'm referring to the fact that a lot of our anxiety is based on a fear that things may not be the way we want them to be.
    - a. Our retirement income may not support life style we hope for.
    - b. We may have to live with an unpleasant chronic illness.
  2. *But Paul addresses this when he says, I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. (Philippians 4:11)*
  3. With this orientation, there was little that Paul feared.
  4. Changing our perspective so that we can find contentment no matter what happens is a great help.
    - a. I remember years ago, at a seminar on aging, hearing a man reflect bitterly on his plans for retirement in San Diego—no snow, no

sub-zero arctic blasts, *just balmy breezes off the ocean, golf everyday.*

- b. But his mother-in-law's health deteriorated, and they had to cancel their San Diego plans in order to care for her—in Peoria, Illinois.
    - (1) Now, having been part of the Peoria community for seven years, I can tell you it is a beautiful community and it doesn't deserve the bad rap it gets.
    - (2) But still it isn't San Diego.
  - c. This man was definitely not content in Peoria, but it would have been so much better for him if he could have been.
  - 5. We have the option of adjusting ourselves to what reality is, even if it isn't the reality we would have chosen.
  - 6. We can learn to be content with the situation in which we find ourselves.
  - E. A fourth management strategy is to view things from perspective of community.
    - 1. We are not alone, but we have a community of loving brothers and sisters, and we experience God's love through each other.
      - a. This is true physically through mutual aid and caring.
      - b. This is true emotionally as we stand with and sit with each other.
    - 2. Knowing we have *Christian community means we know that even if what we fear happens, we do not have to face it alone.*
      - a. I think about our friends, Mike and Nancy, whose daughter Jenna was paralyzed from neck down in a diving accident.
      - b. Hundreds of people have given thousands of dollars and spent thousands of hours in response to that situation.
      - c. Four years later a group of Oak Grovers known as the Jenna Summit still meets every month to support the family.
    - 3. If what you fear does happen, you don't face it alone. You have brothers and sisters to stand with you in it.
  - F. So the first answer to fear and anxiety has to do with managing it.
    - 1. First, we put things in perspective that anxiety and worry don't help.
    - 2. Second, we broaden our perspective to handle things intelligently.
    - 3. Third, we change our perspective and learn contentment.
    - 4. Fourth, we view things from the perspective of Christian community.
  - G. These strategies can really help, but they still leave some anxieties that won't go away and some threats that are really real.
    - 1. Even if we greatly reduce anxiety by means of management strategies, we're still left with the question, "What if I do trust, but I'm still afraid?"
    - 2. What are strategies for dealing with the anxieties you can't shake or the threats that are confirmed as real?
- III. Here I'm going to suggest we need to look to God for our security—to find our security in the spiritual realm, not in the physical realm.

- A. That's what Elisha did for the servant in the 2 Kings 6 passage—he enabled him to see the spiritual reality that transcended the physical reality.
- B. When you do this, even the most challenging of threats in the physical realm recede into insignificance in light of the security of the spiritual.
- C. Paul states this so powerfully in Philippians 4:6, *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
1. Now it's critical for our understanding to notice what Paul promises as the result of our prayer.
  2. It's not that you will get everything you pray for—that all threats will go away—that you will have no discomfort or pain or grief.
    - a. That your mother-in-law will get well and you'll be able to move to San Diego next week.
    - b. That Jenna will leap out of that wheel chair.
  3. Rather, what Paul promises is that, *The peace of God will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
  4. Your spiritual strength will enable you to find peace even though things may still not be as you like them in this world.
  5. *The key is that you have to abide in Jesus.*
- D. I want to spin a parable about the ocean liner, *Jesus*, to try to explain this idea.
1. It is unfortunate that no matter where the ocean liner *Jesus* goes in its cruises on the sea of this world it never gets out of sight of *The Port of Earthly Concerns and Pleasures*.
    - a. Many Christians aboard the cruise ship *Jesus* crowd the rail gazing intently off toward *The Port of Earthly Concerns and Pleasures*.
      - (1) In fact whenever they get a chance they make trips into port
      - (2) In fact they spend most of their time there—have rooms, apartments, condos, houses.
      - (3) Really residents of *The Port of Earthly Concerns and Pleasures*, but they claim to be passengers on the ship.
    - b. Those who abide in *Jesus* spend far less time at railing or in port.
      - (1) Rather they turn their attention to the offerings on board.
      - (2) They spend lots of time in the library, filling their minds with the stories and history of *Jesus*.
      - (3) They take advantage of every inservice, seminar, and class.
      - (4) They volunteer to help in the kitchen, the housekeeping department and the sick bay for victims picked up off streets of *The Port of Earthly Concerns and Pleasures*.
    - c. And because they have such confidence in *Jesus*, they find that when the sea gets stormy or when *The Port of Earthly Concerns*

*and Pleasures* is ablaze with anxiety, they have no fear.

d. They feel secure. They are at peace. They have risen above anxiety.

e. And that's because their real security is in *Jesus*.

- IV. I want to close today by asking where you are in this Parable of the cruise ship, *Jesus*?
- A. Can you honestly say, "I'm abiding in Jesus, and I find my peace and security in him? I feel no anxiety in the ups and downs of life?"
- B. Or would you have to say, "I spend a lot of my time in *The Port of Earthly Concerns and Pleasures*?"
- C. To the degree we struggle with anxiety and fear, I want to challenge us to consider spending a lot more time back on the ship *Jesus*.
1. Now the strategies we talked about in the beginning of the sermon are a good first step to managing fear.
  2. But the best step of all is to abide in Jesus.
- D. If you can turn your attention away from *The Port of Earthly Concerns and Pleasures* and abide more actively in Jesus then it is likely that you will finally be able to put into practice that verse we teach to our toddlers—"I will trust and not be afraid."
- E. 336 When Peace, Like a River. (Horatio G. Spafford)