

December 2, 2017 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
 Luke 2:10 Hark! The Herald Angels Say: Don't Be Afraid by Andy McDonald

It should come as no surprise to us that when the angels show up in all their brilliance and radiance, in all their glory that the first words the angel says are these words—"Don't be afraid!"

Imagine with me that you are one of those shepherds "keeping watch over your flocks by night." Maybe you've had your shepherd's pie around a campfire on the hillside. The fire has died down to just some red embers still holding some heat. You and your fellow shepherds have been talking about life. Maybe dreams of marriage, or building a home, or politics and how sick you are of the Roman rule. Maybe even some conversation about the hoped for Messiah who will come and turn the tables.

You've got the sheep all sort of settled down for the night. Maybe you're in that conversation stop and start drifting off a little to sleep. And kaboom. Suddenly there's this bright light. It's like the sun is shining close up and personal. There's this extra terrestrial being, an angel standing, hovering, present in all this radiant glory.

The shock the contrast. We've been jaded. We've seen big screen special effects. Some of us are hard to be wowed by even the grandest spectacular. But not these guys. They are quietly conversing, quietly in the dark doing duty. They've never seen a lazer light show on Cinderallas castle, They've never been to a fireworks show. They've never seen the night light up like the day. A big bonfire is the biggest night light they've seen. They are terrified.

Before the angel can deliver the news he must calm their nerves—quiet their fear. So what does the angel say? "Don't be afraid!" Does that work? It's good counsel. They are safe. God is for them not against them. The angel is there for their benefit. But you've got to wonder if simply telling someone "Don't be afraid" really works?

It reminds me of the great Bob Newhart sketch where a lady comes to him for counseling. He explains his fee structure as a \$1 per minute but that he will only see her for 5 minutes and it probably won't even take the whole time, looks at his watch and tells "let's start." She looks confused and he says "What seems to be the problem" so he launches into describing her fear that she will be buried alive in a box. And how it is paralyzing her life." He then explains that he's going to say two words that she is to incorporate in her life. She gets out a pen and paper and asks about taking notes, and he dismissively says that they've found that most people can remember just two words. He then reiterates her fear of being buried alive in a box and then says here are the two words and he shouts at her across his desk. "Stop it! Are you crazy. Has anyone ever tried to bury you alive in a box "Stop It". She looks a little bewildered and asks "So I'm just supposed to stop it? I can't you see in my childhood..." and he interrupts, "We don't go there just stop it!" Pretty straight forward counseling but you have to wonder about it's effectiveness!!

We just heard some of the fears of some our kids. Monster's got a couple of votes and I wasn't surprised that "the dark" won a spot on the list. Along with spiders, snakes, poisonous things, rats, cats, our shadows, people that are bad, (tigers, lions, bears) scary rides.

So adults how successful is it to simply tell a child encountering one of their fears, "Don't be afraid!" I mean it isn't bad counsel. The advice may be sound but when a child comes running to mom and dad's bed terrified of the dark probably a little more will be needed than a simple, "Don't be afraid."

Maybe, and this is just conjecture, but maybe there was superstition about when an angel shows up it's bad news. A fore warning. A prediction of destruction coming. A call to flee because bad stuff is on the way." Maybe imagination had already run ahead and set up our shepherds for fear.

So many of the fears we face are things we can do nothing about. From the researched list of the top 10 fears of Americans comes this list

- Corrupt government officials (same top fear as 2015)

- Terrorist attacks or being victim of terrorist attack
- Pollution of air and water
- Not having access to affordable healthcare
- Not having enough money for the future
- People I love dying
- Identity theft
- People I love becoming seriously ill
- Economic collapse
- US going to war/ Attack by North Korea

There are a couple on the list over which we can have some control

We can't guarantee it but we can take steps today so there is enough money for the future, but even our best planning can be thwarted by market collapse or hyper inflation. And we can purchase services that can help protect our identity but it isn't absolute.

At our staff meeting earlier this week I asked the same question posed to our kids in the video, "What makes you afraid? Or what are your fears? What are you afraid of?"

See if any of these resonate with you: Health, Failure, Unknown, Success, Letting people down, Disapproval, Not being prepared, clowns (we aren't saying who but after discussion there seemed to be general agreement) loneliness, people pretending to like me but not really, loosing my spouse (not like in the mall but by death), the dark, storms, tight places, being out of control, seeing something I'm not supposed to see and being the only one to see it—like a murder.

Do you remember when we first encounter fear in scripture? The very first book of the Bible is only half way into the third chapter when we first encounter fear.

Remember the setting. Perfect God has created a perfect world. And then within that perfect world has carved out a very perfect garden home. God has perfectly created everything and then humans in his very image. Here is an environment of perfection. A place where there is safety and no fear. Full acceptance of their vulnerability of being what God made them the last verse of the second chapter ends the creation story, "Now, although Adam and his wife were both naked, neither of them felt any shame."

Total oneness, openness, comfortable vulnerability only in their oneness with God. Just seven verses later after sinning there's this vital revelation—it says, "At that moment, their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they strung fig leaves together around them to cover themselves."

That evening God comes looking for his kids. He called to Adam, "Where are you?" And Adam realizes he can't successfully hide from God, and he replied, "I heard you, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked."

I believe in this story it is real and physical and metaphorical all at the same time. It wasn't an outward expression. Adam didn't say I recognized that Eve was naked. Nor did Eve say that of Adam.

Sin brings this self-revealing curse—I am unclothed, I am vulnerable, and there is this shame that comes to us in the moment of revelation that we are not enough. And in that moment fear becomes real and overwhelming and scary and we either embrace this reality that we are not enough and look for a solution beyond ourselves, or we begin to build facades to portray or to cover over the shame of our inadequacy.

We grab for figleaves, we fashion a covering, in our desperation we will grab for most anything to relieve the vulnerability of our exposure. We seek to fix our fear.

Today in a world where there seems to be growing numbers of things of which to be afraid, how can we obey the angel's directive to the shepherds? Is their relief to our fears? What is our response to the wise counsel "Don't be afraid."

Earnest Ligon wrote a book first published in 1935. It was a book titled and meant to explore The Psychology of Christian Personality, and it was meant to wrestle with question, "If a person should obey implicitly the teachings of Jesus, would he or she be mentally healthy or unhealthy?"

He saw that Jesus teaching, his concrete direct statement in the sermon on the mount is really a teaching to reduce fear in our lives. Just after he has made it clear that you cannot serve both God and Money, Matthew 6:25 records these words of Jesus, "Therefore," this therefore means in light of the reality that you can't serve both God and Money, "I tell you, do not worry about your life." Don't be afraid.

A synonym for worry is fear.

Jesus is sort of like the angels and sort of like Bob Newhart, "Stop it!" Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and th body more important than clothes." If we read this whole section we find ourselves warned to not let worry, to not let fear control our lives and Ligon, as he worked on his book, saw in this part of Jesus' teaching four means of overcoming fear.

First is knowledge. This was part of what the angel used that night with the shepherds. First they are told "Don't be afraid." But immediately they are given knowledge to back up the directive. Don't be afraid because I bring you good news of great joy for everyone.

The common fear of the dark is related to the fear of the unknown and knowledge can dispel that fear.

We all know how we can let our imaginations run wild in the dark. We can look around our room and see things in the shapes and shadows and work ourselves up into a fear of what isn't really there. But do you know what can fix that fear?

Just flick on the light switch and woosh with the light comes the knowledge—and reality the knowing it is only a shadow that resembles a monster but is not in fact a monster diminishes our fear.

The unknown is fearful simply because it is unknown. We are down and skeptical and afraid of what we are ignorant, but coming into the know moves us beyond being paralyzed by fear into either total relief or into action to resolve.

Jesus in the sermon uses God's care of the birds and his dressing of lilies as knowledge to relieve fear and worry.

In addition to knowledge as the first means of overcoming fear the second is a development of sense of dependence.

Returning to the illustration of a child facing their fear. They may be scared but if dad or mom is there to hold their hand all those feelings of fear are vanquished in their dependence and the security they have in their dependence on their parent.

If you take the time to read through all the scriptures that say, Do not be afraid, you may be struck as I was of the reasons that follow.

They run along these lines—God says,
 Do not be afraid, I am your shield
 Do not be afraid, for I am with you
 Do not be afraid, you will see the deliverance of the Lord
 Do not be afraid, I will fight for you
 Do not be afraid, I will never leave you nor forsake you
 Do not be afraid, I will be with you wherever you go
 Do not be afraid, for the battle is not your, but God's
 Do not be afraid, I am with you and will rescue you
 Do not be afraid, I will save you and deliver you
 Do not be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows
 Do not be afraid, your prayer has been heard
 Do not be afraid, you have found favor with God
 Do not be afraid, I bring you good news

Jesus knows that there are plenty of things of which we may be afraid, and he simply tells us we live in him and there is this great fatherliness of the spiritual universe upon which we can be dependent.

I return in moment so fear to Isaiah 41:10 So do 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.”

The knowledge that can dispel the darkness that brings fear
 And the development of a sense of the reality of our dependence on God can ease our fears and thirdly
 A dominating sense of purpose.

Having a great purpose a vision for life that consumes us can make us brave and set fear aside.

I think of the moments of great heroes. What American has not been inspired by the words of Patrick Henry, facing the fear of death as treason to Great Brittan is coming to reality. March 23, 1775, the outcome of the coming revolution unknown, but at the Second Virginian Convention at St Johns Church in Richmond, Virginia, the great vision of new nation was arising and it overcame fear, and in his speech he said, “Give me liberty or give me death.”

Jesus says let your life be connected to one great purpose. Seek first and best and most and above all else God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and everything else will be given you as well.
 So to obey the angels words Don't be afraid,

Step into the light let knowledge banish some fears
 Develop a sense of dependency on God
 Adopt a dominating purpose or vision
 And finally move to action on that vision plan and live and work to fulfill God's vision that he have first and best place

And as a result, even in a world even in your life where there may be many things which could make you afraid, you will be able to obey what the angel said,
 “Don't be afraid.”



What are some of your fears?

How has fear sometimes paralyzed you?

What do you see as the primary source of your fears?

Looking at your own fears how many of them are something you can do anything about?

What do you think Jesus is saying about fear in Matthew 6:25-34?

How do you see fear and vulnerability connected?

When has knowledge helped dispel fear for you?

How can you get that sense of dependency on God that we had on our parent or significant adult in our childhood?

What vision, what dominating vision has or could helped manage fear for you?

How will you “take action” to pursue the vision of Matthew 6:33?



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