

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Tuesday, August 11, 2020

Fears, Phobia and Forgetfulness

But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"

—Luke 12:20, from the Parable of the Rich Fool, 12:13-21

For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. —1 Timothy 4:6

In these anxious times I often remind myself of one good way to handle anxiety. Years ago a wise pastor explained to me that anxiety is simply a non-specific fear, that is, being afraid of something which we can only vaguely identify. The best counter to a non-specific fear is to specify it, identify it as clearly as one can, and then deal with it. Vague fears can easily paralyze, but once identified, fears can be addressed and put into perspective. This is great advice for living.

Life is full of frightening things and while we want to avoid dwelling upon fears, we do need to address them regularly and keep them in their proper place. We need to prioritize and strategize. For starters we should deal with phobias that may creep into our lives. A phobia is an irrational fear, meaning that the actual reason for fear is minimal or nonexistent, while the reaction is maximal. Phobias can be anything from a fear of crowds, to storms, heights or bridges. Occasionally one can overcome the phobia by reasoning through the matter, or by defying the fear. Often one must learn to avoid phobic situations, and find coping skills to help one through a phobic session when it does occur. However the phobia is addressed, it is important that it not be allowed to dominate one's life, for rationally we know that it is only a phobia.

Life is also full of real fears—matters which should cause us genuine apprehension. The big challenge with fears is to keep them in their proper perspective. Are we responding to a possible danger in a way which fully recognizes the risk, but does not over-react? Are we keeping our fears in an appropriate priority, giving the most attention to the most threatening problems and less to the minor ones? This is a tough one as we all have our preferred fears. One might have a deep ongoing concern for their cholesterol levels, yet drive their car like a maniac. An essential living skill is maintaining perspective in the fear department.

Even the most level headed folks are challenged in these days as we try to deal rationally with COVID fears. How cautious should I be? Am I high, medium or low risk? What activities should I curtail or adjust? How much damage is the stress of isolation

doing, and how shall I balance that against the precautions? It is so hard to keep a perspective on an invisible virus!

It may seem for a moment that I should not be discussing fears, as we Christians are not to be a fearful people. True enough. But we deal with fears so that we might then put them aside and get on with a life free of fear. And lest we become too reticent to consider fearful matters we must remember that Jesus often told us of what we *should* be afraid! *I tell you my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has the power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.* (Luke 12:4-5) This brings us to the third fear factor which deserves serious consideration: the things which we forget to fear.

While one hates to be introducing new fears into anyone's life, one is a fool to deliberately remain blind to danger. In these days of COVID precautions and endless discussion of the virus's dangers we find other cares cast aside. Even before the pandemic America was becoming a physical health conscious people. In my lifetime we Americans have become experts at extending earthly years, and this is wonderful. It is wonderful until we consider how much this striving for physical health may be stifling our seeking after spiritual health and readiness for eternity. Jesus tells us the *Parable of the Rich Fool* and we cringe as we realize that like this ambitious entrepreneur, we too are given to ambitiously pursuing earthly comfort and security with little thought of eternity.

Years ago, one of my sons wanted to try out a membership at the "Y" so we did it as a family. I remembered seeing so many people and families that I knew traipsing into the gym several times a week with a religious kind of dedication. They were getting healthy, and while I could applaud such a desire, I could not stop thinking of Paul's advice to Timothy. *Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.* Are we training in godliness with discipline and rigor, or has this concern fallen by the wayside? Do we care deeply about the spiritual welfare of those around us, of the children in the neighborhood and of others who may not have heard the Good News?

In all the fears that pester us in these days, let us be sure to add to them the fear of the Lord, for once we learn the fear of the Lord we will never again be tormented by fears.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O Lord God, in whom we live and move and have our being, open our eyes that we may behold thy fatherly presence ever with us. Draw our hearts to thee with the power of thy love. Teach us to be anxious for nothing, and when we have done what thou givest us to do, help us, O God our Savior, to leave the issue to thy wisdom. Take from us all doubt and mistrust. Lift our hearts up to thee in heaven, and make us to know that all things are possible to us through thy Son our Redeemer. —Brooke Foss Westcott, 1825-1901