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## **What are You Afraid of?** Psalm 34

What are you afraid of? According to most studies, peoples number one fear is speaking in public. Anyone here back that finding? Number two is a fear of death. So...says comic Jerry Seinfeld..to the average person, if you have to go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket, than doing the eulogy.

David Letterman interviewing Diane Keaton on his show:

Letterman: Do you believe there is a heaven?

Keaton: I don't know.

Letterman: Are you afraid to die?

Keaton: Yes. A lot of people say they aren't afraid to die. They're lying.

We are people filled with fears. Besides the obvious fear of heights and public speaking, spiders and enclosed spaces. We are pulled by many fears. Even the tough guy who spouts, I'm not afraid of anybody...is probably plagued by fears. We fear pain. We fear rejection, loss and abandonment. We fear becoming old, becoming less attractive. The thought of losing our mental facilities, memory and reason can be terrifying. We fear becoming a burden on those we love. We fear embarrassment, shame, financial loss. We fear the unknown, the future. We fear what other people will think of us. We fear failure. We fear expectations that cannot be met. We fear circumstances we can't control. We fear losing control. We fear our emotions. We fear loneliness. Getting downsized at work. We fear becoming unable to provide. We fear how our kids will turn out. We are pulled by many fears. These fear will cause us to do or stop us from doing things. Fear can be a healthy thing. Its a good fear that keeps us from, driving down the river road at 100 mph. fear keeps us from lounging on a heated stove. Fear keeps us from saying certain things our boss. Fear in dangerous situations is a good thing. Fear of failure can motivate us to do our best and work hard. But if fear

begins to take over and control us...it can become a serious and debilitating problem.

Most of us will not become so afraid that we try something like an 63 year old accountant in London tried in 1994. Most of us don't like going to the doctor, but this guy took it to the extreme. He needed a bladder surgery but could not overcome his fear of doctors and hospitals. So he did what he thought needed to be done and performed a self surgery. Tragically the man got an infection and died. His drastic remedy went wrong where a simple surgery would have solved his problem. Just like this man didn't trust doctors, preferring to risk their very life on their own skills...many of us fail to fear the right things and so fail miserably in life. What is your greatest fear? An unhealthy fear will pull you out of balance. Fears will plague you and pull you down...and all those around you. When you see no options..it's tempting to run and hide to try and escape the paralyzing grip of fear. How can we overcome our fears...those fears that have come to overwhelm our thoughts. Those fears that chase us into hiding. How does the teen who is confused and terrified looking a life in chaos get a grip on the fear that drives their anger, confusion, that fearful trapped feeling and not knowing why? How about the teens parents that watch their daughter in fear as she lashes out in anger and the rebels rage, not knowing what she will do when she leaves the home with friends on a Friday night. Lets call worry what it really is...it's fear. How can we overcome our fears?

Turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 34. The introductory comments, that are also included in the ancient manuscripts, tell us that this Psalm was written by David while reflecting on the fear driven experience of faking insanity before the Philistine king Abimelech, also known as King Achish. Hold your finger in Psalm 34 and can flip back to I Samuel 21 so I can give you a thumbnail background of this Psalm.

David has been anointed as the next in line king of Israel. He is already known as a great warrior and national hero. He has slain the giant, Goliath and the women have danced in the streets singing his praises, King Saul has killed his thousands and David His ten thousands. As you can imagine this did not sit well with king Saul and being jealously enraged began trying to kill David. David flees the country and I Samuel 21 we read that David comes trembling. He is full

of fear. David stops by the local temple at Nob to see if the priest, can help him out. He asks for food and only the bread that had been consecrated before the Lord is available. David asks if there are any weapons. He must have left quickly without weapons or provisions. The only thing available is Goliath's sword which David had used to kill the giant. The sword failed to boost his courage and overcome his fear. David's confidence is gone so he keeps on running, all the way past the front line to the enemies capital city, the Philistine city of Gath. Where was the giant hero from? Gath. Do you think they might recognize David, the hero killer and his sword in the streets? Yep. Some men captured David and brought him before Philistine King Achish. V. 12 Now David's fear of King Achish was greater than His fear of King Saul, so when he came into the throne room, he began to slobber and drool down his beard. and snort and scratch at the walls and scream. What a pathetic sight this great warrior hero was. Achish can only figure that the reason David would come straight to his city is that he is truly gone mad. Achish is disgusted says he has enough crazy people in his castle and throws him out. David's life is spared and he limps off to the Cave at Adullam to process with God his bought with fear. As David sits there in the cave...focus returns and he begins to write Psalm 34. Are you needing to process some fear today...read with me Psalm 34. (READ)

How can we overcome our fears? First. Fear the Lord. Sounds pretty basic doesn't. Fearing the Lord is as basic as the abc's are to learning a language. In fact this Psalm is written in alphabet structure. It's an acrostic. Like a children's book. A is for Apple. B is for Bible. Each of the verses begin with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It's also in a chiasm structure where the focus of the point is found in the middle verse 11. So let's look at this Psalm by starting in the middle and working our way out. David begins "Come you children, listen. I will teach you the fear of the Lord." He is bringing all the cookies down on the lowest shelf so we don't run the risk of missing it. Children life is filled with a multitude of fears...We overcome our fears, our unhealthy fears, with a far greater and holy fear. We neutralize our fear by cultivating an even greater fear...That is the fear of the Lord.

This is the principle of fighting fire with fire. This is the season for fires, in Florida and also Washington fires rip and devastate millions

worth of property and lives. Hundreds of firefighters are called in, helicopters, water tanker planes, bulldozers every possible means are employed to save the homes in the path of the fire. But often what works the best is fighting the fire with fire. Controlled Backfires are intentionally started to rob the onrushing forest fire of it's fuel and kill it power.

David in Psalm 34 says a similar technique must be employed to rob the fuel and silence the unhealthy fears that rage within our lives. The answer to our fear problems is basic, the fear of the Lord. It may seem strange to fear the Lord, to calm our unhealthy fear, but just as a fire can destroy, it also is necessary to stimulate growth of grasses and return nutrients to the soil and expose seed beds. God's refining fire will bring new life in the fields of our own hearts as well..if we allow the fire of the fear of God to control our lives rather than allow the rage of the onrushing, fears overwhelm us. How can we overcome our fears? Point one fear the Lord, greater than you fear failure, being lonely, taking advantage of and manipulated, pain, rejection, abandonment, failure, aging. We must replace our fears with a greater and holy fear of God. When our raging fears get out of control and threaten to disable us, the Fear of the lord is the answer.

What is the Fear of the Lord? What does it mean for me to Fear the Lord. Is it a cringing, cowering fear of some divine dictator who wishes to strike me dead at his whim? Some here may have been raised in a very strict legalistic and even abusive religious upbringing. Is that the fear I'm talking about? Do I hide in fear of an authoritarian maniac controller? No. The fear of the Lord is a reverence and respect for God. This fear could be better described as Awe. Wow! For a God who is my loving leader above all else in my life. Not a dictator to please Himself. A leader who knows perfectly what is best for me even when I can't see it. A leader who is always there even when I cannot sense His presence. A leader who will allow us to go through fires, challenges to refine our character. The fear of the Lord is an inescapable accountability to God for my behavior. He is present always therefore I act as if there really is a God. The fear of the Lord is then obedience to truth, experiencing the presence of a Holy God in my life and humbly following His compelling leadership by obeying His Words.

It is this fear of the Lord that keeps us sensitive to sin. Knowing that how we handle sin is not to be viewed as our own personal success or failure but that our sin is grieving the very heart of God. Proverbs 1:7 says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. While naiveté is not knowing all the facts. Foolishness is knowing the facts and not doing them. The fool has no fear of God. The way of wisdom begins with a step of holy fear that puts the feet to the facts and walks in obedience following the truth of God. The awe or fear of the Lord motivates us to do right

Back in Psalm 34. v. 4 "I sought the Lord and He delivered me from all my fears." v. 7 The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear His name. v. 9 O fear the Lord for to those who fear Him, there is no want. They who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing. To fear the Lord is to seek him. In verse 11. David says I will teach you the fear of the Lord. and then gives an example in an area where we all struggle. I say all and not most because James 3 lets us know that anyone who is able to control His tongue, the words he says is a perfect man able to bridle his whole body as well. V. 13 "keep your tongue from evil and lips from speaking deceit." How can the fear of the Lord help me with my tendency to sin with my lips, the words that I say that hurt others? When I fear the Lord. God will hold His rightful place in my life. My focus will be off of myself and on God. When I fear the Lord even my speech will become driven by that awesome respect of God. It is that fear of the Lord that will flush out those things we would never say here in the church service, but find coming out of our mouths in the kitchen at home, at the garage, the shop, at work. When we yell angry things to our children glad that the, phones been hung up and the windows are closed so the neighbors can't hear us..it is the fear of the Lord that prompts us...God is here, He is present. When we lash out fearing a lack of control. When we fear being manipulated and taken advantage of so we on the offensive spew out venom filled words. It is a realization of the fear of the Lord that the one who can control the spinning earth can handle this situation that I'm getting so excited over right now. How would he want me to respond? I must say this has been quite helpful this week to me. When I fear failure...the fear of the Lord gives me a perspective that He is in control and my success or failure is up to Him. When my

expectations are not met by someone, I don't have to rant and rave and get all bent out of shape, I would rather fear the Lord than those things that are out of my control.. When the fear of being overwhelmed with the coming school year hits it is the fear, the reverence of a holy God who knows what He is doing calms my worry and fear.

The first point would be then to Fear the Lord, to replace your fears with a greater and Holy fear of Almighty God. The second point I think David would want us to catch from his Psalm is a move to answer the question what does it look like for me to fear the Lord. I think he would want us to practice His presence. Look at verse 1. I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. The practice of His presence is not reserved just for church, LIFE Group and a blessing before your meal. No matter where I am. No matter what kind of situation I find myself in. I will make sure that God is in His rightful place in my life. I will bless the Lord, praise Him by giving Him the position due to Him of awesome respect. This practice of His presence is not always easy when you are down and depressed and He doesn't feel anywhere near Yacolt. Its not easy when you lack any motivation, when your spirit feels dry as toast. When your health and mind are going downhill and you know it. When you find yourself in relational tension. When there are fears that are overwhelming your life. It's not easy to sense that the Lord is always right there..but He is. Michael Card writes, "Lord I long to see your presence in reality, but I don't know how, let me know you in the now." There is a very strong connection between the fear of the Lord and the practice of His presence in your life.

What does the fear of the Lord feel like? Practicing His presence feels Like you are never alone. v. 7 the angel encamps around those who fear His name. O check it out. O taste and see that the Lord is good. O fear the Lord. Just take a taste of the Lord. He is good. What does the Lord taste like to you right now? bitter? sweet? fresh? sour? bland? dry? Fruity? meaty? salty? Taste the Lord He is good. He is the one who said, "I will never leave you or forsake you" Look at verse 15,16 His eyes, ears his face. He is a present reality. We can know Him, experience Him not just sometime in the future in heaven. We can know Him in the now. He is right here in our office, our kitchen, our garage, and bedroom. He is even in our thoughts. I can never do anything that he doesn't see. I may

try and fool myself, but I can't get away with anything He cannot see...so why keep trying? His presence elicits our best behavior.

Your arguments suddenly get quiet when you hear a knock on the door. Your foot instantly releases the pedal when the policeman pulls up behind your car. The kids immediately withdraw their hand from the cookie jar when mom walks in. ..when dad turns on the porch light and begins to stroll out to your boyfriend's car. The presence of certain people will bring out our best behavior and that thing that was so tempting is no longer as appealing. To those who fear the Lord v. 9 there is no want, of any good thing. When we cultivate the fear of the Lord, the practice of His presence, it will change our behavior and what comes out of our mouth. It will work because we are affected by those we spend time with and hang around. They influence us. Our lives must change when we spend them in the presence of God Almighty. In His presence is fullness of joy at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore. His presence is our refuge and hope even when things are not going very well. The practice of his presence is not behaving in such a way that merely appears to others around us that we are looking like "good Christians" it's actually doing it even when no one else is around to keep us accountable because we fear a greater and more holier God Almighty who is always watching. Practicing His presence is simply treating God as if He actually were God. His influence in our lives will change us. We must change. If we are not...we are not in His presence.

We no longer have to be governed by fear. We hold an awesome respect for someone far greater than He knows what's going on even when we cannot see it. Verse 18, 19.

Over a decade Elizabeth Middlestaedt from Frankfurt, Germany went to what she thought would be a routine trip to the dentist, but it left her with a severely damaged nerve in her jaw, resulting in constant pulsating pain worse than a severe toothache on her right jaw. She traveled from doctor to doctor trying to repair the damage to no avail. She finally traveled to the best doctors in the States at the Mayo Clinic where the doctor said there is nothing that can be done to repair the damage or even relieve the pain. You will have to live with it. Returning to Germany she felt deeply discouraged and depressed. Medical records show that people with this pain and no relief often resort to suicide. To

her that was no option, but the constant pain took its toll and once when walking over a bridge she looked down at death and relief of the pain. She heard a voice "Why don't you just jump!" Then she was reminded of a verse from Matthew 4 when the devil was tempting Jesus to jump down from the highest point on the temple, so she said, no I'm not going to jump, I'm going to trust God instead. She told God that she feared most living through the pain and God said just this one day. I will help you make it through this day. As Elizabeth walked home she saw the beautiful steepled churches and fairy tale homes with flowered window boxes and realized they were a facade behind were thousands of Europeans struggling with broken marriages, the aftermath of memories of the World wars. guilt, loneliness and crushed hopes. They suffered too, they too wanted to give up, but their pain is different it's emotional. She suddenly realize she wasn't alone in her pain and from that moment sprang a vision to encourage the women in Europe and she is now the editor of Lydia, the largest Christian magazine in Europe it is reaching over a million women in three languages. Pain is still her constant companion but it's not as overwhelming as it once was. She found a verse of comfort and it is verse 19 of Psalm 34. She says the words to the left of the comma describe her circumstances and the word to the right give real hope for the future. If we fear we can hang onto the comma in the middle, the fear of the Lord, the realization of His presence and offer that pain to God. Offer up that fear to God. He will never waste it.