

God's Confidence vs. Our Fears • Proverbs 3:25–26

There is nothing quite so frightening as fear. Fear by dictionary definition is said to be “painful emotion marked by alarm.” But we all know that fear is much more than an emotion. Fear can make our bodies tremble, our hands sweat, our hearts beat faster, our voices quiver and our heads ache.

Fear can take over our lives. We can be so afraid that we cannot speak. Fear can make us behave in strange ways. It can make us run away, turning fear into flight. Or, it can make us instantly violent, turning fear into fight.

I find it hard to imagine that anyone would ever choose to be afraid, although I recognize that some people do. Some people actually pay money to see movies so that they can be scared and other people pay to ride on roller coasters in order to be afraid.

But there is a fear that no one would choose. It is uncontrolled fear. The roller coaster and movie theater fears are chosen and controlled. People pay to get in and are free to walk out. But uncontrolled and unexpected fear comes from a phone call in the middle of the night, an attacker in the parking lot, a car careening out of control on a slippery highway. There are no tickets to buy and there are no exits out. Those are the real fears.

In fact, there is fear of such fears. Some people cannot get to sleep at night worrying that the phone might ring, are covered with a cold sweat walking across the parking lot wondering when someone will jump out or refuse to drive on highways for fear of a horrible accident.

For all such fears, God gives us Proverbs 3:25-26: “Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your feet from being snared.” That’s a wonderful proverb; however, it is a proverb that must be handled with a great deal of care because it can

easily be misunderstood. This is not a blanket protection from all fear any more than the constitution of the United States is a guarantee of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” It comes with conditions.

One condition is a relationship with God. The Lord is the confidence of only those to whom he is related. The first prerequisite of fear-free living is that we know God through Jesus Christ. It would be deceptive to offer the promise of the proverb without first offering the salvation of Jesus.

My hope is that you have that relationship with God. It can be yours right now by coming to Jesus Christ and saying, “I’m a sinner and I accept you as Savior. I submit to you as Lord of my life.”

However, there’s another condition and that is living wisely. If someone chooses to ignore God’s wisdom and live like a fool then fear is to be expected. Seek to live God’s wise way as a prerequisite to fear-free life.

With those introductory understandings, let’s take a look at the proverb. One of the most frequent of fears is “sudden disaster”. It is, of course, just one of the many items in life’s catalog of fears, but it is more frequent and more powerful than most fears.

Let’s understand what it is not. It is not the fear of growing old. It is not the fear of taking

a scheduled examination. It is not the fear of getting married. It is not the fear of paying next month’s bills.

It is not the fear of

the predictable and routine concerns of life. It’s not talking about the fears of what we can plan for.

“Have no fear of sudden disaster.” These are the tragedies and traumas of life that cannot be predicted and cannot be controlled. Examples of these are many: fear of sudden

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death by heart attack or assault or accident; fear of nuclear holocaust; fear of losing your job without advance warning; fear your child will be kidnapped; fear your faithful mate will have an affair.

Life can be immobilized by such fears. We can worry until we cannot sleep at night, until we are inadequate at work, until we sometimes may even cause our fears to come true. Some people are so gripped with fear of sudden disaster that they barely go anywhere, have few friends, don't take normal risks and miss out on many of the joys of life.

Mark Twain once said, "I have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened." Yet, somehow such fears of the unknown are not chased away by a clever quote. Knowing that most fears never happen doesn't bring sleep late in a worry-filled night.

Another frequent fear is personal ruin. More specifically, it is "the ruin that overtakes the wicked." This is a common fear although it is rarely expressed in these words. It is rooted in the notion that if you are "good" life will go well and if you are "bad" you will suffer misery.

We generally believe this, although we are often troubled by the glaring exceptions. We see good people who suffer much and die young. We see bad people who seem to prosper and get away with their wickedness. But, that is the topic for another day!

Specifically, in Proverbs 3:25 is the fear that those of us who are good guys will get the consequences of the bad guys. We are somehow afraid of a mistake in the celestial computer. Perhaps we will be sent to jail for a crime we did not commit. Maybe we will lose our jobs because of the mismanagement of the company board and officers. A husband or wife or son or daughter will do terrible things but we will suffer the greater consequences. The drunk driver will survive the accident without a scratch but our passengers may die and we may end up disabled.

This proverb speaks to the recurring fear of

tragically and mistakenly suffering the ruin rightly intended for the wicked. Frequent fears: sudden disaster; personal ruin. "Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked."

Sounds good, but how? Saying, "don't be scared," doesn't always chase our fears away. So the second half of the proverb moves from our frequent fears to God's lessons for the fearful.

The first of those lessons in Proverbs 3:26 is to have confidence in God because "the Lord will be your confidence." That's an extraordinary promise. It's saying that we cannot control all of life and there are times when we cannot have the confidence to go on and do what needs to be done, and that it is precisely when we must rely upon God. In other words, we depend upon God for that which we cannot do ourselves.

This takes some explaining.

We are always to rely on God. Always trust him. However, there are different ways of trusting God. There are some instances in which we express our trust through obedience. He tells us what to do and we trust his orders enough to do what he says.

There are situations in life where God expects us to be responsible and our trust in him is expressed by our being responsible persons. Irresponsibility can, in and of itself, be an expression of lack of trust.

But there are also situations in life where there is no explicit planning that can be done, when there is no rule that we are to keep through obedience, when there is no responsibility which we can take upon ourselves because we cannot predict it. It is beyond our control. It is the sudden disaster; it is the potential of suffering the consequences intended for the wicked. It is precisely then that we have our confidence in God.

Parents know well the fears of dealing with a hurting child, whether it's a high fever in the middle of the night or a profusely bleeding wound in the middle of the day. You must drop

everything that you were doing and make a whole series of decisions. You wrap your baby in a blanket or you run into the house for a towel and you press it against the bleeding wound and you rush to the hospital emergency room. There you turn your child over to a physician you have never seen before. You have no idea whether she got straight A's at Harvard or stole the white gown from the utility closet.

There is at that instant an enormous emotional change that takes place in a parent's heart. Not that the fever is less, not that the bleeding has stopped, not that you are suddenly unconcerned . . . but you have placed your confidence in someone else to handle what you cannot.

That is what God invites us to do. Let God be your confidence. Rely on him to handle the fears of sudden disaster and personal ruin that we cannot control. Not that the dangers have suddenly disappeared, but that we have entrusted them to the One who understands as we cannot understand and will handle what we cannot handle.

Lesson Number One for those who have the frequent fears of sudden disaster or personal ruin is this: "the LORD will be your confidence."

The second lesson, also in Proverbs 3:26, is that the Lord "will keep your foot from being snared." I read this as a practical promise from God. There are lots of traps in the woods of life. God warns us about many of them in the Bible and tells us to look out for them. However, there is always the possibility that we will be caught in a trap we did not know about and did not see.

Suppose someone at work is out to get you. They want to trick you into some questionable practice that will get you fired or at least out of line for a promotion. God will warn you about the trap. He won't stop you from falling in, but at least you will do it forewarned and with your eyes open!

Maybe you are especially vulnerable to pornography. You know that you must stay away from it or it will destroy you. Don't fear that you will unwittingly be forced to view it as if you have been trapped. God will warn you of the trap and offer some way of escape.

This is not a promise that we won't be trapped. Rather, it is the assurance that we will not be trapped by complete surprise and that he will invariably give to us a way out of that trap. There will be another alternative rather than being taken down by it. "Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared."

I conclude with two stories, one far and the other near.

A Christian woman in her twenties was walking down a Los Angeles street when she heard footsteps behind her. She slowed down to listen more carefully and the sound of the footsteps slowed down to match her pace. She speeded up, but the footsteps again met her pace. She looked around for help, but there was no one in sight. It was late at night and the street was dark. And then the distance became less and her attacker closed in.

In the harsh reality of great fear and genuine danger she recalled some Bible verses that are parallel to this passage in Proverbs. They

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were words that she had memorized years earlier from Psalm 91, verses 3 and 4: "Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He

will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge."

She started to recite them out loud, although in the stress of the situation she didn't quote them precisely or completely. Instead she kept repeating, "I'm covered with feathers; I'm covered with feathers."

As her attacker closed in, he heard what she

was saying and responded, “You’re covered with feathers?!?” With that he pulled back his grasp and turned and walked the other way.

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My mother-in-law suffered a serious heart attack. She was rushed to the hospital by ambulance and was placed in the cardiac care unit. Charleen and I were away and not available to be reached by telephone so it was a number of hours later that we learned what had happened. Charleen flew to the East Coast where she remained for the next couple of weeks. We had ongoing daily telephone conversations about my mother-in-law’s medical situation. Eventually she was discharged from the hospital and allowed to recover at home.

It wasn’t until after Charleen had returned home that I asked her how she understood her mother’s perspective on her brush with death and the uncertainty of the future. She described her mother’s perspective in what I think is an

astonishing way. She said that her mom never showed a hint of discouragement or fear. Her mom told her that she had entrusted her life to God and that he could do with her whatever he wanted. She said her family and friends and the people at church were all praying for her and so she had nothing to worry about.

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