



# A Spirit of Fear

Fear Not #1 | September 10, 2023 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell

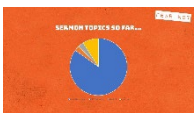
## *A New Sermon Series: Fear Not!*

Last week we finished our sermon series on Acts after twenty-eight eye-opening sermons! We explored God's actions in the early church, and we drew conclusions for our own experience today. We travelled to different places, met new people, and saw the Holy Spirit grow the Kingdom from Jerusalem, to Judea/Samaria, and to the ends of the earth! I hope you gained knowledge, insight, and wisdom as you considered the Holy Spirit's work through these individuals as they lived out their faith.

But now we're at a crossroads! Where do we go next? I was thinking about praying about this ever since I knew it was on the agenda, praying for the right direction.

### *Picking a New Topic*

Sermon planning is a big task! Typically, our staff takes time toward the end of a calendar year and plans out what we need (or hope) to discuss in the next twelve months. While the Spirit is free to guide and direct us differently during the year, planning gives us a framework to consider how we will present information to you, the congregation.



It might not be surprising to know that I brought a pie chart or two to the meeting, charting out where we had been in recent years. There's a balance of content that we want to share from four different categories: Old Testament, New Testament, Topical (Christian Living) Content, and Doctrinal (Christian Belief) Content.

For example, 2023 was always going to be a year that was heavy on New Testament. We committed to the Acts series, and we knew that would take over 50% of our sermons. But that means in the other weeks we should be looking at some of the other areas to give you a well-rounded diet of Truth!

After so much time in New Testament history, now seems like a good time to tackle a topic... and I feel that God has placed it on my heart to talk about "fear."



### *The Reason for "Fear"*

Why fear? Why now?

The short answer is that fear poses a danger to our church!

Have you paid attention to our cultural drift toward fear? Our society is sinking into it, and we are surrounded by it.

- **The daily news cycle depends on fear.** (*Random newsfeed on Wednesday: “Tropical depression to become **powerful** hurricane;” “China issues **ominous** warning to U.S.” “American Shoppers should **think twice** before buying from these two stores”). A scary headline leads people to click on a story and read it, so newswriters search for negative stories (mostly true, but negative) and present them as threats...never mind the impact on our collective mood!*
- **Marketing builds the “fear of missing out.”** Each item in commercials and your Amazon “suggested” items is a call to buy something now...before the price goes up, before the supplies run out, before the best options are gone! (Does anyone still have stockpiles of toilet paper from 2020? Point proven!)
- **COVID wrecked our society with fear.** People were afraid to breathe, cough, talk, interact, gather, or be close. We’re still dealing with the aftermath of that on our collective psyche.
- **People fear each other’s thoughts.** We are terrified of others’ thoughts and opinions. We are apprehensive about what their beliefs could do or create, whether it’s the worry that a political party will destroy the economy, or a worry that a group will impose unnecessary restrictions, or a worry that someone’s lifestyle will destroy culture.

These fears pose a danger to us as a church and as individuals! They tempt us to react poorly to others, to protect ourselves rather than opening up to others. They tempt us to stay silent when we should speak. They tempt us to focus on the present instead of the future. They consume our thoughts and rush us to bad solutions.

Fear is a threat to our church!

And so, this series is a chance to help you **recognize** it, **face** it, and **fight** it!

You’ve no doubt heard lots of popular solutions...

*Listen to K-LOVE, and you’ll hear a wave a songs that discuss fear:*

- *Francesca Battistelli says “Fear, you don’t own me!”*
- *Zach Williams says, “Fear, he is a liar!”*
- *Chris Tomlin says, “Whom shall I fear?”*
- *Josh Baldwin says, “My fear doesn’t stand a chance...!”*
- *Maverick City says, “Fear is not my future...!”*

K-LOVE theology is nice and good...and even true!...but you and I need to be grounded in the Word of God that underpins those declarations! You don’t need a songwriter’s opinion. You don’t even need Steve’s opinion! We just need solid biblical answers that we can trust.

Why? Because God gave us something better than fear!





*“for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”  
(2 Timothy 1:7, ESV)*

A spirit of fear is not becoming for the Christian. Instead, we need to be guided by the most repeated command found throughout Scripture: *“Fear not!”*



We want you to **recognize** fear, **face** fear, and **fight** fear! But that is easier said than done. So, we’re going to take four weeks to explore the topic and equip you to face fear with God’s words instead of your own.

Today, we’re going to recognize fear for what it is! But before we do that... let’s pray!

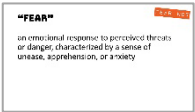
<< PRAY >>



## ***In Defense of Fear (The Emotion)***

So, is fear all bad? Let’s start with a little defense of fear – the emotion.

### ***Fear Defined***



So what is fear? “Fear” is defined as “an emotional response to perceived threats or danger, characterized by a sense of unease, apprehension, or anxiety.”<sup>1</sup>

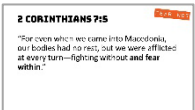
There are two parts to this definition that I want to draw your attention to:

1. *Emotional.* Fear is a natural response. It is a *sensation* that you can’t simply stop. That’s the thing about feelings. You can’t dictate their presence or absence! They well up whether you want them to or not.

If I tell you to feel happy right now, can you? If I tell you to feel sad right now, will you? If I tell you to feel apprehension, do you? You might be able to manufacture the look (*ex: I used to tease my niece and nephew about their ability to smile on command because their mom takes so many pictures...and others can do the same with sadness and crying*), but you can’t generate the **feeling**...or make it go away on demand.

Fear is a human emotion that we all experience.

Paul felt it:

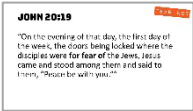


*“For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and **fear within.**”  
(2 Corinthians 7:5, ESV)*

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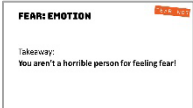
<sup>1</sup> Logos Factbook: “Fear”

The disciples felt it:



*“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were **for fear of the Jews**, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.””*  
(John 20:19, ESV)

And throughout Scripture we find others like Adam and Eve, Cain, Saul, Ahaz, Pilate – godly examples as well as ungodly examples – who faced the emotion. It’s a universal human experience.



**(Takeaway: You aren’t a horrible person for feeling fear!)**

That’s one part of the definition to know. The other part has to do with...

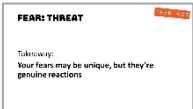
2. *Threat.* Fear is a response to a threat, real or perceived. And it doesn’t look the same for everyone.

We all have a different sense of danger depending on our situation or our status.



Ex: I don’t feel threatened in a parking garage at night. Why? Because I generally assume life is safe, and if it’s not...I’m a beefy dude with a manly beard! But mention the words “donate blood” to me, and I break into a cold sweat!

Maybe you have a severe allergy to something, or you had a bad experience in your childhood, or you just developed a phobia for unknown reasons. The threat may or may not be shared by others, but if you perceive danger (from dogs or ladders or mayonnaise) it can instigate the feeling of fear.



**(Takeaway: Your fears may be unique, but they’re genuine reactions)**

## *Positive Results of Fear*

Fear just happens automatically, whether we want it to or not. But that’s not always a bad thing! In fact, we can treat fear as a positive emotion for some situations.

Fear can:

- **...alert us to danger.** Our hairs stand on end for a reason! We are made aware that something unsafe is present (creepy guy at a party, smell of gas).
- **...activate caution.** If something scares us, we use more restraint around it (power lines, an intimidating father-in-law)
- **...create focus.** Fear takes our focus off other things, helping us center on whether we need to “fight or flight” in response (bomb squad, standardized tests)



While those aspects of fear can be helpful, they are only helpful if fear has been *mastered* to some degree instead of allowed to run free.



## *Fear Must Be Mastered*

Fear must be mastered (aka “managed well”). You can’t allow fear to run wild and send you screaming down the sidewalk, punching blindly against the air, or freezing you in place.

In fact, this is true of any feeling. We can’t just experience a feeling and let our actions run wild.

- You can feel hungry, but you can’t just grab your friend’s Snickers out of their hand.
- You can feel anger, but you can’t just throat punch the rude customer.
- You can feel attraction, but you can’t just kiss Ryan Reynolds.

In the same way, you can feel fear...but you can’t let it spiral into terror, paralysis, panic, retreat, or hiding. You can’t lock yourself away from society, you can’t avoid contact with all people, you can’t turn into a puddle of goo and stay there.

Giving free reign to your fear instead of mastering it never ends well.

The mature response is to manage that fear well.

...But as we said, that’s hard! Especially when we face our biggest fears.



## *Sources of Fear (Biggest and Scariest!)*

What IS the scariest thing you face? What generates the most fear?

Let me hear from a few of you. Shout out the biggest fear you face...

**<< TAKE AUDIENCE ANSWERS.**

**My own – blood drive, heights, not mattering >>**

There’s some good variety here. As we established, each person has different fears.

That fact is illustrated pointedly in fiction. In the Harry Potter book series, there was a magical creature called a “boggart” that shape-shifted and assumed the form of whatever most frightens the person who encounters it.

Early in the series (during a school lesson) some encounters with the creature cause it to shift into a big spider, or a scary professor, or a snake, or an overbearing grandmother. But in a later book, there’s a heart-wrenching scene in which the mother of one of our main characters is stuck in a room with a boggart...and it continually shape-shifts into representations of her family members – her husband, sons, daughter - who have been killed. She’s paralyzed by her fears of losing them until Harry can rescue her.

Fear comes in many types. It can be physical, emotional, relational, or spiritual.

Maybe you have a...

- Fear of failing
- Fear of being alone
- Fear of being wrong
- Fear of getting hurt
- Fear of getting caught

I promise you that your brain is even better than a bogart in showing fears! It can conjure up images and memories. It can imagine futures and outcomes. It can focus intentionally, or it can just pop a thought into your head at 2:30 on a Tuesday or 11:30 as you are trying to sleep.

Your brain can even invent and unlock new fears that you didn't even know you had!

Yet for all these fears (real or imagined), there is a path forward. We might not eliminate the feeling, but we can begin to master and manage our reaction.



## ***Fighting Against Fear (The Choice)***

Pop psychology has its own attempts to solve fear. For example, Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, *“Do the thing you fear and the death of fear is certain.”*

On the surface, such advice has the potential for success. You can get past some fears just by confronting them. But (sorry Ralph) but that's not the best answer.

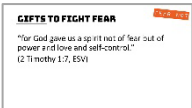
(I know because I tried it. Blood drive? I donated...and now my fear is worse!)

We as Christians need something better. And God provides it!

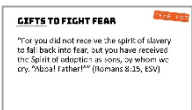
## ***Gifts to Fight Fear***

Here's a key truth: Fear is not the default state for the Christian! God has given us gifts to fight fear!

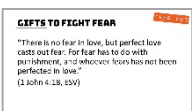
Consider some of the following verses:



*“for God **gave us** a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”  
(2 Timothy 1:7, ESV)*



*“For you did not **receive** the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!””  
(Romans 8:15, ESV)*



*“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not **been perfected** in love.”  
(1 John 4:18, ESV)*

Whatever God expects, He enables. And these verses make it clear that God has something different in store for us. Rather than the path of fear, he enables us to have a different path. He has given us gifts (power, love, self-control, adoption) that help us manage and master our fear.

Not only does He give us gifts, but He also gifts us with His presence! And the presence of God redefines the danger in any situation. The Psalmist writes,

*“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1, ESV)*

God can secure us from fear, either by removing the thing feared, or by subduing the fear of the thing.<sup>2</sup> His gifts greater than anything we might fear:

- Snakes? Clowns? Snake clowns?
- Bad parenting? Bad marriage?
- Loss of friends? Loss of a loved one?
- Fear of inadequacy? Fear of failure?

God is greater! God can change any one of those situations! God can be victorious over any fear! And if that is true, it provides a path forward to mastering our fears.

## *Choice to Fight Fear*

You and I must CHOOSE to trust God over and above the fear we feel. We must hold on to the promises and gifts He has given which can help us master the fear.

*“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.” (Isaiah 26:3, ESV)*

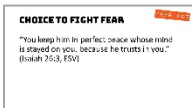
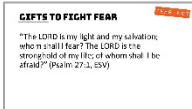
In other words, when our minds are focused on God by trusting him, there is no room for fear to take over.

Remember the biblical command that shows up, over and over and over again throughout Scripture?

“FEAR NOT.”

We’ve been discussing fear as if it is a “thing.” And yes, the feeling is a thing...but the mastery is a *choice*. It is a verb, something we do. To “fear not” is to *choose* to focus on God instead of the fear.

Remember, “mastering” fear is not the same thing as eliminating fear.



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<sup>2</sup> Quote from William Beveridge



## A Biblical Example: Haggai

Let me share an example from the Old Testament book of Haggai. God is delivering a message to the leaders of the Jewish people after they have returned from exile. They have been commanded to rebuild the previously destroyed Temple, yet they face opposition (fear of attack) and depression (fear of failure). In the midst of their fears, God declares:

*“Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, ‘Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. **Fear not.** For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.’”* (Haggai 2:2–9, ESV)

How does God fight their fears? How can He say, “Fear not”?

- **He makes His presence known!**
  - “I am with you!” (2:4)
  - “My Spirit remains in your midst.” (2:5)
- **He reiterates His past promises!**
  - “According to the covenant I made with you” (2:5)
- **He reveals His future plans!**
  - “In a little while...” (2:6)
  - “I will fill this house with glory...” (2:7)
  - “...and I will give peace” (2:9)

God gives them reasons, and the people must choose those reasons over their fears. The sources of fear haven’t changed, but they are put in a new perspective by God’s declaration.

The fears aren’t eliminated, but they are made powerless because of God’s presence.

## The Challenge

God’s words in Haggai reflect what He still is doing today. Your God continues to make the same claims:



- **God still makes His presence known to us...**through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit
- **God still reiterates His past promises...**through the things recorded in the Bible.
- **God still reveals His future plans...**through the words of Jesus, who reminds us that He is coming again!

Those claims give you hope as you face fear. Now you must choose! Your sources of fear haven't changed...but your outlook can. Your trust can. Your perspective can.

Whenever you face fear, make the choice to "Fear not."

- God might empower you to wisely walk away from something that you can't face right now...but you won't have to run!
- God might empower you to endure something that makes you uncomfortable...but you won't have to panic!
- God might empower you to sense His presence...so you won't have to be alone!

His presence (nearby), his promises, and His presents (gifts) are what you need to face something scary and "Fear not."

We'll talk more in depth during the coming weeks about how we **recognize** it, **face** it, and **fight** it... but keep this foundation we established today! Take those verses and tuck them in your heart.

The Words of God now gives us the freedom to agree with the K-LOVE lyrics.

So, leave here with the confidence to say:

- *"Fear, you don't own me!"*
- *"Fear, you are a liar!"*
- *"My fear doesn't stand a chance when I stand in your love"*
- *"Fear is not my future...you are. YOU ARE!"*

Let's pray...



# Invitation

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What fears are you facing? How can we support you and pray for you?

Does it just need prayer, or does it need a life that is surrendered to Jesus?

During our Invitation song, we invite you to come forward and share any of those things that we as a congregation can pray for and support...

*PRAYER REQUESTS:*

# Notes

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## ***In Defense of Fear (The Emotion)***

### ***Fear Defined***

*(2 Corinthians 7:5, John 20:19)*

### ***Positive Results of Fear***

### ***Fear Must Be Mastered***

## ***Sources of Fear (Biggest and Scariest!)***

## ***Fighting Against Fear (The Choice)***

### ***Gifts to Fight Fear***

*(2 Timothy 1:7, Romans 8:15, 1 John 4:18, Psalm 27:1)*

### ***Choice to Fight Fear***

*(Isaiah 26:3)*

***A Biblical Example: Haggai 2:2-9***

***The Challenge: "Fear \_\_\_\_\_"***

# Sermon Discussion ?s

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*Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.*

## ***Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose***

- What is your biggest fear? What led to this fear? How have you tried to confront it?

## ***Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters***

- In what ways do you see fear displayed in our society? What do you think is fueling this fear?
- Have you become more fearful or less fearful in the past five years? Why?
- Read 2 Timothy 1:7. What does it mean by a “spirit” of fear? What kind of spirit should we have instead?
- Do you ever feel ashamed or unusual because of your fears? Explain.
- Are there any times when the feeling of fear is positive? How can fear be helpful?
- What are some negative ways people act on their fears? Are you more likely to run away or to fight when you are afraid?
- Read 2 Timothy 1:7, Romans 8:15, 1 John 4:18, and Psalm 27:1. What are some gifts that God gives us to fight against fear?
- Why must we choose to fight fear rather than wait for the fear to go away?
- Read Haggai 2:2-9. How does God fight their fears? Do you believe God continues to fight our fears in the same way today?
- What does it look like to “fear not?”

## ***Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God***

- Prayer for God to inspire greater trust when you face things that frighten you. Ask Him to make His presence obvious to you.
- Pray for our church to avoid a spirit of fear.