The Origins of Fear

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King Solomon once said that there is nothing new under the sun.

And as we experience the worldwide crisis of the coronavirus, watching markets take drastic hits and the economy getting tossed around by this viral madness, I think about the terror that is gripping the world. Social media probably doesn't help alleviate folks' concerns by pumping cyberspace with misinformation and sound bites that foment fears instead of exhorting the world with God's Truth.

Enjoying a free world lockdown and watching society fall apart from the comfort of my home office, I'm thinking about the last time our nation was brutally struck with financial ruin. It was The Great Depression during Franklin Roosevelt's presidency.

Roosevelt famously encouraged a frightened nation with these memorable words: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

But what is fear?

This month let's take a blueprint look at the origins of fear. To do this, we turn in our Bibles to Genesis chapter three where we take up the narrative after Adam and Eve partake of the forbidden fruit.

> "Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?' So he said, 'I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself'" (Gen. 3:10).

In a world filled with uncertainty and evil, we can't escape bouts with fear. Even for seasoned saints, fear remains a present reality. It is primal and plays a major role in why we do or don't do things. And when we look at Adam's words, we see exactly why this is true.

After the Lord called for Adam, Adam ran because he was afraid. Was he afraid of God's authority? Was he afraid of being exposed? We can speculate for days on end attempting to determine why Adam was afraid, but we are wise to focus on the fact that *his fear was the result of disobedience*. But before Adam confessed his fear to God, he had already experienced it the moment he partook of the forbidden fruit.

"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings" (Gen. 3:8).

Disobedience sparks a chain reaction that is often hard to detect, because our actions flow so quickly and naturally. In the Garden, it went like this:

1. Disobedience created separation from God.

2. Separation from God produced shame, guilt, fear, self-esteem issues,

and anxiety.

3. Shame, guilt, fear, low self-esteem, and anxiety generated

concealment.

4. Concealment prompted evasiveness.

When Adam disobeyed God, he immediately experienced the death that was promised for disobeying. *Death is separation from God*. That separation created a reality Adam had never known before, the terrifying reality of being disconnected from the Source of life. That disconnection produced all these self-esteem issues that come with being separated from the glory of God. Once Adam experienced all those issues and encountered spiritual and emotional nakedness, he hid as soon as possible. He needed to hide that nakedness. To conceal it. And in his effort to conceal it, he evaded redemptive love.

That, my dear friends, is exactly what happens today! When you encounter a situation that produces any type of shame, guilt, fear, self-esteem issues, or anxiety, you can bet that it is directly connected to some form of disobedience. An example of what we could potentially be disobeying is something as simple as Matthew 6:24, 25 where Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

When we try to serve God and something else, we disobey God's commandment to have no other gods before Him. And when we disobey, we create a separation from Him that produces all the negative feelings and emotions that we experience. Once those issues overcome us, we start doing things to make ourselves feel better. We try to cover it up. And not only do we cover it up, but we continue running away from Him.

We evade Him just the way Adam did.

This is the blueprint of fear. Fear is nothing more than the result of disobedience. Fear is also a learned behavior and can be passed on generationally as Peter noted regarding "aimless conduct" (1 Peter 1:18).

So, let's bring this back to what's going on with the coronavirus. Everyone seems to be losing their mind and running in circles paralyzed by fear of the unknown and crippled by uncertainty regarding what tomorrow holds. But what is our response as children of God?

I believe King David said it best in Psalm 23, where he wrote, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

King David said that God's rod and staff bring comfort. Rods symbolized the presence of God (Ex. 14:16; 17:5, 9) and His miracle-working power (Ex. 7:9). They were also used for correction (Pro. 13:24). Staffs conveyed healing power (2 Kings 4:29, 31) and symbolized security and protection (Ps. 23:4).

Taken together, the presence of God, His miraculous power, His corrective love, and security bring true comfort. Therefore, during this coronavirus, we can be sure that God is an ever-present help, willing to correct our misunderstandings about why such a bad thing could happen and, in the process, guide us with His redemptive love.

During The Great Depression, President Roosevelt coined perhaps the most famous words regarding fear, but we saints know better. We don't defeat fear by not being afraid of it.

We do it by obeying God's Word.