

'Living faithfully in our culture'

2. Faithful in our Fears



*But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. **"Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened."** But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, (1 Peter 3:14-15a)*

More than ever, the last year has uncovered a culture of fear and fretting. For the Christian we need to understand that the problem is not so much *that* we fear, but rather *who* and *what* we fear. How might relativizing our fears lead to our flourishing?

Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he- quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"... "Safe?" said Mr Beaver ... "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you. (C.S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe)

Introduction: An 'Environment of fear'

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'Fate' stands for human ignorance and helplessness, and owes its awesome frightening power to those very weaknesses of its victims. (Bauman, *Liquid Times*)

Fear as lack of power: [W]hatever is entirely subject to our power and will, is not an object of fear; and that nothing gives rise to fear save what is due to an external cause. (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*)

1. Fear Relativised

“Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”

“For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.” (Psalm 96:4)

You of little faith, why are you so fearful? In these words we must hear all the disappointment of Jesus Christ in his disciples and all his love for them. Do you still not know that you are in God’s hands, that where I am, God is? Why are you so fearful? Be of good courage, strong, firm, adult, sure, confident, not shaking with fear. Don’t hang your heads; don’t complain about what bad times these are . . . I am in the boat. And Christ is here, too, in the nave of this church. So why not hear him and believe him? (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Overcoming Fear*)

Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then / have nothing else to fear (Nahum Tate)

We are not to fear the idols and elemental principles that people without God do fear. We need not fear them because the God who is infinitely more powerful than us can deliver where we cannot. One current challenge for us is whether we fear God enough so that we need not fear the things that ‘the nations’ do. What we fear reveals a lot about where we think power truly lies. What, exactly, do we fear and in what order? (Mike Ovey, ‘Choose your fears carefully’)

e.g. The mastermind of history (Isaiah 41)

‘But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
you descendants of Abraham my friend,
⁹ I took you from the ends of the earth,
from its farthest corners I called you.
I said, “You are my servant”;
I have chosen you and have not rejected you.
¹⁰ *So do not fear, for I am with you;*
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isa. 41:8-10)

2. Fear Removed

What's the worst that could happen?

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 the One who, after you have been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him. (Lk. 12:4-5).

3. Fear Recognised

Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, *live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear*. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Pet. 1:17-19).

4. Fear Repurposed & Reframed

The third enemy is fear. War threatens us with death and pain. No man -- and specially no Christian who remembers Gethsemane -- need try to attain a stoic indifference about these things: but we can guard against the illusions of the imagination. We think of the streets of Warsaw and contrast the deaths there suffered with an abstraction called Life. But there is no question of death or life for any of us; only a question of this death or of that -- of a machine gun bullet now or a cancer forty years later. What does war do to death? It certainly does not make it more frequent; 100 per cent of us die, and the percentage cannot be increased. It puts

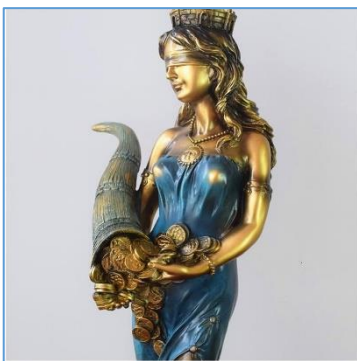
several deaths earlier; but I hardly suppose that that is what we fear. Certainly when the moment comes, it will make little difference how many years we have behind us. Does it increase our chance of a painful death? I doubt it. As far as I can find out, what we call natural death is usually preceded by suffering; and a battlefield is one of the very few places where one has a reasonable prospect of dying with no pain at all. Does it decrease our chances of dying at peace with God? I cannot believe it. If active service does not persuade a man to prepare for death, what conceivable concatenation of circumstance would? Yet war does do something to death. It forces us to remember it. The only reason why the cancer at sixty or the paralysis at seventyfive do not bother us is that we forget them. War makes death real to us: and that would have been regarded as one of its blessings by most of the great Christians of the past. They thought it good for us to be always aware of our mortality. I am inclined to think they were right. (C. S. Lewis, *Learning in Wartime*)

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Heb. 2:14-15)

Q: Since then Christ died for us, why must we also die?

A: Our death is not a satisfaction for our sin, but only a dying to sin and an entering into eternal life. (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 42)

Conclusion: A twist of fate?



‘A question - one way of reading the environment of fear is that our culture would rather fear our modern version of *Tychē* with her grinding, ineluctable randomness than fear a God who providentially controls human affairs with purpose. I think it is indisputable that so many in the cultural do prefer *Tychē* to Jesus of Nazareth: but why?’

(Mike Ovey ‘Choose your fears carefully’)

Further Reading:

Mike Ovey, ‘Choose Your Fears Carefully’ *Themelios*

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/choose-your-fears-carefully/>

Daniel Strange, “Heathy Fear: Keeping Calm and Considering Christ” in *Healthy Faith and the Coronavirus Crisis: Thriving in the COVID-19 Pandemic* (IVP, 2020).