

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Fearless faith

Philippians 2:12-13 reminds us that even in the absence of a teacher, each disciple bears the personal responsibility to continue to work out their own faith with fear and trembling, acknowledging that it is God who works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. In that spirit, *The Layman* now includes a center pull-out section we hope will edify your personal or small group Bible study. This section is offered as a resource to more fully equip the Body of Christ for the realities of ministry in the 21st century world.

In this first issue we will tackle fear. Next month, we will examine the subject of truth. Future issues will lead us into the *Solas* of the Reformation, the nature and calling of the Church, a primer on prayer, and the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The back page of each pullout will feature a resource that we recommend you consider adding to your own equipping tool box. We are also filling the toolbox on our Web site with resources to assist you along the path of lifelong discipleship.

One of the best ways to engage the Scriptures and grow in your walk of discipleship is by sharing in personal study and discussion with other believers. You are encouraged to invite a few friends over and open God's Word.

He promises that it will not return void but always accomplish that for which He sends it forth. Let us then pursue the vision of the Church articulated in Ephesians 4:12-16: that all God's people would be prepared for works of service, "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

If you are facilitating a small group Bible study for the first time, keep these tips in mind:

Pray in advance – by name for each person and for yourself, that God would use you. Ephesians 3:14-21 and Philippians 1:3-11 are excellent model prayers.

Prepare in advance – you can only lead others as far as you have been; provide materials to others in advance (it removes one barrier of anxiety for participants); prepare an outline plan of what you are going to cover. "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine." Titus 2:1

Create a welcoming environment – greet people as they arrive, offer hospitality, and invite them to sit facing one another at the same level, assure them that no one has to talk but that you hope this will be an open discussion and free exchange of ideas. Be reminded of Luke 10:38-42, sitting at Jesus' feet is more important than the fare you serve.

Ask open ended questions and show appreciation for those who contribute to the conversation and participate in the study. Do not be anxious if people are not quick to answer. Allow periods of silence for people to think and formulate a response. Be an encourager.

Use Scripture – When an answer is contrary to the Scriptures, use the Scriptures themselves to point out the error. Remember: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." II Timothy 3:16-17

Agree before the end of the first lesson what individual study is to be done before the group reconvenes and pray before folks depart. "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together ..." Hebrews 10:24-25

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Week 1 ‘Fear-full?’

Facing Fear:

Throughout the Scriptures there are references to being “filled” – God is filled with pain (Genesis 6:5-7), the earth is filled with violence (Genesis 6:12-14), Jacob’s sons are filled with grief and fury (Genesis 34:7), the Moabites are filled with dread (Numbers 22:3), Joshua is filled with the spirit of wisdom (Deuteronomy 34:9), Saul was filled with fear (I Samuel 28:20), the people are filled with joy (Ezra 6:22), Haman was filled with rage (Esther 5:9), Micah is filled with power and justice (Micah 3:8), hearts are filled with joy (Psalm 4:7) and evil schemes (Ecc 8:11), mouths are filled with praise (Psalm 71:8) and laughter (Psalm 126:2), the earth is filled with the glory of the Lord (Psalm 72:19, Hab 2:14), Jesus was full of grace and truth (John 1) and compassion (Mark 1:41), the people were filled with awe (Matt 9:8), the disciples were filled with grief (Matt 17:23) and throughout, people are filled with the Spirit of God (Acts 2:4).

What are we full of? What fills us? If you are having difficulty answering the question, consider what flows out of your life into the world. When the circumstances of life “squeeze” you, what pours out? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control, or something else? Rage, envy, resentment, jealousy, malice, sarcasm, cynicism, racism, bitterness, filth? What we are inwardly full of becomes outwardly evident.

Focusing Faith:

The followers of Jesus Christ are filled with the Holy Spirit. With the gift of the Holy Spirit come spiritual gifts and the gift of courage. Ask God to fill you anew.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Recognizing that the followers of Jesus Christ live in a world that is hostile to the Gospel, we are encouraged to put on the full armor of God that we might stand. Read through Ephesians 6:10-18 and consider being strengthened both internally and externally to stand for Christ without fear.

For discussion:

1. Are you basically a “fear-full” or “faith-full” person?

Memory verse:

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” Acts 4:31

EDITOR’S NOTE:

Carmen Fowler is the author of the equipping section that appears in the center of each issue of *The Layman*.

Your feedback is greatly appreciated as future studies are planned.

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Week 2: Why fear?

Facing Fear:

People fear all kinds of things like death, poverty, loneliness, failure, rejection, public humiliation, loss, disaster, cancer, terrorism, etc. Focusing on such things makes us weary with worry and erodes our faith like an abrasive agent, grinding away our confidence in the sovereignty, providence and goodness of God. Fears must be faced, but they must not be allowed to become the central focus of our lives.

How then should we face fear? Jesus faced head on what most of us fear most: the Devil himself, the reality of owning nothing, living as a single person for a lifetime, being despised, sold out, abandoned by His best friends, falsely accused, publicly humiliated, beaten and murdered. All of these adversaries He faced with faith, not fear. Additionally, Jesus faced the disease, depression, demonic possession, and desperation of others with faith, not fear. What can we learn from his example?

- *Jesus faced the Devil with the Word of God* (Luke 4:1-13). Our lives must be saturated with the Word.
- *Jesus faced the cross with prayer* (John 17). Our lives must be soaked with prayer.
- *Jesus faced the world with grace and truth* (John 1:14, 18:37). Our lives must be overflowing with grace and truth.
- *Jesus faced the grave with trust in the sovereignty of God* (Mark 14:32-40). Our lives must be focused on the faithfulness of God, confident of Him in all circumstances.

Focusing Faith:

What does a “faith-full” life focus on? Consider that which you look at, listen to, read, watch, think about, mull, ponder, and participate in. Where do you spend your time and money? If we were to look at your credit card statements and calendar, what would we learn about your priorities? These are the focus of your life.

A “faith-full” life focuses on God: God’s presence, God’s will, God’s priorities, God’s Kingdom, God’s good pleasure. A “faith-full” life is fearless because it is consumed with God. It is a life lived to the very edge of possibility, knowing that with God all things are possible. It is a life lived in expectation of miracles, glimpses of heaven and ultimate hope. It is a life marked by the peace that passes human understanding by one whose heart is guarded by the Word of God, the one who knows the secret of being content.

For discussion:

1. What do you fear and why?
2. Based on the example of Jesus, how can you face your fears with faith?

Memory verses:

“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

“He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.” Psalm 112:7

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Week 3: ‘Fear not.’

No Fear:

Imagine a life totally devoid of fear, a life where indeed, God’s perfect love has cast out fear. Imagine a life in which fear has been exiled, banished, expelled, deported, sent away for good.

What would you do today if you were full of faith in the resources of God?

What would you do today if you were full of faith in the presence and power of God?

What would you do today if you were full of faith in God’s promise to speak through you?

What would you do today if you were full of faith in the God who equips you for every good work that He has prepared in advance for you to do?

What would you do today if you were full of faith in God’s desire to bless you and bless others through you?

What would you do today if you were full of faith that God has forgiven you, called you, filled you with His Holy Spirit, and sent you as an agent of grace, an ambassador of Jesus Christ, a minister of reconciliation, salt, light and leaven into the world that He so loves?

What would you do today if you had no fear?

Focusing Faith:

Jesus used His time with the disciples to teach them to obey everything He commanded them. He in turn commissions His Church to do the same. So, what did Jesus teach them? On eight occasions He commanded his followers to love God and their neighbors. The only thing Jesus said more times than that was, “Do not be afraid.” Twenty-one of Jesus’ 125 direct instructions sought to re-focus His followers away from fear and onto God.

Re-focus your faith away from fear by reading Matthew 6:25, 8:26, 9:2, 10:26, 28, 10:31, 17:7, 24:6, 28:10; Luke 8:50, 12:4, 12:32, 24:38; John 12:15, 14:1, 3, 27; and Acts 18:9, 27:24.

God will never leave you. God will never forsake you. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God is always with you. In His presence there is no need to fear.

For discussion:

1. How is it that faith in God casts out fear? How is it that fear leads us to abandon our faith in the faithfulness of God?

Memory verse:

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.” Psalm 23:4

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Week 4: 'Faith-full' fear

Righteous Fear:

There is one variety of fear that is faithful – the fear of the Lord.

We know from God's Word that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10), that the Lord confides in those who fear Him (Psalm 25:14), He is even their help and their shield (Psalm 115:11).

Isaiah 8:11-13 says, "The LORD spoke to me with His strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people. He said: 'Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, He is the one you are to fear, He is the one you are to dread.'"

Failure to fear the Lord leads to wrath: the prophet Jeremiah is instructed to say to the people, "Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear: Should you not fear me?" declares the LORD. "Should you not tremble in my presence? ... But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away. They do not say to themselves, 'Let us fear the LORD our God.'"

What then is the "fear of the Lord?"

The fear of the Lord is a drop-your-jaw, fall-to-your-knees, hide-your-face-in-awe recognition of the greatness of the glory of God. It is genuine reverence. It is heart-felt humility. It is genuine worship, where-in God is given His due.

The fear of the Lord makes mighty men weep and grips us like the no other emotion under heaven. It is what we "feel" when our feelings are as they should be, not contaminated by worldly desires. It is the inexpressible joy we experience when confronted with the substance of that for which we have always hoped.

We can learn a great deal about the fear of the Lord by reading: Deuteronomy 10:12, I Samuel 12:24, Job 28:28, Psalm 25:14, 27:1, 33:18, 34:7, 9, 11, 40:3, 86:11, Proverbs 2:1-5, 8:13, 9:10, 15:33, 19:23, 29:25, and Isaiah 11:1-10.

Focusing Faith:

Our focus must be on God, before whom we are filled with reverent fear.

How does one "gain" an appropriate fear of the Lord?

Read Proverbs 2:1-5. Taking God at His word, turning our attention to Him, desiring in our deepest being to understand His heart and apply His will to our lives, and literally spend ourselves in the treasure hunt for a spiritual life lived more fully in who He is. If you think you have something better to do or something of greater value on which to spend the life God has given you, then you do not yet possess an appropriate fear of the Lord.

For discussion:

1. When was the last time your jaw dropped at the wonder of the glory of the Lord?
2. What literally drives you to your knees?
3. How might you encourage one another to cultivate a healthy fear of the Lord?

Memory verses:

"Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name?" Revelation 15:4

"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord." Acts 9:31

Fear not! Because Jesus takes our fears seriously

Book review by Paula R. Kincaid
The Layman

Fearless – it's not only the name of Max Lucado's newest book, it is how Christians should live – even in the midst of all of the troubles of these days.

"They're talking layoffs at work, slow-downs in the economy, flare-ups in the Middle East, turnovers at headquarters, downturns in the housing market, upswings in global warming," and that's just part of his list of worries.

Lucado's question to the reader is "What if faith, not fear, was your default reaction to threats?"

He reminds Christians they will not have a perfect life: "Getting on board with Christ can mean getting soaked with Christ. Disciples can expect rough seas and stout winds."

In the midst of it all, Lucado makes the point that Jesus' most common command was from the "fear not" genre. Of the 125 Christ-issued imperatives in the Bible, Lucado writes that "21 urge us to 'not be afraid,' or 'not fear,' or 'have courage,' or 'take heart,' or 'be of good cheer.' ... If quantity is any indicator, Jesus takes our fears seriously."

Lucado tackles many of the fears found in society from financial fears, to fear of violence; from the fear of not being able to protect our children, to the fear of death; and from the fear of disappointing God to the fear that He is not even real. Each fear is confronted with Scripture.

He writes: "Courage does not panic; it prays. Courage does not bemoan; it believes. Courage does not languish; it listens. It listens to the voice of God calling through Scripture, 'Fear not!'"

Garden prayers

And how are we to deal with our fears? The same way Jesus dealt with His fears in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Jesus faced His ultimate fear with honest prayer." Read Jesus' prayers in Matthew 26:

"... My Father if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet, not as I will, but as you will (39)."

"... My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done (42)."

Two simple, honest prayers.

Matthew says that Jesus was "sorrowful and troubled," and Mark uses the words "deeply distressed." Luke says "He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." When Jesus was in deep emotional turmoil, His prayers were brief, straightforward and trusting. They were "Low on slick, and high on authentic. Less a silver tongued saint in the sanctuary; more a frightened child in a father's lap," writes Lucado. "Jesus' garden prayer is a child's prayer. ... Prayer is simple. And such simple prayer equipped Christ to stare down His deepest fear. Do likewise. Fight your dragons in Gethsemane's garden."

Make-believe money

When discussing the economy, the news on almost all fronts is grim: Job layoffs, high unemployment rates, foreclosures, bank failures, talks of budget cuts in business and government. Lucado turns to Jesus' parable in Luke 12:16-21 in his chapter "Fear of the coming winter: Make believe money."

Lucado draws the reader's attention to the personal pronouns

Fearless:
Imagine Your Life Without Fear
By Max Lucado
Thomas Nelson Publishing,
221 pages
www.maxlucado.com/fearless

in the parable: "This rich man indwelt a one-room house of mirrors. He looked north, south, east and west and saw the same individual – himself. I. I. My. I. I. My. I. My. My. I. My. No *they*. No *thee*. Just *me*."

The rich man trusted the wrong person. Instead of relying on and trusting God, he relied on himself. The rich man's error, according to Lucado was that when he planned "his plans did not include God."

While the accumulation of wealth is a common defense against fear, Lucado writes that "God is the great giver. The great provider. The fount of every blessing. Absolutely generous and utterly dependable. The resounding and recurring message of Scripture is clear: God owns it all. God shares it all. Trust him, not stuff!"

The shadow of a doubt

At some point in their lives, most Christians have dealt with the fear that God is not real. Lucado takes his readers to the upper room in Jerusalem to help them face their doubts about the faith.

"How does Christ respond when we doubt him?" Lucado turned to Luke 24:

- Jesus Himself came to the two disciples walking to Emmaus and conducted a Bible class.
- He extended His hands and invited the disciples to "Touch me."

So, Jesus' response to doubters: "Touch my body and ponder my story."

Lucado says believers today can still touch the body of Christ. "When we brush up against the Church we do just that. ... Christ distributes courage through community; He dissipates doubts through fellowship."

Second is His Word, says Lucado: "God's go-to therapy for doubters is His own word. 'Before you trust, you have to listen. But unless Christ's Word is preached, there's nothing to listen to,' Romans 10:17 (MSG)."

Discussion guide

Fearless includes a discussion guide to be used by groups or individuals. Each chapter's discussion includes examining, exposing and battling fear. Questions from the chapter on Make believe money include: "How do you include God in your financial planning?" and "How much do you fear the coming winter? How can you reduce these fears?"

And one suggestion is that regardless of financial position, you give generously to "some group or individual who advances the cause of Christ. Write in a journal how your giving affects you and your household."

Fear the Lord

In the final chapter, Lucado writes of the one healthy terror. "This is the fear of the Lord," he writes.

While most fears are poisonous, this fear is different, Lucado writes. "When Christ is great, our fears are not. As awe of Jesus expands, fears of life diminish. A big God translates into big courage. ... Stare long and longingly at the Bonfire, the Holy One, the Highest One, the Only One. As you do, all your fears, save the fear of Christ Himself, will melt like ice cubes on a summer sidewalk. You will agree with David, 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?' (Psalm 27:1)."