

Introduction

Like many of you or all of you, I have been challenged by the past few years we have all experienced. I have felt confused, upset, concerned, and even anxious (though that has never been a feature of my life.) I have found myself wrestling with God about these events and the resulting seismic shifts that have occurred. I have struggled to accept the idea that everything I have known for all my life has now changed and may never return to *normal*. I have been grieving over the losses that are represented for my children and grandchildren. The things *they will never know, or experience* has choked out my joy in the present moments. The concerns about what they will face in the world as it exists today are numerous and grave. That word, *normal*, has also been challenged in my heart and mind. Is normal really a synonym for comfortable or known. Is what I am comfortable with or what I have known what I call normal? Is it about control or the perception of control to know things and feel comfort in the familiar? Do I feel out of control now or do I just have to acknowledge in a new way that I never was in control – even of the small mundane things we take for granted – choices, freedoms, options.

As a Christ follower for more than 50 years, I know the *right answer* – the *Sunday School answer* as we used to say.

God is in control.

God is not experiencing any of the emotional fallout that I am.

He is not afraid, surprised, or confused.

He is powerful over all things and knows the full story.

He has made a way for me.

He has a plan for me that is good. He works all things together for my good.

He is with me always, never to leave or forsake me. He is able.

His loving kindness is great towards me.

He gave me His Spirit to comfort me.

He holds the future.

His ways and thoughts are higher than mine.

He abides with me and in me.

I have nothing to fear in Him.

I *know* these things, but this knowledge has been put to another level of testing over these last few ‘fear’ years. Could this *really* be in God’s good and perfect will? How could this *really* be “worked together for my good?” How is this good at all? This is where my **head** and my **heart** had to have a meeting. I don’t know if you have ever had a H&H pow-wow, but I needed one. The things I know in my intellect don’t match the things I feel. That conflict needed a concentrated time of leaning in to listen to Him. I had to make some real H&H decisions to choose to trust Him – in both places. I chose to bring my emotions and allow the Truth of His Word and His Promises to realign them. Notice the word CHOSE...it had to be a volitional, overt, and determined choice because my feelings wanted to stand their ground. These are some of the things I CHOOSE:

I CHOOSE to trust Him even if everything I think is good, safe, healthy, happy, grounded, comfortable, or desirable is pulled out like a rug from under me.

I CHOOSE to celebrate His Peace (that does not make sense) in a time like this.

I CHOOSE to love and be loved by the people in my life.

I CHOOSE to stand in the gap for others who are struggling and losing ground in the battle.

I CHOOSE to lift His Name high at every opportunity – even if faced with opposition or persecution for doing so.

I CHOOSE to “BE NOT AFRAID” knowing the battle belongs to Him and He has overcome – He is the Victor and in Him, so am I.

I pray this book will help you understand the fear pandemic and the effects it has had on us, to realize there is a cure for this disease when you remember your faith and your Father as you journey through these rough waters.

God is with you.

God is for you.

BE NOT AFRAID.

PART ONE

The Infection

ONE:

THE FOCUS FACTOR

“I’ll tell you how to look at it. Haven’t you noticed how, in our own little war here on earth, there are different phases, and while any one phase is going on people get into the habit of thinking and behaving as if it were going to be permanent? But really the thing is changing under your hands all the time, and neither your assets nor your dangers are the same as the year before.” – CS Lewis

“Why am I SO afraid?” Have you ever asked yourself this question? Perhaps it sounds more like the following:

Why am I so stressed?

Why can’t I sleep at night anymore?

Why am I feeling pain in my chest?

Why am I fighting more with my spouse and sniping at my kids?

What is wrong with me? I’m a mess.

Why can’t I catch my breath?

Maybe you haven’t asked this question because you are *afraid* to know what you are *afraid* of because that will cause you to be more *afraid*! What a mess! You would not be alone in feeling afraid after the last couple of years we have just passed through. 2020 was quite the crazy unprecedented year for people all over the world! And somehow, the next two years somehow

found a way to surpass the craziness! The events of those years and the corresponding response to those events launched our fears to another level. Everything we know, for good or for bad, has been turned on its head and that represents a huge change. Change creates the opportunity for anxiety. Now, we have certainly all had experiences with change, some beneficial and some difficult. So, what has made these particular changes different? Why are we all SO distressed, pressurized and emotionally distraught? What has taken our fears over the top is the fact that so much, if not everything, is unknown and we cannot seem to get hold of anything that seems familiar or stable. Nothing is normal and everything is weird: School, church, sports, restaurants, weddings, funerals, graduations, births, and the list goes on. We cannot get “back to normal” because everything has so rapidly changed and has such uncertainty. I have seen a marked increase in requests for counseling and the main themes presenting are anxiety, fear and depression and the impact those emotions have on people. This unprecedented change gave us nothing certain and everything unknown. No wonder we are all feeling fear in unprecedented ways.

So, “why am I SO afraid?” seemed a natural title for a book to deal with the topic of fear. It is a question that I ask, not rhetorically as if to agree with the emotional landscape of this time, but seeking answers rooted in the Truth in order to find peace.

Jesus asked this exact question of His disciples in the book of Mark, chapter 4 verses 35-41.

Jesus Calms the Storm

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat.

There were also other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke

over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ *Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”*

³⁹ *He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.*

⁴⁰ *He said to his disciples, “**Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?**”*

⁴¹ *They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”*

To be clear, Jesus knew what was coming before He even got in the boat. He knew about the storm that was coming, the panicky disciples and the ultimate outcome. He also knew that they would be afraid. He was not asking because He did not know the answer. He did not expect them to give a listing of everything they were afraid of and why. He asked what we would call a “leading” question. He knew the answer and would share it with them in the form of a question. “Do you still have no faith?”

With this second question, He pinpointed the reason they were afraid. It was a cause and effect set of questions. They were afraid *because* they lost or forgot their faith. They focused on the storm and their fear rather than their faith and the Father. They had more fear in the storm than faith in God – they chose to focus on their fear before choosing to focus all they had experienced walking with Jesus. By this time, they had been eyewitnesses to many miracles Jesus performed. They forget their faith once they were in their fear. We forget or lose ours, too, because of our focus. What or whom we choose to look at in our storms and the fear that follows is key.

Once the disciples were focused on the right thing, their fear became awe, which is another form of fear mentioned in the Bible. They experienced the awe of the One who makes the waves be still and calms the storms. “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!” This fear though conveyed in the passage as *terrifying* is not the shake in your boots type, but rather a deep reverence and deep acknowledgment of who He is. You might even say this type of fear brings comfort. Quite an oxymoron, don’t you think? How can fear be comforting? When we focus on the Father, we are reminded of who He is and whose we are. We are reminded of His power and His plan for us. We can see things from His perspective more easily and trust in His provision. That is quite comforting!

“Let us go over to the other side.” In the very beginning of this story, Jesus gave the disciples a gem of truth and comfort. He told them that they were going to the other side. He told them the destination and gave them the implied promise that they would get there. So often, we miss the gold nugget of Truth in favor of being distracted by the wind and the waves we face. We forget the promise and get wrapped up in the pandemonium of our lives. Focus matters. It determines where we go physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Do you find yourself afraid and spinning in fear? Check your focus – what are you looking at...the promise or the pandemonium?

The truth is...

Their boat did not sink, their storm did not last, and they got to the other side.

So will we. Because He said so.