

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Fear Turned to Confidence

Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise; Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked: for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me. My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest. (Psalm 55:1-8)

Although this instance of fear in the psalms does not deal with the fear of God, I have chosen to include it as an example of the manner in which the psalms deal with the vivid reality of life in our fallen world. We live in an age far more characterized by pride among Christians than open honesty. They will pretend that their world is all together and "coming up roses," when in fact it is falling apart. They will even proclaim from the pulpit that if you have ever for one moment doubted your salvation, you are likely not saved, so you should start the process all over again. In public they set the mark impossibly high and unrealistic. In private they deal with all their true problems and then beat up on themselves for their failures. If a perceptive Christian notices them showing their discouragement and asks, "Is everything okay? Is there any way that I can help you?" they will respond with a quick regrouping and denial, "Oh, no, everything is just great." Scripture directs us to "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed." (James 5:16). People expect you to pray for them, but dare not confess their faults. James makes both confession and prayer equal partners in the process of spiritual healing. Neither covering up your faults (sins included here) nor blaming others for them (fallen man's favorite trick since the fall) will accomplish spiritual healing. Only honest confession by the person in fault and the informed prayers of fellow-believers will accomplish the spiritual healing that James promises.

Most commentaries locate this psalm during the time of Absalom's rebellion when many of David's allies forsook him and pledged their loyalty to Absalom. Some commentaries apply the psalm specifically to Ahithophel (2 Samuel

15:31). Regardless of the specific incident to which David refers, he deals with intense discouragement, not to mention fear that resulted from a former trusted friend's desertion.

We must wrestle with the tension of passages such as this one that describe the knee-jerk response of fear in one of the Lord's own children and the various New Testament passages in which Jesus teaches us to "Fear not." I will leave you to this study. The major flow of thought and theme in this passage moves from this initial reaction to calling on God to intervene and judge the unfaithful friend to a peaceful reliance on God that dismisses fear. What does the lesson teach us for our disappointing moments? God allows us in our humanity to have a momentary reaction of fear and discouragement. He does not permit us to wallow in those emotions. He directs us to turn the problem over to Him and to regain our faith footing with him.

In the midst of the initial moment of fear David considers becoming a hermit. *Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.* Those disappointing moments, whatever the catalyst that prompted them, can evoke this sentiment in the strongest of saints. The difference between a strong saint and a weak one appears in the psalm. The weakling in the faith will try to follow through with this idea of isolation. The strong saint will turn his problem over to God and continue in relationship with other believers.

In his recently published book, *The DNA of Relationships*, Dr. Gary Smalley identifies three major factors that he asserts are as ingrained into our being as our biological DNA.

1. *We are made for relationships.* Smalley expands this point to include relationship with God, other people, and self.
2. *We are made with the capacity to choose.* Here Smalley takes us back to the Garden of Eden. The first and most common characteristic of fallenness that Adam and Eve displayed was the inclination to deny personal responsibility for their actions and point the finger of blame to others. Blame others; that is the fallen way of living. We may not have the ability to choose all the people with whom we have relationships (parents, children, etc.), but we are able to choose how we will conduct ourselves in those relationships. Until we insert our own conduct into the equation of brokenness, we will always blame others for our problems, and we will continuously repeat the same failures and blame shifting habits. In our fallen world any broken relationship, any failure, results in shared responsibility, in bad choices by all involved. Smalley correctly insists that we can only avoid repeating our past hurts by examining our own choices and refocusing our minds on our bad choices or decisions, not blaming others.
3. *We are made to take responsibility for ourselves.* We, not anyone else, are responsible for our choices and actions. This point grows obviously out of his assertion that we are made with the capacity to choose. We are not passive robots in life, nor are we innocent victims of the bad things that other people do. The blame game carefully crafts attention on others and avoids personal responsibility for our own conduct. As long as we shift blame and avoid responsibility for ourselves, we will repeat the same painful errors that kill our joy and break one good relationship after another.¹

Our fallen nature shirks without second thought from accepting any responsibility for problems that we encounter. The fallen finger is always ready to point. In our fallen response that blames others we also jump at isolation. “Oh for

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¹ Smalley, Dr. Gary, *The DNA of Relationships* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004).

the wings of a dove to run away from my problem and find isolated, uninterrupted rest.” Friends, one day you shall have that rest, but your body will be six feet under the ground, and your longed-for isolation will be realized inside a casket. God didn’t intend for us to live in isolation from Him or from other people in this life.

We easily set artificial goals too high to reach, but the problem with that inclination is that we are inclined to stop trying for the impossible. I believe it is acceptable for us to realize that the initial reaction to disappointment or trial is fear, but I also suggest that it is altogether unacceptable for us to stay in that state of mind more than briefly.

Bible commentators wrestle with the ethics of the imprecatory psalms, the psalms in which the inspired writer calls on God to bring down severe judgment on the writers enemies. They impose unnecessary tension between these psalms and the “Judge not lest ye be judged” tenets of the New Testament. As usual, they take the “Judge not” passage out of its context by this view. I find great comfort in the imprecatory psalms. I’d rather call on God to judge those who hurt me than to take the matter into my hands and try to judge or—as we more often do—try to punish them.

Beginning with verse 16, “As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me.” The remainder of the psalm redirects us from fear to God with unreserved confidence in His provision and gracious care for His own. I love reading the psalms in discouraging times. They repeatedly allow us to take our rawest and most broken emotions to God, but the pattern that we consistently see quickly repairs the broken pieces of our frailty and takes us to the throne of grace. While earthly friends may forsake us, we worship a friend who sticks closer than a brother, any brother. While sinister people may set traps to snare and destroy us, God turns the trap against the one who set it so that he is caught in his own trap, and we are preserved by His goodness. Similar to the New Testament passage that tells us (Yes, it tells us.) to be angry, but not to sin in our anger (Ephesians 4:26), this passage allows us to fear, but not to remain in its cold clutches.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor