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### TORMENTED BY WORRY?

I have been leading a little Zoom group on Tuesday nights for about 5 years. There are 9 of us all together: 3 in Colorado, 3 in California, and 1 each in Arizona, North Carolina and Canada. During this 5-year period, a mother lost her beautiful son to a drug overdose; others have suffered cancer, depression, heart attack, and alienation from children. We have loved and prayed for one another and have become like family.

Last Tuesday night one of our precious ladies, a mature Christian, said that she was being tormented by worry and fear. Then several others said that they too were being tormented by fear. Our Zoom group has dealt with the issue of fear a number of times in the past, but here it is again. Fear continues to pop up like an evil zombie.

I believe that our little group represents a lot of other Christians, so why do we continue to struggle with worry and fear? Well, as demonstrated by that awful list of things that have happened to us - cancer, heart attack, death of loved ones - our lives and relationships are fragile and bad things can and do come out of nowhere and whack us. It is human and normal for us to struggle with worry and fear, and Christians are not exempt. But God has given us a way to win this battle.

I looked up the word "fear" in my big concordance and found that that word is in the Bible over 400 times..... but about half the time it is used to tell us to "fear the Lord," or "fear God." And the rest of the time the Bible tells us to "fear not," and "not to fear man" and "not to fear death" and "not to fear anything" but the Lord.

### THE FEAR OF THE LORD

I don't think most Christians understand what it means to "fear the Lord."

I was blessed to have a good dad. I still admire him more than any other man in my life. If you live with someone for a number of years, you get to know who they really are. They can't hide it. I know who my dad was. Of course, he was not perfect, and if someone mistreated him or his family he could be a dangerous man. He wasn't very good at turning the other cheek. And he reflected his culture in having some ugly racial prejudice. But he was strong and courageous. He was pure. He was gentle and kind. Some of his siblings had a problem with alcohol, but he did not drink. He helped take care of his mother and father when they got old and helpless. He was a man of God. He wasn't good at talking about his faith, but he took me to church every Sunday, and he lived his faith. (My mother went with her mother to a different church - the Church of Christ.) God told me one time: "You are a pastor because of the prayers of your father." I deeply respected him, loved him, and had a healthy fear of disobeying him or of doing something that might bring shame to him. That, on steroids,, is what it means to "fear the Lord."

And the Bible says in many different ways that if we fear the Lord then we don't have to fear anything else in this life. He loves us and has promised to take care of us, but if you think you can continue to practice sin and there won't be bad consequences, you are deceived.

I will refer to the lady in our Zoom group who said she was tormented by fear as "Y." Another one of our Zoom members asked Y, "When did you first start being tormented by fear?" Y said, "When I was 10 years old and my father died."

There is a devil and he attacks us where we are vulnerable. If we have suffered a trauma, then that is where we are usually vulnerable. Traumas can come in all sorts of ways: an automobile accident, an operation, the death of a loved one, through physical or

sexual abuse, through a fire or flood, through being involved in a war, etc. When her father died, Y started feeling insecure and vulnerable. She also lost her trust in God since He didn't answer her prayers for her father. But we have ministered to Y concerning worry and fear before. Why does it keep coming back?

## HOW THE DEMON OF WORRY AND FEAR CAN RETURN AGAIN AND AGAIN

In Matthew 12:43, Jesus taught that when a demon is cast out it will wander around and try to come back to the house (our body) in which it had previously lived. "If it finds that house empty, it moves back in with seven more demons." That word "empty" in Greek is *scholazo* and means "to be at leisure, to take a holiday, to be a vacant house." We have to fill our house with the word of God. Jesus illustrated what to do when he was tempted by the devil: He said, "It is written" - then he quoted the appropriate Scripture. We have to do the same thing. We can't be at leisure, the devil is constantly trying to move back in and overpower us.

Remember that Satan attacks our minds, our thoughts. Without any warning, we might wake up with terrible thoughts of fear and abandonment and loss and grief.

Let me share the way I deal with these attacks that come against my mind. (I use oxygen every night and periodically during the day. There are times that I get short of breath and realize that I'm feeling fearful about the future.) What should I do? I quote a verse from 2nd Timothy 1:7 that says, "God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, of love and of a sound mind." I say, "I have a sound mind and refuse to think these thoughts of fear about the future. I trust you, Lord, and I renounce those thoughts and command them to go."

Or I might be watching the NBA playoffs on television and during a commercial they show a young woman in a bikini. Yikes! Suddenly my thoughts may jump to something unclean that I saw over 60 years ago. (Everything is stored in our brains on memory sticks.) I have to put my foot down right then and look away

and say "No! I resist the devil, I put on the helmet of salvation to protect my mind from unclean images and thoughts." I might quote 1 Corinthians 6:13, "The body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord and the Lord for the body." And verse 18 says, "Flee from sexual immorality!"

I have read that about 75% of all men have an addiction to pornography and unclean fantasies. I don't know if that is true, but it is a strong temptation for men, including Christian men. We have to decide to resist that temptation or it can wreck our lives.

If I suddenly feel condemned, I can quote Romans 8:1, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," and I declare that I am righteous because of what Jesus did on the cross for me. I renounce the lie that I am condemned in the name of Jesus.

That is how it works. God has provided his Word and his Spirit. We have authority as believers. We don't need to be defeated by fear or depression or anger or lust or whatever. If on occasion we slip and fall, all we need to do is repent and reach out to our Savior. He does not condemn us, our sins have been paid for. We can live a life of peace and victory because of our faith in Jesus.

We prayed for Y's heart to be healed of grief and fear, and I believe she experienced freedom and peace, but it is an ongoing battle.

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## **"GO MARRY A PROSTITUTE!"**

Can you even imagine that God would tell anyone to do such a thing? Well, He did.

Hosea is one of the most important prophets in the Jewish bible, which we call the Old Testament. Hosea lived about 750 BC in a time of national prosperity when Jeroboam 2nd was king. The problem was that Jeroboam was corrupt and his nation was corrupt. In fact, the judgment of God was just ahead. The mighty Assyrian nation was going to invade and destroy Israel and take thousands of people captive back to Assyria. Of course, the people did not know this and they ignored the

prophets who for many years had been warning them about the judgment that was coming. Following is Hosea's story as I imagine it might have happened:

Hosea's father, *B e e r i*, was a very smart businessman. He owned several small merchant ships that he used to buy and sell perfume, wine, and other merchandise throughout the Mediterranean. They might sail from Israel to many different ports in Greece, Italy, or North Africa. His ships were armed because of the pirates that infested the Mediterranean.

Hosea's father was focused on his business, but his mother was focused on Yahweh. Hosea took after his mother. Starting at an early age God had come to him in dreams and visions. He had memorized much of the Torah, the inspired writings of Moses. He knew that God loved him and was going to use him in some way. He sensed God's heartbreak because of the sinful way most people were living. Several times he seemed to hear the words, "I have called you to be my prophet." That frightened him because he knew he was not worthy to be a prophet.

Hosea's prophetic writing speaks of knowing God in a personal, intimate way more than any other writing in the Old Testament except perhaps David in some of his Psalms and Solomon in the Song of Songs. Hosea might be compared to John in the New Testament who called himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved." That's the way Hosea thought of himself and thought of his God, Yahweh.

Hosea was a respected young man, his family was wealthy, and he was well-known in the business community. He was very marriageable, and many businessmen had introduced him to their daughters. Some of them were real beauties, but one of them, a 17-year old named Hannah, sparkled. She was so beautiful and so desirable. Hosea was making plans to talk to his father and start the marriage process.

But then one night Hosea was awakened and God was talking to him.. There wasn't any question about it this time. But there seemed

to be a heaviness, a gravity, in God's tone. "Hosea," God said, "I'm calling you to be one of my prophets to this generation. But I want you to do something that will be very difficult. I want you to marry a prostitute. My purpose is that your life will illustrate how Israel has acted as a prostitute by turning against the Lord and worshiping other gods." (Hosea, chapter 1)

Hosea could hardly catch his breath. He wondered if he had lost his mind. God would not ask him to do such a thing. He was horrified and trembling. He thought about his father, his mother, and his friends. He would rather die than humiliate his father and mother in such a way. Everyone would think he was some sort of unclean sexual pervert. No one could possibly understand.

Hosea felt sick. That couldn't have been God. Then he thought about Abraham being asked to sacrifice his son on the altar. Tears came to his eyes. Sometimes God asks us to do things that are like dying, worse than dying. And God had explained to him the purpose for this marriage. In all of history, God never explained His purpose to anyone until after the fact, but this was such an outrageous ask that God knew that unless He explained His purpose Hosea would never be convinced that it was God speaking to him.: "This will illustrate how Israel has acted like a prostitute by turning against the Lord and worshiping other gods." (Hosea 1:2) Hosea knew that Yahweh was giving him a choice - just as Abraham had been given a choice.

Courage and peace came to Hosea like he had never experienced before. He knew that it was God, Yahweh, who had spoken to him.....and he knew that he was going to obey God no matter the consequences.

The next day Hosea went to the Canaanite temple. He had never been there before. He said, "I want to buy one of your girls." The priest said, "The girls are for use in our religious services, they are not for sale." Hosea said, "I want to buy one. I can pay your price." The priest brought out about a dozen young women who paraded themselves before Hosea. Their faces were covered with makeup and their breasts were exposed. (Hosea 2:2)

Hosea gritted his teeth and looked at the girls. One of them smiled at him and he immediately picked her. Her name was Gomer.

Hosea took Gomer to his family's priest. The priest got angry and refused to consider marrying them. Hosea finally found a priest, a stranger, and paid him to perform the ceremony.

Hosea became a laughingstock. Everyone was convinced that he had an unclean, secret life and had somehow fallen in love with one of his secrets. His father wouldn't speak to him. His mother went into seclusion and cried all the time. And Hosea couldn't explain to anyone until much later.

Hosea had relations with Gomer and she bore him a son, Jezreel - which means "God scatters." The name Jezreel was Hosea's way of pronouncing a judgment on the rulers of Israel. Hosea's marriage and even the names of his children became an unforgettable prophecy to the nation of Israel.

Gomer was now Hosea's wife and the mother of his son. Slowly, slowly, and against his better judgment he started to fall in love with her.

The family business had always required Hosea to go on long trips abroad, and now his father made it a point to send him on even longer trips. He came home after a trip to North Africa which had taken many months and learned that Gomer was pregnant. God had told him this was going to happen - "Some of her children will be conceived in prostitution." (Hosea 1:2) But even so he was sick at heart. He named the little girl Lo Ru-Hama, which means "Not loved." Apparently he could not find it in his heart to love the little girl.

Hosea made another extended trip and again Gomer became pregnant. She had a little boy and Hosea named him Lo-Amma which means "Not mine." God said to him, "Tell the people that because of their sin and rejection of me that they are "not loved" and they are "not mine" and judgment is coming to them."

Hosea made yet another trip and when he returned this time Gomer was gone. He

learned that she had run off with another lover who had betrayed her and sold her into slavery. She was going to be sold at the slave market. "The Lord said to me, 'Go show your love to your wife again though she is an adulteress. Love her as the lord loves the Israelites though they turn to other gods'. So I bought her for 15 shekels.'" (Hosea 3)

Judgment was coming on Israel, terrible judgment. "Because they have rebelled against their God, they will fall by the sword, even their little ones will be dashed to the ground and their pregnant women ripped open." (Hosea 13:16)

But all through the prophecies in Hosea an invitation is extended, hope is extended. "Take my words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him, forgive all our sins and receive us - - - I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel. He will blossom like a lily..." (Hosea, chapter 14) And there was always a remnant, a very few, who remained faithful to God.

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The book of Hosea isn't really about Hosea, it is about God. God was describing to Israel, and to us, how He feels about his children who continue to fall into sin. It feels to God like a husband whose wife commits adultery. It breaks God's heart.

If our acceptance by God depends on our obeying God's commandments perfectly, we are doomed! We fall short. A new way has been opened for us that is so amazing that in the book of Romans St. Paul uses three metaphors to explain it. (1) the example of the Law Court - "justified," We have been pronounced innocent because our crimes have been paid for by another, the precious son of God. (2) the example of the Altar - "atoning sacrifice." Moses led the people to sprinkle the blood of an innocent lamb on the door posts of their homes so that the Angel of Death would "pass over" them. So the great feast of Passover was instituted among the Jews, and Pentecost was instituted among the Christians to remind us of the blood of the Lamb. (3) the example of the Slave Market - "redemption."

We have been redeemed from our slavery to sin and to the devil because another bought us back, paid the price, the precious Lamb of God. The metaphor of the slave market, of course, goes back to Hosea.

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Let me mention two of the lessons I get from the book of Hosea. First, as noted above, since God gave his Son to die on the cross for us, and since all of life is a gift, He has the right to ask anything of us.

Second, we need to ask God if we have worshiped other gods instead of the true God. He is ready to forgive if we will repent and set those false gods aside.

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## **A SURPRISE REJECTION**

Ed Young said that he used his auto insurance three times in about 15 months and was shocked to get a letter from his insurance company canceling his policy. He was rejected as one of their clients. He was surprised because he had been with them for many years, two of the accidents were fender benders, and the third was not even his fault - his car was parked and sideswiped by an anonymous culprit.

The letter said, "Dear Mr Young: While you have been a valued client for many years, we are sorry to inform you that you have exceeded the grace we give to our customers. I'm sure that you can find another form of coverage. With kindest personal wishes, Blank Insurance Agency."

Ed said that he imagined getting a letter from heaven that would read:

"Dear brother Ed:

You have been a believer for 57 years and we have appreciated you. But you have made several mistakes recently. Two of them could actually be classified as sins. This exceeds the grace that we can give to you. I'm sure you can find another form of coverage. Sincerely, Jesus."

Ed said the problem with that letter is that there's not any other coverage. This is it! And he said he doesn't really believe he's going to exceed the grace and mercy that have been given to him so far.

That is certainly my hope as well.

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God bless,  
Glenn