

**Week #1 of a 3-Week Series**

## **FEAR MANAGEMENT**

**April 22, 2020**

**Rev. Richard Rogers**

**Rev. Richard Rogers:** Happy Earth Day! Yes; it is Earth Day, and you are with us, and we are so excited you're with us! I hope you had time today to spend some time in nature; maybe go for a walk, or even just in your own neighborhood or in your backyard, and just really feel the presence of God.

For me, nature is one of the ways where I experience the presence of God the most. There's something in being in the desert, or at the beach, that just reminds me of just how magnificent life is, and how magnificent God is.

So I hope you're doing well during this time. We are praying for each and every one of you: that you may feel the presence of God in your life; that you are safe and secure.

So we're going to go into our time of meditation now as we just celebrate nature.

### **MEDITATION:**

So take a deep breath. Close your eyes. And I want you to feel the presence of God that is right where you are. That you are God's beloved. That God loves you. God loves you! And that you've been given the kingdom and everything in it for your enjoyment. For your pleasure; for your delight. For you to rejoice and give thanks for all the good that God is. So, today, we celebrate our Earth, and what an incredible process our Earth is. What a healing sanctuary our Earth is. And we honor the Earth today: we don't abuse it; we don't overuse it. We honor it. We honor the air that we breathe that gives us life. We honor the beauty of nature: the life force of all the other animals that share this planet with us. And during this time – as we are walking lightly on the planet – we see so much evidence of the planet healing. That, as we live lightly on this planet, the planet becomes and heals and restores to greater and greater levels.

Let us walk softly on this planet. Let us honor the sacredness of where we are allowed to live. That wherever we are, God is. Wherever we are, God is! Thank you, God, for the beauty of nature. Thank you, God, for the healing power of nature. Thank you, God, for all the forms of life that share this planet with us. And that we may truly honor all forms of life. That we move beyond egotistically-driven focus, our commitment to nature is fabulous. It's divine. Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!

In this sacredness of this moment – in the holiness of this moment – we give thanks. And we bless you; we see you surrounded and enfolded in pure good, pure God. We know the light of God surrounds you; the love of God enfolds you; the power of God protects you; and the presence of God watches over you. Wherever you are today, we know that God is there, and all is well. And so it is. Amen.

### **SONG:**

***Rusty Ferracane: 'From a Distance (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on piano)***

From a distance the world looks blue and green  
And the snow-capped mountains white

From a distance the ocean meets the stream  
And the eagles take to flight

From a distance there is harmony  
And it echoes through the land  
It's the voice of hope  
It's the voice of peace  
It's the voice of every man

From a distance we all have enough  
And no one is in need  
And there are no guns, no bombs and no disease  
No hungry mouths to feed

From a distance we are instruments  
Marching in a common band  
Playing songs of hope  
Playing songs of peace  
They're the songs of every man

God is watching us  
God is watching us  
God is watching us from a distance

From a distance you look like my friend  
Even though we are at war  
From a distance I just cannot comprehend  
What all this fighting's for

From a distance there is harmony  
And it echoes through the land  
And it's the hope of hopes  
It's the love of loves  
It's the heart of every man  
It's the hope of hopes  
It's the love of loves  
This is the song of every man

God is watching us  
God is watching us  
God is watching us from a distance

God is watching us  
God is watching  
God is watching us from a distance

***[Light applause]***

## MESSAGE

**Rev. Richard Rogers:** Craig and Rusty, that is fabulous! Fabulous, fabulous! What a great job! Thank you; thank you; thank you, gentlemen! Beautiful! Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!

So my question for you today is: how are you managing your fears? Anybody ever been freaked out lately? Anybody worried about this or that? Worried about your income? Worried about loved ones? Worried about how we're going to get through this? Or what's going to happen next?

And what I want you just to begin to notice is – as you're managing your fears – I want you to notice if you're eating a little bit more, or drinking a little bit more, or cranky, or not sleeping so well... And, over and over again, what I want you to see is I think those are the signs that we are not managing our fears as well as we could be. Because we can spend a whole lot of time freaked out and really working not to have to feel it. We have this ability to kind of segment our thoughts or our behavior into little pockets, and not really notice how freaked out we are until something happens where we realize: *"Oh! I'm just really anxious!"*

You know, in our country, you are 400 times more likely to be on anti-depressants or anti-anxiety medication than any other country in the world. Now, you can say, well, that we're being over-prescribed for that stuff. Or it could just mean that we're far more anxious than we realize. And I think that's the case for many of us. I think many of us live with a level of anxiety that is really beyond our awareness. That we just live anxious. And we're not even sure why we're living anxious; we're just anxious.

And what I want to talk today is about we can manage those fears. And I really believe that it's really a spiritual opportunity to manage our fears. That our fears really are an opportunity for us to take us deeper into our spiritual life. To really practice believing in God.

There was a recent Gallup poll that asked people if they believed in God. Eighty-seven percent of the people said they believed in God. Then they asked it in a different way; they gave them a multiple-choice quiz. And the three choices are: Do you believe in God? Not sure? Or firmly don't believe? At that point, only 79% of the people said they believed in God. And then the last question they asked people is: Are you convinced that God exists? Now, we drop down to 64%. Right? **[Laughs]**

So what I want you to see is that we have this belief like, *"Yeah; I believe in God."* But if it really doesn't translate into your daily practice – if it doesn't really translate into how you live your life – believing in God just as a concept or an idea doesn't really help you really move through your day and not be afraid.

And what I believe, over and over again, is that: as we believe in God, our faith goes up. You know, I believe that our belief in God really is a requirement to live in faith. And when we question – and all of us question God at some point. I mean, I – honestly – we all question the existence of God at some point. It's part of our, just our make-up or intellect. Right? But what are the foundational beliefs that you live on? What are the foundational beliefs that really are the core of where you live your life from?

You know, one of the people who has been very supportive of this ministry, his name is David. And David was one of the people in my life who was a true believer. He believed in my ministry; he believed in the work I was doing. He helped fund it. He was the CEO of many organizations here in town, companies here in town. Very prosperous guy, and he believed in me. He believed in the work. I think

every minister needs people who believe in them. Who will encourage them and support them. And we need that work, if we're really going to do the work that God has for us to do. And he was a true believer. And he passed last year.

And one of the things I knew about David is the 23rd Psalm was always really important; it was part of his spiritual life. The 23rd Psalm was what he went back to over and over and over again. And David fought in the Korean War. He led his troops during the Korean War, and every day during the Korean War, he would start every morning with the reading of the 23rd Psalm. It was what he came back to.

And, last year, when we were doing his Celebration of Life, person after person got up and shared how David had made a difference in their life. How he gave people opportunities, helped them start businesses, gave them jobs, helped them in the community... And he was just a stunning individual. And after that was all over, I got to get up and I got to read the 23rd Psalm in honor of David: in celebration of his spiritual journey. And I got to read it, and people got to hear it from a place of: this is somebody's – truly – their "go to" spiritual belief.

And so I'm going to begin a 3-week series on "Fear Management." And we're going to take the 23rd Psalm, and we're going to do it step by step. We're going to take it verse by verse. We're going to slow it down. Because sometimes when you read something, you don't really hear the words that you're reading; you don't really think about it. So we're going to slow it down. I'm going to take two verses a day.

But I want to read the whole thing in honor of David: in honor of just what a powerful spiritual document and statement and prayer the 23rd Psalm really is.

#### **The 23rd Psalm:**

***"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.***

***He maketh me lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside still waters.***

***He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake.***

***And, yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.***

***Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.***

***Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."***

You know, I said that David served in Korea. One morning in Korea, he was called to lead his troops up the side of the hill. And as he was leading his troops up the side of the hill, the Chinese came over the top, and as he raised up his arm to stop – to halt – his troops, he actually got shot in the arm. And that was his last day in Korea. He was air-evaced out, and he went and spent time in a military hospital recovering from that. But two of his friends from that day never made it off that hill.

But, over and over again, what I want you to see is that that prayer made such a difference in his life that it was his "go to" over and over again.

And so I want to really slow this down, and take it line by line, verse by verse – sometimes even word by word – so that we can really take this prayer in such a way that, in this time of our pandemic, in this time of going through change and fear, that we have something to hold on to. And I hope that these words – these six verses of the Bible – are that kind of a verse for you. That you can hold on to it when you're in a time of fear. That you can really have something to go back to over and over again.

**So here we go. The first line: “The Lord is my shepherd.”**

I want you to really think about what that means for you: “*The Lord is my shepherd.*” When I Googled the responsibilities of a shepherd, it said this: “*A shepherd’s primary responsibility is the safety and welfare of his flock (or her flock). Some flocks may include as many as a thousand sheep; the shepherd will graze the animals, herd them into areas of good forage, and keep a watch over them for poisonous plants and other predators. Shepherds often live in trailers or other mobile quarters.*”

See, I know a shepherdess! I know a woman who started her career as a shepherdess! She’s now an opera singer in New York; she sang at our wedding. But she started her career singing to her sheep! And she has this big, rich, gorgeous voice! And she would sing to her sheep, and her sheep knew her! They would follow her! At our wedding – she was the soloist at our wedding – and we got married in New York City, in the Unity church there. And following the wedding, we all walked down 5th Avenue. And it was at Christmastime. So if you’ve ever been to New York at Christmastime... We walked down 5th Avenue; all the holiday decorations. And we got to Rockefeller Center, and the Christmas tree was there. And we had our friends and family, and there were literally thousands of people that are there at the base of the Christmas tree at Christmastime. And then Julie sings, *When You Wish Upon a Star*. And it was absolutely one of those memories that I will just never, ever forget. It was so sweet! And to know her story about being a shepherdess, and what that means.

And it takes me back to a couple of verses from the Gospel of John: John 10:27. “*My sheep hear my voice, and they know me. And they follow me.*”

And then from John 10:11-15: “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. And the man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. But I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep.*”

So this is really important. I want you to really see the difference between [**chuckles**] a sheep and you. So what do you think the primary difference is [**chuckles**] between you and a sheep? If you had to list them all: “*No; I don’t create wool.*” Or whatever it is. Right? But the major difference between you and a sheep is that you have free will. The difference between you and any sheep anywhere in the world is that you have free will. A sheep doesn’t get to decide who is shepherd is. He doesn’t get to decide that! But you and I get to decide who our shepherd is. And we get to decide if we want God to shepherd us.

Because we have free will, we get to go and do our life any way we choose. We get to make as much of a mess. We get to create havoc. We get to create pain and disorder and confusion. And we know some people – and maybe there’s been some times in your life – where you were really good at creating just chaos and madness and mayhem. You know, it’s like that commercial where the guy is chaos, and he

just creates problem after problem after problem. And we have that choice! Because we have free will, we get to decide literally everything in our life. Every decision, we have to decide.

So we have free will! So we get to decide who's going to be our shepherd... or if we're going to have any shepherd at all! And what this states – the first line in this prayer – is *“the Lord is my shepherd.”* Now, for some of us, this will drive us nuts! *“No! I don't want a shepherd! I don't want anybody telling me what to do! I do not want anybody else calling the shots of my life; it is my life! I'm living it my way!”* and we have a God-given right to do it that way!

But I believe that there's a moment in all of our spiritual journeys when we make the decision to have God in charge of our life. We never have to; we have free will! But there's a moment where we actually decide that we want God to shepherd us... to guide us... to direct us... to lead us.

And I want you to look at your own life right now and to see if you've made that internal commitment to be led by God. Have you made that decision to be shepherded? To be led? To be guided? To be directed by a power greater than yourself? That's one of the primary focuses of AA and the 12-Step community: is that there's a power greater than me. Surrendering your will over to that power.

Where are you with that? You know, is that something you make a day-by-day choice? Is that something, *“Well, it's Tuesday or Wednesday; okay, today the Lord will be my shepherd. Today God will be in charge of my life.”*? Or is that the place that you live from over and over again?

And I want you to see – as you're managing your fears – how much easier it is if you actually have put God in charge of your life. Like, if God's not in charge of your life in every situation and every moment, you have to figure it out! You have to be smarter than that situation; you have to be faster than that situation; you have to be better than that situation. But the moment that you have God as your shepherd – the moment you put God in charge of your life – at that moment, now God is in charge! And you just have to follow the directions that you're given.

*“Well, I don't like directions!” [Chuckles]* How many of you – how many guys in the room... how many guys watching today – know what this one is? Right? The directions come out of the box and, like, *“Aw, I don't need those stinkin' directions! I can do it on my own!”* And it's like: some of us have come into life with that mindset: *“I don't need no stinkin' directions! I don't need no shepherd! I don't need someone guiding and directing me; I can do this all on my own!”* And we can!

I'm just saying I believe that our fear increases when you believe that you're in charge of your life. And I believe that when you truly believe that God is in charge of your life – when you truly surrender to a power greater than yourself – that everything in your life gets easier, and that your fears go down exponentially. That, over and over again, I would challenge you to look at the situations where you've been the most – and I'm going to use this word – “freaked out.” And in those situations where you were the most freaked out, did you honestly believe that God was in charge of your life? Or did you feel like a victim of circumstance?

Over and over again, what I want you to see today is that we have a choice in every moment, in every situation: Are you going to live from your own personality? Are you going to live from your own intellect? Or are you going to surrender your life to a power greater than yourself, and live at a higher level of good? *“The Lord is my shepherd.” “The Lord is my shepherd.”*

**And then it goes to the next line: “The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want.”**

Now, if you look at the world today, would you say that the world is living in a state of wanting? I do! I believe that the world is living in a huge state of wanting. And I believe that there’s really two ways to live your life: from a state of wanting or a state of gratitude.

Over and over again, when you live in a state of constant gratitude, your wanting really is non-existent, because you are so grateful for what you have. And it really opens the door to greater and greater good.

Now some of you have heard this story, but I’m going to tell it anyway, because I love this story. So Jill and I were coming back; we had spent a few days with Daniel up in Yellowstone – Daniel Nahmod – at Yellowstone National Park. We were driving back. And I was leading a workshop the next weekend in San Diego for men, and so we had five days to go from Yellowstone National Park to San Diego. And so we were just putzing along... And we were driving through the desert. And about halfway is Las Vegas. And so, we were driving to Las Vegas; we decided we were going to spend the night in Las Vegas that night.

And as we’re driving that day, we began to talk about living from desire and living from satisfaction. And both of us were talking about how living from that space of desire and wanting and needing, and the difference between living from a place of – of living from a place of truly being satisfied with life. *“I shall not want.”* And, you know, we really were looking at how much easier it is to live from a place of satisfaction. Right? Instead of wanting. Because when you’re living from a place of wanting, there’s always a greater want. There’s always a greater need. There’s always more wanting. You’re always hungry. And what I want you to see today is that, when you live from a place of being satisfied, it makes a difference.

So we were getting close to Las Vegas. I got on my phone and I made a reservation for a hotel. And we were looking for a hotel that would allow us to swim. Because we were getting there pretty much after dinner. And a lot of the hotels in Las Vegas – at least at the time – they would close their pool at about 5 o’clock/6 o’clock, because they wanted everybody to come in and get clean, go to dinner and gamble. Right? They didn’t want you hanging out all night at the pool; they’re not making any money you hanging out at the pool! But we wanted to find a pool that was open late.

So made a reservation; we went to Paris, Paris. And we got to the hotel; we unpacked and got stuff out of the car, and went to the front desk. And long line. Long line! And got up to the front, and they said, *“Mr. Rogers, we no longer have your room; we’re overbooked tonight.”* And they said, *“But we have a room that we think that you’re going to like.”* And I said, *“You sure? You think I’m going to like it?”* And she said, *“Mr. Rogers”* – and she used the very word that we’d been playing with all day – she said, *“You’re going to be very satisfied.”* And I heard that word – because we’d been talking about it all day! – and I knew that this was God whispering in my ear: that this was the direction.

This was the purpose of my life! That if I really put God in charge of my life at every level, I would be very, very satisfied! So she said, *“Mr. Rogers, you’re going to go right around the corner there, and there’s a private elevator. You’re going to take it up three flights – three levels. You’re going to be met by the concierge at the third level; they’re going to take you up to the top of the next elevator, and take you up to the top.”* And I said, *“The top top?”* They said, *“The top top!”*

So we went around the corner, found the little secret, hidden elevator, took the elevator up. Third floor. Concierge met us at the door. **[Chuckles]** Walked our bags to the next elevator. Took us to the top. And we went to this amazing room! Right? And the kicker was: we had a butler. A butler!!! I have had a butler!!! It was only overnight, but I have had a butler! **[Laughs]** The butler wanted to unpack... Now, we've been driving all day! Right? We're scuzzy! Like, we're just dirty, dusty messes! Greasy hair, the whole thing! We're in shorts; greasy, greasy, greasy! Right?

The butler says, *"Would you like me to unpack your bags and lay out your evening wear for tonight?"* **[Laughs]** You know, it's hard not to giggle when someone says – you know, we're in shorts and scuzzy, and he's asking about our evening wear! And it was such a fun experience!

And what I want you to really see is that, when... Because what we believe is that the inside creates the outer experience. Right? That the inside creates the outer experience. When there is need on the inside – when there's a longing, when there's a longing on the inside – it can't help but see it in the world around you. When you are satisfied – when you are full on the inside – everything else moves forward in a much better way! *"The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want!"*

I want you to say that with me: *"The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want!"*

**And then the next line. "He maketh me lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside still waters."**

And I want you to get the image of this! That the Lord is your shepherd: he's going to guide you to the green pastures. He's going to guide you to the safe waters. He's going to provide for you everything you want and need.

You know, a green pasture – in that area of the world where Jesus taught from – was not very common. Like, if you're walking around Phoenix – if you're going to the deserts around this town – you're not seeing a lot of green pastures! We think of a golf course or we think of a city park; we think of a green pasture or a green chunk of grass. And so, when Jesus was saying this – when he was teaching this – he was really trying to "up their game." So he was saying: The Lord is your shepherd; he will have you lie down in green pastures. And drink from still waters.

I really want you to see that, when you lay hold of this Scripture – when you really lay hold of the idea that *"God is my shepherd: I shall not want"* – that he will have you lie down in green pastures. He will you leadeth you beside still waters.

Now, why are still waters important? Well, sheep drown easily, especially when they're all "furred out"... when they're heavy with wool. If they get in the water, and the water's too turbulent, that wool collects water and becomes very, very heavy, and they drown. So one of the responsibilities of the shepherd is to find water that the sheep can actually drink: that they can get into and drink, and get out of safely.

Over and over again, what I want you to see is that everything in your life – when God is your shepherd – he will have you lie down. Now, you may not always get a butler every night! But he will have you lie down in green pastures, and he will lead you to calm, still waters.

Today, this opportunity that we're in – as we walk through this pandemic – I want you to decide: are you willing to be shepherded by God? Are you willing to be led? Are you willing to be directed? Are you willing to put God first in your life? And the promise is that you will not want again. That – as you move

from the mindset of want to a mindset of gratitude – you will live in green pastures. And drink from still waters.

So are you ready for your homework? Well, your homework is a hard one! And this is not an easy one; it's not a little one. I'm going to invite you in your homework today to really decide that you want to put God first in your life. That you're willing to make a decision today that God is the focus – the center – of your life, and that's how and where you're going to live from.

So let's take that into prayer:

Today I decide. It is 100% my decision; I have free will. I am a fully grown man and woman of God, and I decide today to place my life – my care, my keeping – I place in the hands of God. Thy will be done. Thy will be done in the greatest possible way. Thy will be done in such a way that I am blessed over and over and over again. They will be done. That I will let God lead me and guide me and direct me in every event of life. And that when I'm in my fear – when I'm in my "freak out" place – I will remember that I am not trusting God right there, and I will turn my will over to God again. The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. And so it is. Amen.

### **OFFERING:**

This is the time of giving of our gifts and tithes. And I know – even if you're going to give them electronically – I want you to take your gift (this is my check, my tithe) and place it in your hand. Even if it's only imaginary, I want you to imagine placing your gift – your tithe, your offering – in your hand. And our offering blessing is: *"Divine Love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I am, all that I give and all that I receive."* Together: *"Divine Love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I am, all that I give and all that I receive."*

God bless you, friend! I am so excited to be a part of your spiritual life! I see you moving through this time with greater and greater levels of success, and I so look forward to being with you next week. God bless you!

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