

Final Week of the 3-Week Series

FEAR MANAGEMENT – Part 3

May 6, 2020

Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: Hi! I'm Richard Rogers and I want to welcome you to the Wednesday night service! This is such a great time; this is the week before Mother's Day, so I want to give an early "shout out" to all the moms. Hi, mom! And "hi" to my own mom! And I just wish all the moms have a great weekend. Celebrate in your cloistered little self, wherever you are. And know that we are holding you in prayer; we see you safe and well and happy.

So let's go into our time of meditation.

MEDITATION:

And this meditation today is all about love. Over and over again, love is the most important thing. We are just loved! God loves us! And we get into our fears and our story and our drama and all our stuff, and God just loves us. And our mind gets so busy with all the details of what we have to do, and what we shouldn't do and what we should do, and who's doing it right and who's doing it wrong. And we just take a breath. And sometimes we can go years in the drama of our mind. There's a moment where we take a spiritual breath, and we remember that God loves us. Not because of all the things that we've done and how many thoughts we think, or how many things we've done or created, or how busy we've been in this life. God just loves us! God loves us because each and every one of us was created in the image and likeness of God. God love us because we have God's Spirit within us. Each and every one of us is a reflection of God. Our essence and our core is pure God. God loves us because God is love. And we are created out of that love. We are the fulfillment of that love. We are that love expressing in greater and greater ways.

I am God's love made manifest. I am God's love: that's the beginning, the middle and the end of every story. No matter how wonderful you think you are, how terrible you think you are, the reality is God loves you just the way you are. No matter what you do will never change how God feels about you. No choice that you could ever make could keep you from God's love. If you've done everything right in your life – if you've been perfect in every detail – or you've made every mistake possible... If you've gone down every wrong road, God loves us the same. Because God is love. Whether we think we're perfect or flawed or sinned or broken, God loves us. God loves us!!!

And we take that even deeper by saying God loves me. God loves me!!! God loves me!!! So today our first thought, our last thought, our only thought is God loves me. That I am God's beloved. I am whole and complete and lacking in nothing. I am the beloved of God. God loves me just the way I am! No matter what the choices, no matter what the actions, my soul is fully loved by my Creator. Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And so it is. Amen.

SONG:

Rusty Ferracane: 'The Climb' (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on piano)

I can almost see it
That dream I'm dreaming
But there's a voice inside my head sayin'
"You'll never reach it"
Every step I'm takin'

Every move I make feels lost with no direction
My faith is shakin'

But I, I gotta keep strong
Gotta keep my head held high

There's always gonna be another mountain
I'm always gonna wanna make it move
It's always gonna be an uphill battle
Sometimes I'm gonna have to lose
It's not about how fast I get there
It's not about what's waitin' on the other side
It's the climb

The struggles I'm facing
The chances I'm taking
Sometimes might knock me down
But no, I'm not breaking
I may not know it
But these are the moments
That I'm gonna remember most, yeah
Just gotta keep goin'

And I, I gotta be strong
Just keep pushing on

'Cause there's always gonna be another mountain
I'm always gonna wanna make it move
It's always gonna be an uphill battle
Sometimes I'm gonna have to lose
It's not about how fast I get there
It's not about what's waitin' on the other side
It's the climb

There's always gonna be another mountain
I'm always gonna wanna make it move
There's always gonna be an uphill battle
Sometimes you're gonna have to lose
It's not about how fast I get there
It's not about what's waitin' on the other side
It's the climb
Oh, yeah

Keep on movin'
Keep climbin'
Keep the faith, baby
It's all about — it's all about the climb
Keep the faith, keep your faith
It's all about — it's all about the climb

[Light applause]

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Rogers: That was fabulous! I'm so, so blessed by both of you! Thank you, guys, for doing this each week. You are such a blessing to me; you're such a blessing to this ministry. You're such a blessing to all of us that are watching online! So God bless you; Rusty and Craig, thank you, thank you! Have a wonderful day! Thank you so much for your gift for us.

Okay, so you ready? I've been doing this three-part series on "Fear Management." And I wish – if you were in the room – what I'd have you do is: How many of you know that fear ever has been an issue in your life? And I would guess that more than two or three of you would raise your hand. And especially during this time of being shut in or locked down or experiencing this pandemic, that from time to time, all of us have come up against a fear or two. And I really want you to slow down.

And, this week, I'm going to give you your homework first: I want you to write down your fears this week. I do. I want you to sit down quietly in a spot; take 10 minutes, take 20 minutes, take an hour. And I want you to think: *"If I tell myself the truth, what are the fears that have driven my life? If I tell myself the truth, what are the fears that have impacted my life?"*

Because I believe, in one way or another, we're all impacted by our fears. And for most of us, we're either consciously creating our life or we're unconsciously reacting to life. So I want you to actually consciously be aware of what your fears are.

Now, why would you not want to do that? Well, for some of us, the fact that we even have fears is shameful. Like, we're embarrassed that we have fears: that we're an adult, that we have fears. And so for some of us, having a fear means that something's wrong with us, that we're broken, that we're less than... whatever it may be. But I want you to actually become conscious of all your fears. And next week I'm going to tell you what to do with that list. But this week, what I still want to focus on is the difference between fear and faith. Because I believe that you can't be in both camps at the same time. You're either focused on your faith, or you're focused on your fears.

Now, a story in point. So when I look back at my fears, one of my fears is being audited by the IRS. Now, I don't know why that's a fear, but it's been a fear my whole life. Like, I've been worried about it. So my whole life, I've had somebody either do my taxes for me, or review my taxes after the fact, because I have always... The IRS has historically freaked me out! Right? I just didn't want to deal with them; I didn't want to be audited. I didn't want to make a mistake. Yabba, yabba, yabba.

So over the last couple of weeks, as I was preparing my taxes for this year – for actually last year, getting my taxes ready – I realized the State of Arizona, the wonderful honorable State of Arizona, failed me to send me my income tax return from last year. And somehow with all the busy-ness of last year, I didn't even notice I didn't get it back! But as I was going through all my files and stuff, I realized, *"Oh; I never got it back."* I was supposed to – I don't know if you do this; they were supposed to direct deposit it. And it didn't arrive.

So there's a way that you can online that says "Where's my tax refund?" You file the paperwork, or you file the little thing, and literally within five minutes this very nice person from the State of Arizona called me and said, *"Let me tell you why you didn't get the thing,"* and went through the steps. And she said that we made a mistake. And it's like, hmm. Okay. So I listened to all that information and called my accountant – my tax person – and I say, *"This is what the State says."* And she said, *"That's not accurate. Let me take care of it."*

And I thought: How many times is that our relationship with God? Where we get all wound up about something and, all the while, Spirit is saying in the background, *"Let me take care of that!"* Right? So I had this conversation with her, put down the phone, and I just had this huge sense of relief. There was

this huge sense... And I said, *"You know..."* I've literally – I've been filing taxes for more years than I care to count. **[Chuckles]** I've been filing taxes since I was 16 years old. And so I have been – at some level – carrying this fear of the IRS my entire life. My entire adult life, anyway! And in that moment – where she said, *"Richard, let me take care of it..."*

Now, after we had that conversation, the very next day – as Spirit will do – I got a letter from the IRS. So this was the State. The next day I get a letter from the IRS. I have to take a deep breath. And it's literally a form letter. And so, within 24 hours, I had a conversation with the State of Arizona: the tax department. And I get a letter from the IRS. And it was like, *"Okay, Spirit; I realize that the jig is up on this. That I have been carrying this fear for way too long."* I've never been audited. This is the closest I've ever come to being audited. By the time we did something wrong. And it was like, *"Oh."*

So one of the things I want you to look at as you're listing your fears is: I want you just to make a little note. Is that fear a possibility? Like, if you're afraid that spiders are going to eat you to death, on a scale of 1 to 10, that's probably not going to happen! Now, you may see a spider; you may even have a spider crawl up your arm! But the idea of a spider killing you or eating you or chewing off your arm is probably never going to happen.

So one of the things I want you to look at as you're making this list of your fears is: I want you just to say to yourself, *"How big of a possibility do I really think that is? Like, am I ever really gonna get eaten by a great white shark?"* You know, maybe you list that maybe as not very likely. Right? Or, you know, maybe other fears you could say, *"Well, you know, I don't really think that's going to happen, but that's really a fear of mine."* And you don't have to judge them; I just want you to see... Ask yourself: *"How likely is that to actually occur in my life?"*

Because I want you to begin to see that so many fears that we have actually – the possibility of them actually happening... Like, probably a bunch of zombies will never eat your face! That probably will just never happen! **[Laughs]** But if we're carrying that fear with us, it's just taking up room within our mind, our heart, our soul.

So, we've been using – I've been using – the 23rd Psalm as this roadmap to manage our fears. And every week I think that – and it's six verses long; I'm doing it in three weeks, so you can do the math: that's two verses a week. And every week I believe those two verses are the most powerful, beautiful verses!

And so this week we're going to focus on, of course, the last two verses: five and six. So let me begin with 23rd Psalm, Verse 5.

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

I love that! *"Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of mine enemies."* That I really want you to begin to look at the times when you've been fearful. And I want you to see the imagery that is placed in this prayer, in this Scripture. That when you're in conflict – when you have an enemy, when there's a moment of anxiety or fear – what I want you to see is: in this Scripture, Spirit says that, *"I will place a table before you."*

And the idea here is that, when we get into conflict – when we are sent to the war, when we're going into battle with somebody, when we're getting upset about a situation – what I want you to see is: right then, in that moment – in the moment when you want to get upset or angry or defend yourself or attack somebody who you feel like is attacking you – at that moment, I want you to stop and think to yourself. To the best of your ability, I want you to stop at that moment and think to yourself, *"Thou has prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies."*

Now, when you think about somebody going to war or going to battle... You know, they give people field rations. They give people combat rations. And a combat rations are simple to make, simple to eat, but have high calorie, high nutrition. So that people – when they're going into battle – can eat quickly. They don't have to spend a lot of time preparing them. Sometimes they're freeze dried, and they just add water. Or sometimes they're dried packets. Or sometimes they're a food or a protein bar. And the idea is that you don't want people who are in battle to have to stop, slow down, prepare a meal. Because that energy they want... You want them to be using to defend themselves and actually attacking the enemy.

So the idea is: you want them to get as much nutrition or as many calories into their body as they can quickly, so they can be about what they're about.

This is a completely different rationale. The rationale on this one is: in the moment of conflict, God wants you to stop, sit down at an abundant table where everything that you've ever desired will be provided.

You know, many years ago, there was this idea of a "win/win" situation. And a "win/win" situation was that: when I'm in conflict with somebody else, not only to I want to win... But in a "win/win" situation, I want the other person to walk away from the situation also believing that they won. And it's the idea: If I really believe in an abundant Universe – if I really believe there's enough good for all of us – that it's not enough, any more, for me just to make sure that my side wins, or that I win. But I really need to make sure that both sides win.

And that's why compromise doesn't usually work. Because compromise... Neither side really comes away from that situation feeling like they had a win. It's kind of a: it's a semi-win for both sides. But when you create a "win/win," both sides have to walk away thinking that that solution – or that answer – was really good. That their needs were resolved. That their needs were met, that they really feel like they're walking away...

And that's what I want you to see that this Scripture really means. That thou preparest a table in the presence of my enemies. That every time you're in need – every time you're in conflict; every time you're in anxiety; every time you're in fear – I want you to imagine the Spirit of God is preparing a table before you. And you can go fight that battle. And you can go hammer it out. And you can go raise your voice and get all worked up and all upset... Or you can sit down at the table of God's good and just enjoy the meal – the abundance – that God has created for you.

Then the next part of that line is: ***"Thou anointest my head with oil."***

Now, in our culture, we don't really have an understanding of what that means: *"Thou anointest my head with oil."* So I went back into the Jewish tradition where that comes from. And the rights of inauguration have three typical offices in the Jewish commonwealth that are acknowledged by an anointing of oil. And the first one is prophets. Prophets were occasionally anointed into their official office, and were called "Messiahs" or "anointed one. So a prophet.

A priest. At their first institution of the Levitical priesthood, they were anointed into their office. But afterwards, only the high priests were anointed with oil.

And the third case where people were anointed with oil were kings. Kings were anointed and their divine role acknowledge in a ceremony where Jewish kings' heads were anointed as a right of inauguration into the lineage of David.

So what I want you to see is – in this line: *"Thou preparest a table in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil"* – means that you are either a prophet, a high priest or a king. So every time

we pray that *"Thou anointest my head with oil,"* what I want you to see is the role – the height, the importance – that this prayer places on acknowledging who you are in the importance to God in the world. That you're at the level of a king, a high priest or a prophet! They called Jesus the anointed one! So every time we say, *"He anoints my head with oil,"* we're acknowledging that we're at the level of a prophet, a high priest or a king!

And so what I want you to see is that, if you're seeing yourself as unimportant... If you're seeing yourself as broken, or if you're seeing that God isn't paying attention to the struggles that you're going through... what I want you to see is that, every time we affirm the 23rd Psalm, and we get to the line that says, *"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies,"* and now *"anointest my head with oil,"* it's an acknowledgement that you're at the level of a king, a high priest or a prophet! That you're not a little creation. You're not broken. You're not less than. You are the holy of holies! You are the thing that God has created and sent into the world. And that everything you need will be provided!

The next line: ***"My cup runneth over."***

See, we live in a state where water is scarce. And we know what it's like to conserve water. We know what it's like to have landscaping that doesn't use a lot of water. And this idea is very similar to the way it was in the time of Jesus, in the time of the Middle East where water was very scarce. And so this imagery of *"My cup runneth over"* is really an incredibly powerful image. Because it really talks to us about abundance. It calls us to live in a higher state of abundance, because my cup runneth over!

And especially during this time. Because during this time where we're invited to slow down, to go within, to spend more time in prayer and meditation – really a time of reflection – what I want you to see is that, as you move through this pandemic, is your cup runneth over. Are you getting more and more filled? Is your soul filled to overflowing? Or are you moving through this time as empty as when this time started? Because, ideally, this 23rd Psalm invites you to rest, to relax, to get full so that your soul is a cup runneth over.

The next line: ***"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."***

When you think about your future – when you think about tomorrow, when you think about what's next for your life and your world – do you have a scary image of the future? Or do you just see your life getting better and better and better? *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."*

See, for some of us, the use of our imagination – that we talked about last week – that we've really used our imagination to take us to some pretty dark places. But this prayer, over and over again, invites us to use our imagination to have an image of the future that is only getting better and better and better. *"For surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."* I want you to really have that image: that everything you need is going to follow you all the days of your life. That the goodness of God – the mercy of God, the blessings of God, the abundance of God, the health of God, the wisdom of God: every aspect of God – is going to be with you all the days of your life. All the days of my life! I will be blessed all the days of my life!

Will you say that with me? *"I will be blessed all the days of my life!"* I want you to have an image of your future where you are just becoming more and more and more blessed in greater and greater ways, so that your life is only getting better and better and better.

And then the last line, the last phrase of the 23rd Psalm is: ***"And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."***

I love that! *“And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”* So what does that mean: to dwell in the house of the Lord? Well, I think that there’s two aspects of this that I really want to call your attention to.

The first one is: when you dwell in a house, right? When you dwell in God’s house; by definition, if you’re hanging out at God’s house, you’re experiencing the presence of God. If I have a friend or family member come stay with us, whether they like it or not, I’m going to be in the house. Right? They are going to experience my presence. They’re going to know – because I’m kinda loud – they’re going to know when I wake up; they’re going to know when I go to bed. You know? If you have a guest to your house, your presence is going to be felt.

So when you dwell in the house of the Lord, you’re going to feel the presence of God in your life. You’re going to feel the presence of God as an active presence. You’re going to feel the presence of God guiding you and directing you. Because you’re dwelling in the house of the Lord.

Now, the other aspect of this that I really wanted to call your attention to is that, when we have friends or family members come and stay at our house, we want to do everything that we have; we offer them everything. We say, *“Now, if you get hungry, here’s the kitchen. Here’s the refrigerator. Here’s the pantry. Anything in this house: please help yourself.”* We call ahead of time; we find out what they like for breakfast, so that we have their favorite foods in the house. I mean, we go out of our way! When we have guests in our home, we go out of our way to make sure that they’re comfortable in our home: that they have the foods that they like; that they have what they need. And we go out of our way!

And then, our friends and family, I throw them the keys to my car! You know, we have a car that we just have for friends and family when they’re in town! And I say, *“The car is gassed; it’s clean. Use it; enjoy yourself! Come and go as you please! This is your house while you’re here; just enjoy it, and know that whatever we have is yours!”* And I love that about the way that we do hospitality! I love that: that we offer our guests one of our cars, and that we.... I love that!

And what I want you to see is: I know that God is even a better host to each and every one of us. That everything that God has – because we live in God’s house – is available to us! That whatever we want to eat or drink – however we want to live; whatever car we want to drive... That we are offered the infinite abundance of God!

Jesus said it this way in John 14:16: *“All that the Father has is mine.”* Like, there’s a statement. There’s a level of our own life, when we get to that level of spiritual awakening, where we know that all that the Father has – all that the Father is – is mine! And I would want that for all my guests. If I invite you into my home – to stay in my home – I want you to be well taken care of. I don’t want you to go without anything that you need. You need a phone charger? I’ve got a phone charger. I’ll even go buy a phone charger if I don’t have your phone charger. I want to make sure that you have everything that you need. That’s just the way that we like to host people!

And what I want you to see is: I promise that God is even a better host than you’ve ever had before! That all that the Father has is mine! All that God is is mine! And that that’s our right; you live in God’s house! That the presence of God is always with you: guiding you, directing you. And everything that God is – everything that God has – is available to you!

So take a deep breath. You know, there is so much spiritual food in this 23rd Psalm. And I’ve been taking it verse by verse. But what I want to do right now, as we close this three-week series, is I want to go back to the beginning. And I want to read, line by line, this whole prayer. And I want you to really take it in. And this time when you take it in, I want you take it in with the deepest level of meaning. So I’m

going to go slow. And I'm going to invite you to take it in as a process of prayer, so that you can really hear every word, every statement, every aspect of this prayer, and really take it in to your life.

So close your eyes, and let's do it together.

"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."

I want you to hear these words and know that each of these words – each of these promises; each of these commitments – is a commitment to your soul. To you, personally! To your life! That you need God? God will be your shepherd. That if you're feeling want, God will provide every need. God will guide you and direct you; God will prosper and love you. God will walk with you through every change, through every moment, through every day.

"The Lord is my shepherd, and I shall not want." And so it is. Amen.

OFFERING

This is a time of giving of our gifts and tithes. And I invite you to hold them in your hand as we bless them together. Even if you're going to give electronically... And I just want to thank each and every one of you who is giving so generously and abundantly to this ministry during this time. Your support of this ministry is making a world of difference. So let's just take our offering – even if it's just in your imagination – I want you to take your offering in your hand. And our offering blessing is: *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I give and all that I receive."*

Together: *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I give and all that I receive."* And so it is. Amen.

CLOSING

God bless you all! Have a wonderful week; I am so excited to be with you each and every week. And I will be with you next week, and know that we are holding you in prayer: that you are safe and well during this time. God bless you, my friend! See you next week!

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