

The Futility of Fear

DEREK A. CUTHBERT

My dear young friends, I would like to share with you today some thoughts on the futility of fear.

Anciently the Lord spoke to Isaac, saying, “Fear not, for I am with thee” (Genesis 26:24). The admonition to “fear not” was clear and direct and meaningful. The promise that “I am with thee” was equally plain and direct and powerful.

Freedom from Fear is Essential

Down through the ages the same admonition, the same assurance, has been extended to every living soul who is willing to qualify. And yet fear is prevalent throughout the earth. It stifles initiative, saps strength, and reduces efficiency. It weakens faith, brings doubts, and begets mistrust. Indeed, it tends to impede the very business of being. How negative, frustrating, and futile is fear.

Let us consider together then the futility of fear, so that we may overcome it and exclude it from our lives as much as possible. Then shall our efforts yield their full potential, and our minds will be unshackled and enlightened with eternal truth. Indeed, one of the four essential human freedoms listed by Franklin D. Roosevelt, in a message to Congress, is “Freedom from Fear” (January 6, 1941).

As we embark together on this brief voyage of discovery, I trust that we will grasp the helm of faith to guide us through some troubled waters. Emily Brontë’s immortal words are apt.

*No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world’s storm-troubled sphere:
I see Heaven’s glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.
[Last Lines, 1846]*

How shall we then arm ourselves from fear?

Ten Aspects of Fear

Just like people, fear comes in all shapes and sizes. There are those who fear people; others fear things. Many fear the future, and some fear the past. Where do you fit in? I will present ten aspects of the futility of fear, and I trust that this sharing will be beneficial, uplifting, and arming.

Derek A. Cuthbert was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 1 May 1984.

First, there is fear of God. Among all of the possible fears, this is the only one that is valid. However, it is not fear in the normal sense of lack of courage, but rather love, respect, and reverence. Indeed, fear of God in this sense can dispel all other fears. Two examples are the assurance and admonition to the Israelites, “the Lord is with us: fear them not” (Numbers 14:9), and Apostle Paul’s rhetorical question, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31), meaning “who can prevail against us?” (JST Romans 8:31).

Fear, or love, of God also brings many other blessings besides courage. “It shall be well with them that fear God” (Ecclesiastes 8:12), for he is “gracious unto those who fear” him (D&C 76:5). Yes, fear, or love, of God releases us, frees us, just as acceptance of truth does, for “the truth shall make [us] free” (John 8:32).

Second, there is fear of man. There are those who fear physical domination by others. The Psalmist gave good counsel that we should “not fear what flesh can do unto [us]” (Psalms 56:4). Solomon also gave the wise saying that “fear of man bringeth a snare” (Proverbs 29:25). It is hard for a child to realize this when someone sets upon him. Experience teaches that it is futile to be afraid, for fear attracts the attention of the bully and the derision of those who mock.

The Lord, through Moses, declared with firmness to the Israelites:

When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. [Deuteronomy 20:1]

To return good for evil not only overcomes fear, but also overcomes enmity. I remember when we had an unfriendly neighbor some years ago. He would play the radio very loudly and generally try to be objectionable—so much as to generate fear. I am glad I was prompted

to retain a positive, cheerful demeanor which overcame fear and eventually broke down the barrier, for “perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18).

Third, much more prevalent than physical fear, is the fear of criticism, rejection, and verbal opposition. Again, the scriptures are replete with counsel and admonition. In latter-day revelation to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, the Lord said, in relation to the loss of 116 pages of manuscript of the Book of Mormon, “You should not have feared man more than God” (D&C 3:7).

Saul was rejected as king because, as he confessed to Samuel, “I feared the people, and obeyed their voice” (1 Samuel 15:24). Will you transgress the commandments of the Lord because you fear what others will say if you don’t follow them in the ways of the world? “Fear ye not the reproach of men,” the Lord counseled through Isaiah (Isaiah 51:7). In more recent times he has chided those who “will not open their mouths [to share the gospel] . . . because of the fear of man” (D&C 60:2).

When we have something to tell others which will benefit them, protect them, or enlighten them, we should not hold back. There are so many people who are confused and discouraged, and who want a better way of life. How grateful they are when someone takes the time to share their happiness and purpose in life. Will you seek to share even more? You are a great power for good, providing your righteous potential is harnessed by service.

While I served as mission president in Scotland from 1975 to 1978, the Church received considerable opposition and criticism. On one occasion, three ministers made derogatory public statements in a particular city. I wrote an open letter to the local newspaper announcing that we would be holding a public meeting in that city to dispel some of the misunderstandings which were being voiced around. It was a wonderful meeting. We first showed the fine Church film “Meet the Mormons,” and then I spoke to the large group concerning our beliefs

and way of life. When we opened the meeting for questions, a number of people who were not members of the Church stood and said kind things about the Church and the Latter-day Saints they knew. Positive results ensued and the work moved forward.

What if we had feared the criticism? I remember receiving a telephone call from a missionary who was obviously a little fearful. He said, “President, what shall we do? We have a man from the local church who follows us wherever we go and tries to stop us from knocking on the doors.”

The young missionary was surprised at my response. “Good,” I said. “You will have much success there, for the adversary is getting worried.” I told him of the experience of the early missionaries to the British Isles, just before the first baptisms took place in Preston. Elder Heber C. Kimball, grandfather of our beloved President Spencer W. Kimball, recorded it as follows:

*By this time the adversary of souls began to rage, and he felt determined to destroy us before we had fully established the kingdom of God in that land, and the next morning I witnessed a scene of satanic power and influence which I shall never forget. [Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1888), p. 143]*

After my wife and I were baptized in January 1951, many of our neighbors shunned us, sometimes crossing the street so they would not meet us face-to-face. This did not affect our attitude, however, and we would greet them normally. It was not long before they would come to us and say, “We have a child who is ill, would you pray for her?” or “I have a problem. Would you please give me some counsel and advice?”

There is never any need to fear opposition, criticism, or persecution, for we know what will be the outcome. The Lord’s work goes forward even more strongly, for

the works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught. . . .

Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men. [D&C 3:1, 3]

Fourth, there are some who fear events, such as examinations and tests, interviews and journeys. These are all challenges which we need to shoulder. Fear usually brings failure. The Savior warned of “men’s hearts failing them for fear” (Luke 21:26). Eleanor Roosevelt said, “You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face” (*You Learn by Living*, 1960).

There is an excellent example of this when Elisha’s servant discovered that the Syrian army had surrounded the city of Dothan, wherein they dwelt. Fearfully, he said to the prophet, “Alas, my master! how shall we do?”

Elisha answered him firmly: “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2 Kings 6:15–16). Well could he say this, for “Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (2 Kings 6:17).

One lesson we have to learn is that fear is the beginning of defeat. On the other hand, courage is the beginning of success. We gain courage by the realization that we have a lot going for us. We derive strength from the knowledge that the Lord is with us. To Abraham he declared, “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield” (Genesis 15:1). This is exactly what we need in this tempting, permissive world—a shield to protect us from the “fiery darts of the wicked” (D&C 27:17).

One great event that some people fear is referred to as “the end of the world.” We know that at the second coming of Jesus Christ it will be the “great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Malachi 4:5, D&C 110:14)—dread being a

synonym for fear. We can make it a great day for us, though, rather than a dreadful day. How? By qualifying, by complying, by following the Lord. It is futile to be afraid when we could be “looking forth for the great day of the Lord” (D&C 45:39).

As a young boy, not quite thirteen years of age, in September 1939, it was natural to have some momentary fear when I heard that war had been declared. Some of the children even speculated about the end of the world coming in those dark days that followed, when the invasion of England seemed imminent, and bombs were falling all around. We were not really afraid, however, for we had faith in God. We prayed and worked for deliverance, and miraculously it came.

Another futile fear that I dispelled some years later was the fear of heights. We were building our new chapel in Nottingham, England, with all the members helping. My specialty was laying floor tile and placing acoustic ceiling tile, mainly in the corridors and classrooms. There was a call for someone to fix some ceiling tiles at the very apex of the chapel ceiling. I don’t know the height, but as I started to climb the ladder, it seemed like scaling Mount Everest. On reaching the top I had to measure exactly, then descend the ladder, cut the tiles to shape and size, climb once again and fit them in place. Certainly, the best way to overcome fear of heights is to “do it,” as President Kimball has challenged. In fact, he has said, “Give me another mountain.”

Fifth, another event which strikes fear and apprehension into the hearts of many, is death. The prophet Mormon speaks of “that awful fear of death which fills the breasts of all the wicked” (Mormon 6:7). This particular fear arises from misunderstanding of the purpose of life and lack of knowledge of the plan of our Eternal Father. It is vital to come to an understanding that death is not the end, but a new beginning, a necessary stage in our eternal progression. Fear of death accomplishes nothing

if we are righteous, for “death is swallowed up in victory. . . . victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:54, 57).

David, the shepherd / psalmist, gave us those magnificent words of comfort:

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. [Psalms 23:4]

Speaking of death in this way gives the Lord’s perspective, whereas talking fearfully of death creates fear and uneasiness.

Some years ago, a dear young friend of ours, Pat, was stricken with cancer. She was not afraid of death, but was concerned about her small children. She did not want to leave them while they were so young. Her great faith and courage were rewarded and she was granted a few vital years to care for her family before she peacefully passed away.

I think of another very dear friend, Joan, our closest friend in the Church, who was tragically killed by a car as she crossed a pedestrian walkway in Salt Lake City. She certainly did not fear death, for she was fully prepared. Everything was in order, in her personal life and in her personal papers. She was ready to meet the Lord.

Sixth, we will consider other fears of the unknown. These may be experienced in a number of ways: fear of the dark, fear of change, fear of the future. Such fear can be overcome by faith, as the Lord showed as he rebuked the winds and the sea. “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” he challenged his disciples (Matthew 8:26).

The Lord’s disciples succumbed to this type of fear on several occasions. When they saw Jesus walking on the water, he comforted them, saying, “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid” (Matthew 14:27). Again, when he appeared to them after his resurrection, they were “terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had

seen a spirit." He developed faith within them as he asked them to "handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:37, 39).

Reassurance from others is an important step toward faith. For example, there is the comfort given by parents to children afraid of the dark, or by a wife to a husband about to change his place of work. I remember during my Royal Air Force service in India and Burma, during World War II, one of our colleagues was always imagining a twisted stick to be a snake. We had to reassure him on numerous occasions to allay his fears. As Theseus remarked in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*: "Or in the night, imagining some fear, / How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear!" (act 5, scene 1).

Again, concerning the future, is it unknown? The Lord has told us much about the future through his prophets. "Fear not," he has counseled, "let your hearts be comforted" (D&C 98:1). "If ye are prepared ye shall not fear" (D&C 38:30).

The pattern of the scriptures is first a commandment, then a promise. Providing we live our lives in harmony with the commandments of God, there is no place for fear regarding the consequences. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). I have a strong testimony of this—for while we have not sought for worldly possessions, we have always had sufficient for our needs since we put our hands to the gospel plough.

Seventh, we have fear of responsibility. I remember just after I joined the Church, a great feeling of confidence came over me. I felt that since I had chosen the Lord's side, he was on my side. Several remarkable things happened, of which I will recount but two.

Although I had never had the courage to stand on my feet and speak in debate, either at high school or college, I found myself asking my branch president if I might give a talk in

sacrament meeting. I still have the notes of that very first talk. It was on faith and works.

A few months after my baptism, a golden opportunity presented itself at my place of work, where I was a management trainee. Again I had that strong feeling of self-assurance, and I received my first promotion, which set my feet on the management ladder. I found that through my Church membership and the faith it engendered, I overcame the fear of taking responsibility.

I have always loved reading the Apostle Paul's epistles to Timothy and particularly cherish this advice: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). I have learned to rely on the Comforter, even the Holy Ghost, to give me the feeling of peace and confidence, and to bring things to my remembrance.

Said the Savior: "Whosoever belongeth to my church need not fear" (D&C 10:55). How true that is, for in his Church the gift of the Holy Ghost is available to all. We can have the promptings of impending danger, as I have had on several occasions. We can have the discerning of places we should not go and things we should not do. It is futile to fear when the Holy Ghost is with you and the Lord himself is "on your right hand and on your left" (D&C 84:88).

What of marriage responsibility? Are there some who delay marriage for fear of the responsibility? When my wife and I were married, we had the magnificent sum of twenty English pounds between us. Although young, we felt ready for the challenges and responsibilities that we knew lay ahead. What a glorious experience it has been for almost forty years now to shoulder responsibility and struggle together in building a happy home and a wonderful family of ten precious children.

From time to time I meet members of the Church who do not feel able to take responsibility as an officer or a teacher in the Church.

I tell them of my experience in England. Literally within days of baptism I was called to head the youth program in the Nottingham branch. This was completely new to me and I felt inadequate, but I knew the Lord needed me. There were less than 7,000 members in the whole of the British Isles where there are now 40 stakes. We all had to be “anxiously engaged” in the work of saving souls, building the kingdom, and establishing Zion. So it is with all of us. It is futile to fear responsibility when we have been called to serve “by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority” (Articles of Faith 1:5).

Eighth is fear of loneliness. Linked with this is the fear of being in a small minority. This type of fear often results in compromise of principles and giving in to the demands of others for fear of being lonely, or being the odd one out. In latter-day revelation, the Lord has given comfort and assurance to those in this situation.

Fear not, little flock; do good; let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail. [D&C 6:34]

Fear of loneliness includes fear of not having anyone to talk to, or being without help in time of need. These fears can be conquered by reaching out and giving service to others, becoming outward-looking instead of inward-looking. In order to have a friend, we must be a friend.

I think of dear Sister Amy Gent, who I was privileged to visit for fifteen years as a branch president, home teacher, and friend. The first time I visited her, she was eighty-seven years of age, and I was later honored to speak at the funeral of this wonderful lady who stepped from this life at age one hundred and two. Widowed twice, she was the only member of the Church in her extended family. Was she lonely? Never!

She read the scriptures every day and once asked me to take her some missionary tracts, which I thought were to vary her reading. I gave them to her, saying, “You will enjoy reading these, Sister Gent.”

“Oh, they are not for me,” she replied. “I visit an old lady and I want to share the gospel with her!”

Reaching out, helping, serving—this is the way we overcome the fear of loneliness.

A few weeks ago, a brother complained to me, “When I was away on business recently, in another part of the country, I went to church and no one spoke to me. I felt very lonely, especially as I was so far from home.”

I paused and then asked, “How many people did you speak to?” At first he was a little annoyed, feeling I had not empathized, but then he smiled and said, “You’re right, I did hold back instead of reaching out.”

Ninth, fear of the past haunts those who have transgressed and have not yet gained forgiveness and remission. It holds them back, but this should be but a temporary phase. As President Kimball has counseled:

To cure spiritual diseases which throttle us and plague our lives, the Lord has given us a sure cure—repentance. [*The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), preface]

Furthermore, the Lord has given us a wonderful formula to enable us to remove fear and guilt:

Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.

By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them. [D&C 58:42–43]

Once we confess, we need have no more fear about being found out. What a tremendous burden is lifted, which otherwise would

weigh us down interminably. Confession is the first major step in the process of repentance. Sincere repentance is many-faceted; it is more than confession. There must needs be a forsaking and turning away from transgression in all its sordid forms.

Then we can look forward to and, indeed, claim fulfillment of the promise of the Lord, that he will not only forgive, but remember our sins no more. What a contrast to the lot of those of whom Isaiah speaks:

Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? And who knoweth us? [Isaiah 29:15]

On a number of occasions I have had the happy assignment to meet with those who have prepared to come back into the fullness of gospel blessings. What a great day it is for them. Fear of the past has fled and they are starting out anew. It is good to be able to say to them, "Today is the first day of the rest of your lives."

We need to spring-clean our lives, sweep out each nook and cranny and under the carpet. In the world of industry and commerce, which used to be my environment, regular inventory is taken. At these times, decisions are made to eliminate certain items from the inventory and to mark other items down in value.

We should take inventory in our lives, as did Scrooge, and cast out the dross so that we become unencumbered and free from fear of the past.

When recommendations are being considered for appointment to public office, investigation of the personal life and affairs of the nominee is becoming more frequent. Whether we have aspirations for success in the political, business, academic, or other spheres of activity, we should endeavor to keep ourselves "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). In order not to fear the past, try not to do any-

thing in the present that you will regret in the future.

Tenth, and finally, there is fear of failure. There are those who will not even attempt to do something because they lack the self-assurance that they could accomplish it. I was raised with the old adage ringing in my ears, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." There is no disgrace in failure, and in any case, we have never failed until we give up. The four-minute mile eluded athletes for many years, but after trying again and again, Dr. Roger Bannister finally achieved it. Since then, athletes from many lands have broken this seeming barrier.

President N. Eldon Tanner remarked on one occasion, "One of the evils of the world today is not failure, but low aim." Just as we should not fear to fail, neither should we fear to aim high. There was no question of failure in the mind of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, when, in the dark days of 1842, he penned the words, "Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory!" (D&C 128:22).

Take Courage!

I say to you: Courage, young people! These are great times and there are great things to be accomplished. Develop your talents; do not hide them under a bushel. Prepare prayerfully, increase in faith and you will never have need to fear. We declare with the poet, Longfellow:

*Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee,
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears
Are all with thee—are all with thee!*
[The Building of the Ship, 1849]

God bless and guide you, protect and inspire you. I testify to you of my love for the Lord Jesus Christ and bear especial witness of him as the risen Lord. I know truly that he is the Savior of the world. This is the living Church of the

living Christ, and he speaks through a living prophet. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.