

Face The New Year With Courage And Confidence

The year 2008 is almost behind us and the New Year is rapidly approaching. Recently I was reading some predictions for 2009. One economist predicted that the stock market decline will accelerate with the Dow Jones Industrial Average dipping below 6,000. Another is calling for extreme volatility to engulf the markets. Still another is predicting that urban areas will see skyrocketing crime and in parts of some cities, life could become totally uninhabitable!

God does not desire his people to worry. Over and over the Bible says, "Fear not!" The term worry comes from an old German word that means "to choke, to strangle." Worry will sap your effectiveness. Worry is a thin stream of fear that trickles through the mind. If encouraged it will cut a channel so wide that all other thoughts will be drowned in it. Anxiety is wasting today's time to clutter up tomorrow's opportunities with yesterday's troubles.

Our society admires people who can stand firm, hold to their convictions, are courageous and bold, and cannot be bought, intimidated or defeated. Rudyard Kipling described such people in his famous poem. He wrote, "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you; if you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, but make allowance for their doubting too; if you can wait and not be tired by waiting, or, being lied about, don't deal in lies, or, being hated, don't give way to hating.....yours is the Earth and everything's that's in it, and-which is more- you'll be a man, my son!"

Worry, anxiety and fear must be replaced by courage and faith. Philippians is the book in the New Testament that deals with joy. Joy is better than happiness. Happiness is dependent upon circumstances. Joy rises above circumstances. Joy is a deep and abiding confidence. Philippians 4:6-9 spells out three keys to overcoming fear and anxiety.

The first key is to pray with thanksgiving. Verse 6 reads, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...." Praying with thanksgiving is very important because it forces us to look back. The best predictor of future results is past performance. When I pray with thanksgiving I am forced to remember what God has done in the past.

"God, thanks for my wife and children. Thanks for friends and family. Thanks for a warm home. Thanks for food on the table. Thanks for sending your son Jesus to die for our sins. Thanks for preparing a place for us in heaven." God's provision and protection in the past reveal that the Lord will take of you in the future. Spiritually stable people react to difficult circumstances with thankful prayer. Prayer is the antidote to worry and the cure for anxiety.

The terms "prayer, supplication, requests" are very important. The text assumes that a Christian will cry out to God not with doubting, questioning or even blaming God but

with thanksgiving. We must not rebel against God for what he allows. Instead, cast all your anxiety upon him because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

Thankful prayer results in the peace of God. The peace God offers is supernatural. This peace begins with salvation. The sinner must turn from his sin and turn to Jesus. This inward tranquility is a confident trust in God's flawless wisdom and infinite power. Paul said, "And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). The word guard is a military term used of soldiers on guard duty. True peace is available only through Jesus Christ.

The second key is to meditate upon Scripture. Verse 8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy- meditate on these things." The computer industry often says, "Garbage in, garbage out." A computer's output is dependent upon the information entered. Your actions are dependent upon your thinking. Meditate means "to consider, to evaluate, to calculate." Our minds must be focused upon the Word of God.

Only the Bible meets the qualifications of verse 8. The Bible contains many great and astonishing promises. Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep" (John 10:14). Hebrews 3:14-15 read, "...he himself (Jesus) likewise shared in the shame, that through death (the cross) he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." At the cross Jesus defeated Satan. Our Messiah even delivers his people from the fear of death. "For God so loved the world (that's you!) that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

The third key is to obey the truth. In Philippians 4 verse 9 the Apostle Paul continues, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you." The truth must be obeyed. The Scriptures must move from your mind to your heart and even to your feet! As you obey the truth the God of peace will be with you.

What is the key to a great 2009? Don't let the predictions of economic chaos, climate change, disappearing glaciers or even civil unrest scare you. Live your life with stability, strength and courage. Be a person of hope. Pray with thanksgiving. God has taken care of you in the past. He will take care of you today and in the future. Meditate on the truth. The promises of God will strengthen and encourage you. Make certain you apply the truth and the Lord himself will be with you.

Ethan Hansen
Pastor, Faith Bible Fellowship
Big Lake, AK
ethanhansen@gci.net