



DEAN WELCH - TEACHER

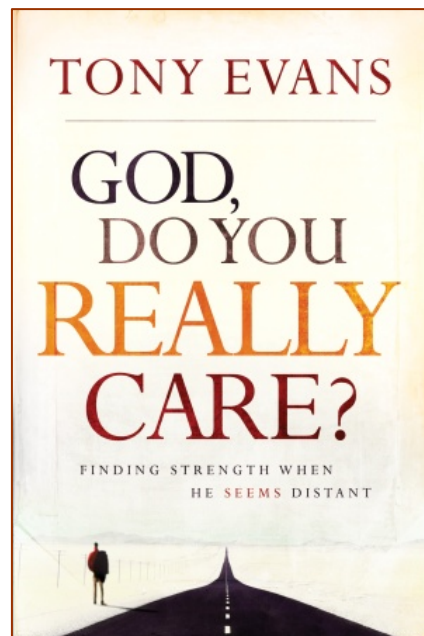
WHADDIFS & HOWELLS

[DO YOU REALLY CARE ... WHEN I'M AFRAID?]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JUNE 8, 2008

LESSON #2 FROM THE *MASTER WORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



WHADDIFS & HOWELLS

[DO YOU REALLY CARE ... WHEN I'M AFRAID?]

he man was a professional thief. His name stirred fear as the desert wind stirs tumbleweeds. He terrorized the Wells Fargo stage line for thirteen years, roaring like a tornado in and out of the Sierra Nevada's, spooking the most rugged frontiersmen. In journals from San Francisco to New York, his name became synonymous with the danger of the frontier.

During his reign of terror between 1875 and 1883, he is credited with stealing the bags and the breath away from twenty-nine different stagecoach crews. And he did it all without firing a shot. His weapon was his reputation. His ammunition was intimidation. A hood hid his face. No victim ever saw him. No artist ever sketched his features. No sheriff could ever track his trail. He never fired a shot or took a hostage. He didn't have to. His presence was enough to paralyze.

BLACK BART! A hooded bandit armed with a deadly weapon. What was his deadly weapon? One word, it was FEAR! Fear has prevented many Christians from experiencing the blissful happiness that Jesus tells us about in the beatitudes. Fear of death, fear of failure, fear of God, fear of tomorrow – and the list goes on and on. Fear's goal is to create a cowardly, joyless soul. He wants you to take your eyes off the mountain peak and settle for the dull existence of the flat lands.

Today, as we continue with Week #2 of our Bible study from Tony Evans' book, **God, Do You Really Care**, the question we've focused on this week is, "God, do you really care when I'm afraid?" A great focal memory verse for us this week is found in **PSALM 34:4 (NIV)**. Listen as I read this verse—and then mark it and go back and memorize it later: ***4 "I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears."***

So, what are you afraid of? What's your greatest fear and what does it do to you? There are all kinds of things that rob the joy in

our lives at any given moment. For instance, you get up in the middle of the night to go to the kitchen for some water and a second after you turn the kitchen light on you see a small furry animal running across the floor. Or you are at your favorite restaurant and as you are enjoying your meal, you see a roach climb up the wall. Fear is also something that robs our joy.

Max Lucado, in his book *Travelling Light*, talks about all the WHADDIFS and HOWELLS in life, like: Your ten year old is afraid—so afraid he can't eat. So afraid he can't sleep "What's wrong?" you inquire. He shakes his head and moans, "I don't even have a pension plan." Or your eight-year old granddaughter is crying in bed. "What's wrong, sweetheart?" She whimpers, "I'll never pass the college entrance exams." How would you respond to such statements? Besides calling a child psychologist, your response would be empathetic, "You're too young to worry about those things. When the time comes, you'll know what to do."

Unfortunately, we adults have more than our share of fears, whaddifs and howells. WHADDIF I lose my job? Howell I know who I should marry? Whaddif I marry I go who snores? Howell I pay our baby's tuition> Whaddif, after all my dieting, they learn that lettuce is fattening and chocolate isn't? I read a great acronym for fear this week—where each letter stands for something else. It says fear stands for: **F**ALSE **E**VIDENCE **A**PPEARING **R**EAL!

One summer night during a severe thunderstorm a mother was tucking her small son into bed. She was about to turn the light off when he asked in a trembling voice, "Mommy, will you stay with me all night?" Smiling, the mother gave him a warm, reassuring hug and said tenderly, "I can't dear. I have to sleep in Daddy's room." A long silence followed. At last it was broken by a shaky voice saying, "The big sissy!"

You and I both know that there are things we fear that we shouldn't. Things that are beyond our control. Things that aren't even a reality. Yet we act just like that great theologian, Charlie Brown of *Peanuts* fame, who said, "I've developed a new

philosophy: *I only dread one day at a time.*" Some of you might be afraid to face death. You might be afraid of commitment or rejection. Or you have the constant fear that your kids are going to get hurt and that's all you think about. Or you might have the fear that you'll never measure up to anyone or the fear that you might wake up and have cancer one day, lose your job, go bald, get fat-and on and on. What makes us so fearful when we know that God's Word tells us just the opposite when we love and lean upon God alone? Doesn't He tell us that He will never leave or forsake us? What about these words from **1 JOHN 4:18 (NKJV)**? Listen as I read, ¹⁸*"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.*

Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his first inaugural address, said: *The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.* So simple sounding, isn't it? But what happens when we are fearful and afraid instead of relying on faith? Listen to how one writer said it so clearly: *Fear imprisons; faith liberates; fear paralyzes; faith empowers; fear disheartens; faith encourages; fear sickens; faith heals; fear makes useless; faith makes serviceable.* Even Babe Ruth understood the problem with fear, when he said, *Never let the fear of striking out get in your way.* And, we know he didn't—since he not only was the home run king of his time, but also led the league in strikeouts!

And, finally, Benjamin Franklin, one of the early founders of our country, put our fear of dying it into proper perspective when he said: *Fear not death, for the sooner we die the longer we shall be immortal.*

So, what fears did you come up with this week for your list? Did you hear the news story this week about the woman who was shopping in WalMart with her four-year old granddaughter? As the woman turned away briefly, her granddaughter pulled a gun out of the grandmother's purse and accidentally shot herself. The little girl will apparently be OK, but we wonder how this could happen? The investigation discovered that the woman was actually the local

magistrate judge and had a permit to carry the gun because of her position. As a matter of fact, the report said it was common for judges to carry handguns for protection. Duh! What if the little girl had died? Do you think they would have listed the cause of death as "fear?" Probably not, yet she would have died, in part, because her grandmother had been caught in the grip of fear.

Fear is very much a part of our lives and we simply want to know if God really, really cares when we are afraid and fearful? Most assuredly, the answer is YES! His Word is full of assurances for us, if we lean upon Him—and Him alone. But, oh, how we tend to go everywhere else. First to the bar, to the counselor, to the self-help book or the friend next door. Not Jesus. Why is that? Why can't we learn from the example of Christ that night He was in such anguish? Cheeks streaked with tears? Face flooded in sweat? Rivulets of blood dripping from his chin?

You remember the night? Right? Turn to **LUKE 22:39-44 (NCV)** and follow along as we put this fear thing in perspective: *³⁹Jesus left the city and went to the Mount of Olives, as he often did, and his followers went with him. ⁴⁰When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray for strength against temptation." ⁴¹Then Jesus went about a stone's throw away from them. He kneeled down and prayed, ⁴²"Father, if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering. But do what you want, not what I want." ⁴³Then an angel from heaven appeared to him to strengthen him. ⁴⁴Being full of pain, Jesus prayed even harder. His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

I came across a children's Bible recently that someone left in the Sunday School department. In thumbing through it to see who's it was, I noticed a picture of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. His face was soft, hands calmly folded as He knelt beside a rock and prayed. Jesus seemed peaceful. Yet as I thought about that pastoral picture in contrast to the message I read in the Gospel, the image is disrupted. Mark says, *"Jesus fell to the ground."* **Mark 14:35.** Matthew tells us Jesus was *"very sad and troubled*

... to the point of death" **Matt 26:37-38**. According to Luke, Jesus was "full of pain." **Luke 22:44**.

So, equipped with those passages, how would you paint this scene? Jesus flat on the ground? Face in the dirt? Extended hands gripping the grass? Body rising and falling with sobs? Face as twisted as the olive trees that surround him? What do we do with this image of Jesus?

Simple. We turn to it when we look the same. We read it when we feel the same; we read it when we feel afraid. For isn't it likely that fear is one of the emotions Jesus felt? One might even argue that fear was the primary emotion. He saw something in the future so fierce, so foreboding, that he begged for a change of plans, remember? "*Father, if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering.*" **Luke 22:42**

What causes you to pray the same prayer? Boarding an airplane? Facing a crowd? Public speaking? Taking a job? Taking a spouse? Driving on a highway? The source of your fear may seem small to others. But to you, it freezes your feet, makes your heart pound, and brings blood to your face. That's what happened to Jesus.

He was so afraid that he bled. Doctors describe this condition as *hematidrosis*. Severe anxiety causes the release of chemicals that break down the capillaries in the sweat glands. When this occurs, sweat comes out tinged with blood. Jesus was more than anxious; he was afraid. Fear is worry's big brother, according to Max Lucado. If worry is like a big burlap bag, fear is a trunk of concrete. It wouldn't budge.

How remarkable that Jesus felt such fear. But how kind that he told us about it. We tend to do the opposite, don't we? Gloss over our fears. Cover them up. Keep our sweaty palms in our pockets, our nausea and dry mouths a secret. Not so with Jesus. We see no mask of strength. But we do hear a request for strength. "*Father, if you're willing to take away this cup of suffering.*" The first one to hear his fear is his Father. He could have gone to his mother. He

could have confided in his disciples. He could have assembled a prayer meeting. All would have been appropriate, but none were his priority. He went first to his Father. WOW! And, yet, look at what we do—as I mentioned earlier? We go everywhere else first.

In our recent study of David, we learned about how he had a heart like God's. But, let's not forget that David urged us—the fear-filled—to do the same thing we see Jesus doing in the Garden. In **Psalm 23:4 (NKJV)**, David wrote it this way: *"I will fear no evil."* How could David make such a claim? Because he knew where to look. Look at the rest of verse 4—as David gives the answer: *"You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."*

Rather than turn to the other sheep, David turned to the Shepherd. Rather than stare at the problems, he stared at the rod and staff. Because he knew where to look, David was able to say, *"I will fear no evil."* Can you do the same today?

Rather than focus on the fear—focus on the solution. That's what David did. And that's what the writer of Hebrews urges us to do in **HEBREWS 12:1-2 (NKJV)** when he tells us: *"...Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith,*

The writer urges us to keep our eyes on Jesus. It seems so simple—but can it be enough? Wasn't that the counsel we saw with David? *"You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."* And let's look at how Jesus endured the terror of the crucifixion. He went first to the Father with his fears. He modeled the words of **PSALM 56:3 (NLT)**, *"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you."*

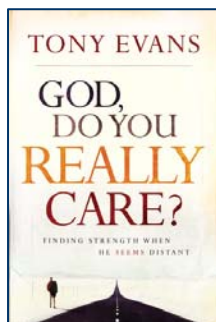
Do the same with your. Don't avoid life's Gardens of Gethsemane. Enter them. Just don't enter them alone. And while there, be honest. Pounding the ground is permitted. Tears are allowed. And if you sweat blood, you won't be the first. DO what Jesus did; open your heart.

And be specific. Jesus was. *"Take this cup,"* he prayed. If it's a fear of flying, give God the number of the flight. A speech, then tell him the length of the speech. Share the details of the job transfer. He has plenty of time. He also has plenty of compassion. He doesn't think your fears are foolish or silly. He won't tell you to *"buck up"* or *"get tough."* He's been where you are. He knows how you feel. And he knows what you need. That's why we punctuate our prayers as Jesus did: *"If you are willing..."* Was God willing? Yes and no. He didn't take away the cross, but he took the fear. God didn't still the storm, but he calmed the sailor.

As you know, one of my favorite verses of comfort and assurance is **PHILIPPIANS 4:6 (NIV)**: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* Don't measure the size of the mountain; talk to the One who can move it. Instead of carrying the world on your shoulder, talk to the One who holds the universe on his. Hope is a look away.

Oh, yea, to finish the story of Black Bart. As it turns out, he wasn't anything to be afraid of, either. When the hood came off, there was nothing to fear. When the authorities finally tracked down the thief, they didn't find a bloodthirsty bandit from Death Valley; they found a mild-mannered druggist from Decatur, Illinois. The man the papers pictured storming through the mountains on horseback was, in reality, so afraid of horses he rode to and from his robberies in a buggy. He was Charles E. Boles – the bandit who never once fired a shot, because he never once loaded his gun.

Let's pray!



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