

Fighting Fear and Anxiety

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How do we deal with all of the fear and anxiety that we face, whether media-induced or event-induced? An example from church history proves instructive. Saint Augustine (354–430) lived at a time of great fear and anxiety. His world changed dramatically in A.D. 410 when the barbarian Alaric entered Rome. This was the beginning of the end for the western half of the Roman Empire. As refugees fled to northern Africa, bringing all manner of ominous reports, Augustine was forced to deal with the issues as many were going so far as to blame the fall of Rome on Christianity. His classic work *The City of God* was written to respond to the crisis. One of my favorite quotes from this book addresses the fearfulness of his readers. He encourages Christians who are surrounded by danger on every side, saying: “Among the daily chances of this life every man on earth is threatened in the same way by innumerable deaths, and it is uncertain which of them will come to him. And so the question is whether it is better to suffer one in dying or to fear them all in living” (1:11). These are the words of one who trusts the sovereignty of God. Augustine knew there was no point in being constantly fearful about all of the dangers surrounding him. He knew God was in control and that not a single hair could fall from his head apart from God’s will.

The world is fearful and anxious, but it is fearful and anxious about the wrong things. The world is fearful about the economy. The world is fearful about retirement accounts. The world is fearful about natural disasters and man-made disasters. The world is fearful of terrorism, and the world is fearful of diseases like the coronavirus. The world, however, is not fearful of God. Jesus tells us that we are not to fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead we are to fear God who can destroy both (Matt. 10:28). The wrath of God makes all other objects of the world’s fears seem like nothing in comparison. A truly fearful thing is to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31).

Those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, however, have nothing to fear from man, or from anything else for that matter. Those who trust Christ have nothing to fear from hurricanes, diseases, economic collapse, war, famine, or even death. All of these things are under the control of our sovereign Father in heaven. Of course, this is easy enough for us to say, but we all too easily take our eyes off of God and dwell on the dangers surrounding us.

Is there anything we can do to fight worldly fear and anxiety? I believe Paul provides one important clue by contrasting fear with prayer. He writes: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6–7). A neglect of prayer almost always results in a corresponding rise in our fear and anxiety. This is no coincidence. Prayer is an act of faith in God, and faith in God leads to the peace of God.