

Phobias



Have you ever noticed how often we use the phrase “I’m afraid?” It’s not a good phrase to use, but I’m afraid we use it a lot. To save you the time, I have compiled a list of things that some people are actually afraid of. I am not making this up. These phobias include: mirrors, pine trees, ships, umbrellas, stubby pencils, Styrofoam, Adam’s apples and the Muppets. The list could go on and on. Why are people afraid of these things you might ask? My answer is simple. With the exception of the Muppets, I don’t know.

When I was about five years old, my dad took me to the state fair in Raleigh, North Carolina, where I saw a double Ferris wheel. That is a Ferris wheel that is perched on top of another Ferris wheel, an idea generated by someone who was not at all afraid of the first Ferris wheel. The people on the lower wheel would spin around and around and then the two

wheels would switch places so that the lower wheel would be on the top. It was breathtaking to watch the transition and difficult to describe how enormous that ride was. The upper wheel seemed to nearly touch the clouds and it frightened me to look at it from the ground. My dad asked me if I wanted to ride it and, of course, I said, emphatically, “No!”

So we rode it. When we were about to reach the top part of the top wheel, my stomach was coming up into my throat. My knuckles were white as I held onto the bar that went across our seat. It was the only safeguard between being alive and plummeting to certain death. I have never been so scared in my life. I wanted off the ride. But then something happened that I will never forget. My Dad, all 240 pounds of him, put his huge arm around me and held me tight just as we crested the top. Suddenly, all the fear left me, and I felt completely secure knowing that my Dad would keep me safe. What seems especially odd is that I was not afraid at the scariest part of the ride. I actually went from being petrified scared to not scared at all.

Although we face many terrors in this life, no matter what kind they may be, God is stronger and able to protect and sustain us. I admit it is easy for me to forget that. Imagine life without fear of anything. God tells us in His Word over

and over again not to fear. The more we believe Him and have faith in His arm around us, the more we can live such a life, because God is trustworthy.

Joshua 1:9 says, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Will you dare to take this word from the Most High into your situation and see what He will do?

I am happy to report that I am no longer afraid of Ferris wheels of any type. I am also not afraid of cheese, clowns, lamps, plastic jugs or ceramic. I’m still a little creeped out by the Muppets, but I’m working on it.

Malcolm



Sixty-year-old Malcolm worked as a cashier at a grocery store. He had a very loud voice no one could miss when walking in the door. He was always joking and laughing and doing everything except taking his job seriously. Malcolm spoke to his customers with the feigned seriousness of a bad actor in a high school play.

“This is gonna be a cash deal!” Malcolm would say. Then he would dramatically count back the change as if the grocery purchase was much larger than it actually was.

I suspect Malcolm was not invited to any of the employee meetings. In fact, I have a feeling that management planned the employee meetings around Malcolm’s day off. He just didn’t fit in. Everyone else was stressed and overly concerned, but Malcolm was carefree and happy; quite frankly, a bit too carefree for comfort.

As a new customer, I started joking around with Malcolm. Several times I brought my groceries up to his register and asked, “Do you take cash?” Sometimes, when I bought a few standard grocery items, I would ask if he needed to see my I.D. A confused look would cross Malcolm’s face. That brought me deep satisfaction. And when he would ask if I wanted the milk in a bag, I would explain that if he poured the milk in a bag it would spill all over the place.

At first, Malcolm had no idea how to take me, but once he realized that I was as crazy as he was, we became good friends.

One day, I saw Malcolm pull up at the post office in a beautiful luxury car. I couldn’t help but wonder how a grocery clerk could drive such an expensive car. “Hey Malcolm,” I said, “You must have gotten a raise at the grocery store!”

“No, I had money before I started working there,” he answered. “My mother-in-law moved in with us and I just took that job to get away from her.”

I laughed out loud. But that helped me to understand why Malcolm was the way he was at work. He didn’t need that job. He wouldn’t have cared if they fired him because he already had everything he needed and was working for a different reason than everyone else was. In fact, Malcolm was

in a different zone: it’s what I call “The Malcolm Zone.” To him, his job was like a game that had already been won.

That is exactly what God is telling us: There is a different zone for us to live in, one where we understand that God has already taken care of everything. It is called the Kingdom of God and it is in our midst. (Luke 17:21) For the children of God, that zone is within us. It seems too good to be true, but God tells us in His word to trust Him, to be of good cheer, not to worry and not to fear. If we really knew that God had already provided everything we need and that He wouldn’t let us down, wouldn’t we laugh more? Wouldn’t we relax and play and enjoy life more? To whatever degree we can put our trust in God, to that degree, we too can live in the Malcolm Zone.

Jesus put it this way in John 16:33 (KJV), “In the world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Safe By A Mule



Traveling by way of mule, my uncle Crate routinely visited his sweetheart Harriett, back in the 1940s. It was quite a distance, but worth every jarring step. One night during the journey, when it was especially dark, the mule suddenly stopped. Uncle Crate didn't know what to do. He yelled "giddy-up" and kicked the mule in the sides. He thought maybe the poor thing had run out of hay. Eventually, the mule turned around and the two of them went back home.

The next day, Uncle Crate went back to the place in question and discovered that the mule had stopped at the edge of a 10-foot drop-off. That's right. The night before, my uncle Crate had been sitting on a mule in the pitch-black darkness at the edge of a cliff, kicking and yelling "giddy up." The mule had much better night vision than any human, which gave him some insight into the situation and left my

uncle sitting in the dark.

It's easy to laugh at Uncle Crate, but we are kind of like that aren't we? I mean, we are all in the dark. We can't see a minute in front of us. If you doubt that, listen to the financial experts on television make predictions about the economy. They are often brilliant people, but they have no idea what is going to happen in the future, as evidenced by the way they all disagree.

The Bible teaches that we don't know what life will be like tomorrow. Instead of saying, "We're going to do this or that," we should say, "If the Lord wills, we will do this or that." What we do know is that God is sovereign and He is at work orchestrating life for our good.

I love Psalm 32:8, which says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you." It gives me a lot of confidence just to know that even though I'm in the dark, I have a heavenly Father who can see what's ahead.

No, we don't know our immediate future, but we do know that God always wins. If you have any doubts about that, just skip to the back of the Bible and you will see how it all plays out. We know that His love for us is pure and that His will for us is, as Romans 12:2 says, "that which is good

and acceptable and perfect."

My Uncle Crate is 86 as of this writing and he is as funny as ever. He is, however, very feeble and barely gets around because, as he puts it, he has a case of the 86s.