

Youtube: Mutant Giant Spider Dog (SA Wardega)

Okay, if you have a fear of giant spiders, or a fear of little dogs, or a fear of little dogs dressed up like giant spiders, then I'm sorry about that. That probably wasn't the way you expected to start your Sunday morning – but I just couldn't resist.

There is a lot of fear in our world today, fear has been mentioned often in conversations with others, and many people seem to live in fear of something – which can impact their ability to function normally in life. Now we know that some fear is completely understandable and rational – in other words, sometimes there is a good rational reason to be fearful. For example, the fear of a rattle snake is rational – that's a healthy fear, and it serves a legitimate purpose to deal with a potential danger. But there are other fears out there that people deal with which are completely irrational, they are unhealthy, they have no basis in reality, nor do they serve a purpose. These irrational fears are called phobias.

For example, some people have a fear of creepy crawling things or in Trish's case, the crunch of creepy crawling things – *and that's my fault, I have to own that.* Some are terrified of clowns. Some are afraid of the dark. The list of these irrational fears or phobias are endless, and I found a few that were interesting.

Topping the list of my favorite phobias is Chorophobia, which is the fear of dancing. So, that's my problem! My inability to dance has absolutely nothing to do with my lack of coordination or my lack of rhythm. I can't dance because I have a fear of dancing – I got the phobia.

*Gamophobia is the fear of marriage. That could be a creative way to get out of a sticky situation in the future. It's not your inability to commit – oh no, you just have Gamophobia. “Sorry dear – it's really not you, it's me – you see I have this phobia and I can't commit to marrying you. **Can we just be friends?**”*

Politophobia, is the fear of politics, and it can encompass the political process, the politicians, choosing a candidate, casting a vote, and fear of the results. Boy, this has become a pandemic.

But my favorite and the most difficult to pronounce is Arachibutyrophobia (arack-a-beauty-ro-) which is the fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth.

Now, we might think these phobias are a little silly, but there are people with these fears whose experience is so overwhelming, and nerve-wracking, and stressful, and anxious that they may go to great lengths to avoid or escape the thing or the situation that is causing their irrational fear – to the point that they can no longer live a normal functional life.

We on the other hand, are a people of faith – we are a people who walk by faith, we know it is faith that pleases God, but God also knows that we are a people who are prone to fear. He knows this about us.

Most of us face, or will face some type of fear sooner or later, which may explain why one of the most frequent commands in the Bible is “**fear not**”, “**be not afraid**”, “**do not be anxious**”, and the Bible speaks on this topic of fear hundreds of times.

For example, in the Old Testament we read in **Psalm 56:3-4**,

When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?

In the New Testament, after Jesus told His disciples He would be leaving them shortly, He said this in **John 14:27**:

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

Jesus knew, that even as believers; even as people of faith, we are still prone to fear. Consider this. We are told in **Hebrews 11:1**,

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

So, based on this passage from Hebrews, we could say a simple definition of faith might be “*the belief that something you cannot see is going to happen in the future.*” That sounds about right. **So then, how might we define fear?** Well, if you think about it, a simple definition of fear might also be “*the belief that something you cannot see is going to happen in the future.*” The definitions could be the same – opposite sides of the same coin – for in both there is an expectation – there is a belief that something either good or bad is going to happen in the future. With faith, we confidently hope for a positive outcome, we believe something good is going to happen, but with fear, we expect a negative outcome, we believe something bad is going to happen.

I bring all of this up because I know something that terrifies most believers – people of faith, and sends them running in fear believing something bad is going to happen – they anticipate, they expect the very worst will occur.

If I were to ask most believers to share their faith, I might as well ask them to face that giant mutant spider dog

This morning we are beginning a sermon series about sharing our faith, which naturally comes off the heels of our sermon series through the book of Jonah. The story of Jonah serves as a good springboard for this topic because in that story we saw that God clearly has a heart for people who do not know Him. His ministry is a ministry of reconciliation – seeking and saving the lost – reconciling sinners unto Himself, and because He cares about it, we should care about it as well. We should care about what God cares about.

And I think most of us would agree that our faith in Christ is supposed to be shared with others. Someone once said that sharing one's faith is like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. I like that. The reason we can call ourselves Christians today is because someone shared their faith with us – someone told us beggars where to find bread. This is how God has included us into His ministry of reconciliation. Christianity has grown because someone told someone else who told someone else, and so on and so on. This is how the Christian faith has spread all over the world, from the early church until today, and this practice of sharing one's faith should include you and me as well. We too have a part to play.

Now before we venture any further, I want you to relax – there is no need to get all worked up – and no, we are not leaving here after the service to go blindly knocking on doors. So, just relax and breathe! My goal for this morning is to try to take some of the fear and the anxiety out of sharing our faith – where you can just be yourself and share in a way that is normal and natural to you. So, relax.

I want to read a familiar passage to you. Turn with me to **Acts 8:25-35**.

²⁵ So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

²⁶ But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." ³⁰ Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:

**“He was led as a sheep to slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He does not open His mouth.**

³³ **“In humiliation His judgment was taken away;**

Who will relate His generation?

For His life is removed from the earth.”

³⁴ **The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?”** ³⁵ **Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.**

Philip, one of the first deacons, was actively involved in this huge area-wide evangelism campaign, where God was working and things were hopping, and it must have been exciting for Philip to be speaking to all these people about Jesus. Then an angel of the Lord told Philip to leave all the excitement and head out on a lonely seldom used desert road in the middle of nowhere. That must have been tough for Philip – I mean *“Lord, things are awesome here, I’m in the middle of this great work, I’m on the front-line, people are being saved, why me, why now?”* But Philip obeys, not knowing that God had a plan, and out on the road, Philip crosses paths with this Ethiopian and overheard him reading from **Isaiah 53**.

So, Philip, this seasoned evangelist, pulled out his script and began a step by step systematic presentation of the gospel. **Is that what he did?** No, that’s not what he did. Philip simply made a connection with this complete stranger in a natural way – *“Hey, what you are reading?”* And it went from there. Philip didn’t give a complicated canned presentation – rather he just started a simple and natural conversation with this man which moved into a discussion about Jesus.

But there is something else I want to point out before we move on. This Ethiopian had just made a very long journey to Jerusalem – some 1600 miles. After making this long journey, it is safe to assume that he probably stayed in Jerusalem for a period of time before making his return trip back to Ethiopia. **So, why didn’t the Lord direct one of the original disciples in Jerusalem to share the gospel with him there?** This Ethiopian could have received a crash course in the life and ministry of Jesus and be discipled by a church leader like Peter before he left Jerusalem. Instead, what we see here is one man crossing paths with another and a simple connection was made – *“Hey, what you are reading?”* That was God’s plan.

Maybe the first thing to do when it comes to sharing our faith is this: Instead of figuring out the approach, instead of determining the right words to say, instead of working ourselves up in a fearful frenzy – maybe we just need to make simple connections, have normal conversations, and create relationships with people.

Maybe we just need to get to know our neighbor. Maybe we just talk to someone at work or chat with the clerk in the checkout line we don't know that well. Just talk to people, just make simple connections the way you already do it. That's a start and it can be a very effective start.

Several weeks ago, I mentioned that people go through storms in life, and they may be far from God. They may not come to a church service, they don't want to hear a sermon from a preacher, they don't want a lecture – but they may welcome your prayer for them. I challenged you, the next time you heard of someone – anyone having a difficult time, Christian or not, why not ask them: “Can I pray for you?”

Joanne accepted the challenge. One of the residents at the care facility she works at was having a hard time and he was in need of prayer, but there was a significant problem. This man was very difficult to deal with. He was cantankerous old man, loud and obnoxious, verbally abusive to others, and Joanne was fearful about approaching him. She was fearful about how he would react to her if she asked, “Can I pray for you?” But the Lord had laid it on her heart to do this, so she worked up the nerve, pushed aside her fear, and when the opportunity presented itself, she asked this man if she could pray for him in his difficult time. She did not expect what happened next. Instead of being rejected, and put down, and verbally abused by this man – he cried like a baby because someone was willing to pray for him.

Now he is still a cantankerous old man according to Joanne, but who knows where this may lead in the future? Who knows the conversations that will occur as a result of a simple connection from a simple question, “Can I pray for you?” or in the case of Philip, “Hey, what are you reading?”

Now some of you might be saying to yourself, “Well, I just don't like speaking.” I hear you, but you and I both know that's not entirely accurate.

We will talk about and even start conversations about kids, sports, the weather, a TV show, politics, vacations, and any else under the sun – heck, we can talk all day about people we don't like without the slightest hint of having any problem with speaking.

And if the truth be told, whenever we come upon something we consider interesting or important to us, we will go out of our way to tell someone about it – that's what we do – but for some reason we get tongue-tied, and tight-lipped, and anxious when it comes to sharing good news to people really who need to hear it – people who are often times dealing with their own bad news.

So, if speaking really isn't the problem – and it really isn't the problem, **then what are we afraid of when it comes to sharing our faith?** Most likely, it's a fear of rejection – you know being shot down, it could be a fear of not knowing what to say, or it could be a fear of failure – and these fears are often tied together.

The number one reason that Christians give for not sharing their faith is the fear of rejection. I can understand that. We all want to be liked, we want to be accepted, we don't want to be unpopular, and no one wants to come across as being weird, but in all honesty, we can't control what other people think.

Case in point: Jesus was perfect, He loved everyone perfectly, He made no mistakes, and still He was rejected.

*I was thinking about a Dallas Cowboy sports fan who walks into the Seattle Seahawks stadium, proudly wearing his Dallas Cowboy hat and his Dallas Cowboy jersey. He's got a big smile on his face and willing to share with anyone who will listen as to why he is a Dallas Cowboy fan. **How does he do it?** His passion for his team outweighs his fear of being unpopular. He knows he will be unpopular in Seattle, but he just loves his Dallas Cowboys too much to get lost in the crowd or to keep silent.*

I want to share something with you: People who don't know Jesus are more *amazed* at our silence than *offended* at our message. They are amazed that we believe Jesus is the answer but are unwilling to say anything about Him.

I have shared the gospel hundreds of times, and I can only recall on one occasion where a person was downright hostile to the gospel. Only one occasion. People are spiritual, not necessarily biblical, but they are spiritual and for the most part, they are willing to talk and listen. And if Jesus is the most important person in our lives, these people are surprised that we don't talk about Him more.

Another fear is not knowing what to say. I want to mention a couple of things about this. First, and this should be comforting – we won't have an answer for every question that an unbeliever may have. We can only share what we know and what God gives us, but with that said, believers should strive to be more fluent with the gospel. We need to see how the gospel is connected to every area of our lives, and once we see the connection – then we can then weave in and out a conversation naturally. We will talk about this more in a later message.

Jesus told His disciples in **Luke 12:11-12**,

“When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense,

or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

When we step out in faith to share, the Holy Spirit partners with us to help us. I have experienced this more times than I can count. I recall an occasion, I was talking with a man in Vancouver who was getting a little testy with me and I thought our conversation was going absolutely nowhere, but before I knew it – the man I was talking to wanted to pray to receive Jesus as his Savior and Lord. And for the life of me, I couldn't even explain how we got to that point. I don't have a clue – it was a God thing. We are never alone when it comes to sharing our faith. We have an awesome partner.

What about the fear of failure? The answer to this starts with an understanding of what God does and what we do. It is God who convicts of sin. It is God who draws the lost unto Himself. It is God who sent His Son to die for a lost and dying world. It is God who gives faith. It is God who saves.

Here is the truth about the fear of failure when it comes to sharing your faith – your success is not based on the response of the lost person – this is not sales – we are not closing a deal. It is not our job to save people, God does that work – the results are His – not ours. Our success is simply in the sharing. That's it. That's what we do.

So, how can we learn to overcome our fear?

Let's circle back to that simple definition I used for both faith and fear – that being *“the belief that something you cannot see is going to happen in the future.”* Again, with both faith and fear there is an expectation – there is a belief that something either good or bad is going to happen in the future. The definitions could be the same, but the anticipated outcomes are different – **but why?**

Well, the basis for our fear, especially irrational fear, tends to be a past bad experience – you know, *“I tried it before and it didn't work out that well.”* Fear could be driven by our faulty beliefs, or a perceived threat – whether real or not – and as a result, we anticipate something bad is going to happen.

Now, let's consider the basis for our faith. For faith, the basis – the object of our faith is God. Our faith comes from knowing God, knowing that He is good, knowing that He is involved in every aspect of our lives – and like Philip experienced, knowing that God actually has a plan that applies to you and me as individuals. God is the object of our faith, and it is this faith in God that overwhelms our fear.

Ultimately, the basis for your faith or your fear hinges on one very pointed question: **Do you trust God enough to take you where you are afraid to go?** If the answer is “yes”, then you can faithfully face whatever life has to offer you – to include the sharing of your faith. **Do you trust Him?**

If the answer is anything but “yes”, if you are having a difficult time trusting God in this area, then you will unfortunately live in fear – overwhelmed by your circumstances and the potential threats – whether they are real or imagined, and you will be hindered from stepping out and moving forward.

So, I want to challenge you to do a couple of things this week. First, I want to give you a prayer, and I challenge you every day to incorporate this into your own daily prayer life. It goes like this:

God, give me this day (just today), an opportunity to share Christ, the wisdom to see it, and the courage to take it.

And secondly, ask God to show you one thing that terrifies you about sharing your faith.

Source Material:

Holman Old Testament Commentary – Max Anders
Sharing Jesus Without Freaking Out – Alvin L. Reid
Fearless – Andy Stanley
How to Overcome Being a Chicken When it Comes to Sharing Your Faith – Peter Guirguis
Exposition Commentary – Warren Wiersbe
The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck
Enduring Word – David Guzik