

## "What does the Bible mean when it tells us not to fear?"

**Answer:** The Bible's commands to "fear not" are plentiful and occur in a variety of contexts. As God's people, we are not to be fearful. We have no reason to live in fear.

The Bible often says things like, "Do not fear," "Do not be afraid," and "Fear not." Of course, these commands do not contradict the command to "fear God" (1 Peter 2:17). The fear of God keeps us *from* sin; the fear of man leads *to* sin, and that is what we are to avoid: "The fear of man brings a snare" (Proverbs 29:25, NKJV). Also, the biblical command *do not fear* does not negate the need for prudence and caution in this world. We are not to be cavalier but prayerful in the face of danger.

The fear that the Bible tells us to avoid is concern mixed with anxiety or dread; it is the feeling of alarm we have when we expect trouble or danger. Followers of Christ are not to live in a state of anxiety. We have higher expectations than simply anticipating trouble. In fact, we have the means to rise above fear: "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7, ESV).

God's command to "fear not" is applied in several ways in the Bible. For example, the fear of what other people think should never prevent us from obeying the Lord (see 1 Samuel 15:24; John 9:22). We should not fear lacking provision in this world (Luke 12:6–7). We are not to fear the plans of the wicked, even when they rise to power (Psalm 37:1–2, 9–17, 35–38).

When the Bible tells us, "Do not fear," it means we are not to allow anxiety or fretfulness to rule our lives or take root in our hearts. We are not to be people of panic. We are to be people of faith.

Having been justified by God, we need not fear divine condemnation (Romans 8:1). Having been chosen by God, we need not fear His rejection (Ephesians 1:4–6; Luke 12:32; Jude 1:24). With Christ as our Shepherd, we need not fear the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4). With the Maker of heaven and earth watching over us, we need not fear anything (Psalm 121).

Psalm 91 speaks of the one who "dwells in the shelter of the Most High" and who says of God, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust" (verses 1–2). Those who trust in God can live fearlessly: "You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you" (verses 5–7). There is a direct correlation between faith and the confidence to face the dangers of life: "If you say, 'The Lord is my refuge,' and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent" (verses 9–10). We rest in God's promise: "'Because he loves me,' says the Lord, 'I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble'" (verses 14–15).

Matthew's account of the resurrection of Christ presents two very different results of that miracle. When the angel descended to the tomb and rolled the stone away, "the guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint" (Matthew 28:4, NLT). The angel let them lie there. But later, the angel spoke to the women who visited the tomb: "Don't be afraid! . . . I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead" (verses 5–6, NLT). With one group, God takes away their fear; with the other group, He allows fear to overwhelm them. The difference was one of belief versus unbelief.