

The Right Kind of Fear

Luke 12:1-12

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If you ask people what they are afraid of, you'll hear a lot of the same answers. "Heights," "the dark," and "public speaking" will be some of the most common. But Stephen Davey helps us understand that there are only two categories of fear that matter, and they have a lot more to do with who we are than what we are afraid of. Those two categories are "saved" and "unsaved," and the right kind of fear will look drastically different for these two groups.

Do a word search online for the key word "fear," or "being afraid" and you will get millions of results. Many of the results rehearse information for what we might call unfounded fear, or fear of things that never happen.

For instance, many people are afraid of heights; in fact, that was the second most reported fear, but someone's chance of falling from some height is 1 out of 65,000, while the same person's chance of having their identity stolen is 1 out of 200.

The fear of flying on a plane is another example. Your chance of being in a plane accident are 1 out of 13 million—and 98 percent of those accidents do not result in fatalities; however, your chance of being struck by lightning is 1 out of 2 million and it's typically fatal.

Your fear of being bitten by a dog is pretty realistic, your chance of being hurt by a dog is 1 out of 137,000; but your chance of being hurt while mowing the lawn is 1 out of 3,000.

Louthian Law Firm, www.louthianlaw.com/avoiding-injury-2014

The truth is, we're living in a world of fear and anxiety. Everything from the fear of accidents to the fear of the unknown.

But fear isn't necessarily a bad thing. You teach your young child to fear playing in the street or touching a hot stove.

Jesus Christ is about to teach His audience to be afraid of certain actions and perspectives. In fact, the word fear shows up five times in the next few verses, here in Luke's Gospel and chapter 12, where I invite your attention today.

As we go through these opening 12 verses in Luke chapter 12, I want to organize our study around the kinds of fear that Jesus is endorsing—encouraging—we could call these justifiable fears, and here's the first one in principle form:

We need to be afraid of living a lie.

Verse 1:

In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops."

Luke 12:1-3

As we learned in our last study, a meal had convened at a Pharisees home where the Lord ended up exposing their hypocrisy.

That meal had broken up and Jesus had walked out. And now the multitude mentioned back in **chapter 11 and verse 29** has suddenly turned into a mob so thick they're stepping on one another.

Adapted from R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), p. 671

Luke uses the word *urias* (μυριας) which gives us our word "myriad," which means ten thousand.

Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 318

In fact, it can be used for a crowd impossible to accurately count.

They are jammed in every street around this house, they are packed into every alley, waiting for Him to appear.

And Jesus walks out the door and immediately is confronted by this massive crowd, and He says, primarily to His disciples but loud enough for the crowd to hear: *You need to beware of the kind of hypocrisy I've just encountered. The hypocrisy of those Pharisees in there is like leaven.*

Everyone would have immediately understood this analogy.

Leaven is yeast. Yeast had become the symbol of the permeating power of sin. The Jewish people were to remove all yeast from their homes during the Passover festival; they were to eat unleavened bread for seven days.

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1 (Zondervan, 2002), p. 426

The apostle Paul referred to the leaven of wickedness in **1 Corinthians 5:8**.

And here's the fearful thing about Jesus' analogy: hypocrisy isn't always loud and crass and obvious. Like yeast, or leaven, it works silently and invisibly.

Adapted from Warren Wiersbe, Be Compassionate (Victor Books, 1988), p. 135

Adapted from Dale Ralph Davis, Luke (Christian Focus, 2021), p. 215

Everybody in Jesus's audience knew that if a baker wanted their loaf of bread to be airy and fluffy, they inserted a lump of leavened dough from a previous batch into the fresh dough. Then, before baking, they set the fresh dough aside in a dark, cool place, where the yeast bacteria would spread and multiply, until it permeated the entire batch.

Adapted from Swindoll, p. 319

Hypocrisy does to a person what yeast does to bread dough—it puffs us up.

Adapted from Wiersbe, p. 135

The yeast of sin, if it isn't checked, will permeate someone's entire way of thinking and living.

This is the creeping, corrupting bacteria of hypocrisy—subtle, silent, deadly.

A hypocrite can reach a point where they complain about the hypocrisy of others without realizing they are describing themselves.

How many of you have had somebody say to you, "I'm not going to church anymore because it's full of hypocrites."

Someone from the church sent me this sometime ago, the title reads, "Reasons why I'm not going to a ball game anymore."

1. The coach never came up to meet me.
2. Every time I went, they asked for money.
3. The people sitting in my row weren't very friendly.
4. The temperature was either too hot or too cold.

5. The referees always made decisions I didn't agree with.
6. Some games went into overtime and I got home late.
7. The marching band played songs I'd never heard before.
8. My parents took me to too many games when I was a growing up.
9. I always ended up sitting near hypocrites who only come to the game to watch other people.

I'm not going to go to church because there are hypocrites there. Well, I'm not going to go to a ballgame for the same reason.

By the way, when someone says to you, "I'm not going to church because it's full of hypocrites," tell them, "Come to ours! We've got room for one more."

I think I just said we're all a bunch of hypocrites!

Well, the truth is Jesus would not have warned His disciples of the danger of hypocrisy if it wasn't a potential reality. And it is for us today, as well.

We need to be afraid of living a lie.

Secondly:

We need to be afraid of forgetting the future.

Verse 4:

"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear; fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!"

Luke 12:4-5

Jesus knew that His disciples would face martyrdom. Almost all the original twelve were indeed martyred—sawn in two, speared, beheaded, crucified.

Many more of those who chose to follow Christ would lose everything they had. Let me put it this way: there were a lot of good reasons to be afraid of following Christ.

But Jesus says here, you're fearing the wrong thing. Don't forget about life beyond the grave. Don't forget your future.

The worst someone can do to you will only last a brief lifetime; and if they take your life that's as far as they can go.

But God has the authority not only take your life but determine your eternal destiny. **Verse 5 says** He has the authority to cast you into hell.

The original word here is Gehenna, the term translated hell, because it was the term used most often for hell.

Gehenna was a valley just outside the southwest wall of the city of Jerusalem. At one point in history, it was a beautiful garden of the kings. But then as Israel drifted into idolatry, the valley became notorious a place where Judah practiced child sacrifice to the god Baal-Molech.

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Commentary, p. 426

Years later it was turned into the town dump where rubbish and trash were continually burned (Jeremiah 19). The Lord Jesus often related the future torment of hell to the burning stench of Gehenna.

So, Jesus says here, ***“Fear Him who has the authority to cast you into hell.”***

By the way, the person with the authority to cast someone into hell isn't the devil. We know from Scripture that the devil isn't throwing people in there, he will be thrown in there

The devil will be hell's most notorious prisoner.

John MacArthur, [Luke: Volume 2](#) (Moody Publishers, 2013), p. 118

Satan is not the warden of hell, he is its chief inmate, and like all others who've rejected God, there will be no pardon and there will be no parole.

This text warns of the terror and reality of a future hell. By the way, if an unbeliever dies and simply no longer exists, then God is no more capable of doing to them any more harm than mankind can do.

But the opposite is the truth. Mankind can do their worst, but they cannot reach beyond the grave; God can reach beyond the grave and He will.

So, fear God—be in awe of Him—as you consider your future destiny.

He knows who you are.

But then at that thought, Jesus suddenly shifts His focus to the believing disciples and says, *Now, don't be afraid.*

Verse 6:

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. ... Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Luke 12:6-7

Sparrows were the cheapest food purchased in the marketplace in these days. They were considered the boniest, cheapest meat you could buy. They were considered almost worthless in value.

Adapted from Swindoll, p. 321

Taken in context, the Lord is telling those who were His disciples that no matter how worthless they might think they were to God, they were not.

How many disciples through the ages have thought, “There’s no reason God would remember me; surely He’s forgotten all about me.”

No matter how worthless a follower of Christ might feel at times, there is no way they are going to slip out of God’s omniscient sovereign hand and somehow end up in hell.

*No, Jesus says, **Fear not!** God will never forget you; He will never lose sight of you. You are of great value to Him because you belonged to Me, His Son, your Savior.*

Jesus gives us another analogy of God’s omniscient—that means, all-knowing—awareness and care for us. Back up into **verse 6 again**:

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered.”

Luke 12:6-7a

The word for numbered is *arithmeo* (αριθμεω), which gives us our word “arithmetic.”

Imagine that kind of comprehensive knowledge. At any given moment, God has done the arithmetic on your head of hair. For some of us it’s not a long equation!

The point Jesus is making is that if God knows that kind of detail about your hair, He knows everything about who you are.

And Jesus wants the comprehensive knowledge of God concerning everything about you to encourage you.

Fear God; fear this omniscient, Creator God.

For the unbeliever, to fear God means to run from Him; to avoid Him; to dislike Him; to be terrified of the thought of Him.

But for the believer, to fear God doesn't mean to run away from Him, it means to stand in awe of Him; to love Him; to reverence Him; to worship Him.

So, we need to be afraid of living a lie. For the unbeliever, it will one day end with total exposure before God; for the believer this is a warning against the secret corrupting influence of hypocrisy that will ruin our testimony and joy.

Secondly, we need to be afraid of forgetting the future. For the unbeliever, they don't want to think about the future, but it will catch up to them in the end; for the believer, forgetting our future will distract us and discourage us; we'll focus only on the troubles of life and forget the glory of our eternal future.

And now thirdly:

We need to be afraid of caving in to culture.

Luke writes in verse 8:

“And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.”

Luke 12:8-9

What does Jesus mean?

Well, I've heard a few sermons in my day that said that what this means is if you don't give your testimony when you ought to, or if you don't speak up for Christ when you should've, and if you fail at some point or lose your nerve to align with Him, then you're not a Christian and Jesus will reject you one day and you'll not get into heaven after all.

This interpretation has certainly scared a lot of Christians into the work of evangelism. But that isn't what He means.

In fact, it can't be what he means, because Peter and most of the rest of the disciples are going to deny the Lord and run away from Him instead of defending Him.

The word Jesus uses here for **acknowledging** Him is the same word for confessing Him. The word means “to say the same thing.”

Swindoll, p. 321

In other words, it means saying the same thing about Jesus that Jesus says about Himself.

In fact, Jesus uses the messianic term from the prophecy of Daniel here in **verse 8** when He refers to Himself as **the Son of Man**.

In other words, if you deny that Jesus is the Messiah—if you cave in to the culture around you and come to the conclusion that Jesus is just another prophet, that Jesus was just a good teacher, or, as one man told me recently, Jesus was just another Rabbi; and you deny that Jesus is God the Son, the anointed Messiah, who came to die for your sins, save you from hell and take you to heaven—you deny *that* and Jesus will deny you.

Jesus isn't talking about losing your nerve; He's talking about a definitive repudiation of who Jesus is.

Davis, p. 218

This is tantamount to blaspheming the Holy Spirit. **Notice further here in verse 10:**

“And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.”

Luke 12:10

This sin can't be forgiven simply because this person doesn't want to be forgiven. He's closed his heart and mind and ears and eyes to the truth of the gospel and the convicting voice of God's Spirit.

Speaking against Jesus can be forgiven if you ask Him; but speaking against the Spirit carries the implication of life-long rebellion. Rebellion that never turns into repentance.

This person is committing the unpardonable sin only because he doesn't want to be pardoned.

They reject the Holy Spirit's convicting word of truth regarding sin and the Savior.

And someone who dies in that condition will not be pardoned.

But listen church, be careful to draw the verdict on anyone's life to whom you're witnessing.

A single act of blasphemy, or rejection, or even years of blasphemy—a reputation of blasphemy—doesn't doom someone as hopeless; as long as they're alive, there is the possibility that they will be brought to repentance and faith.

We know that's possible because one of the most antagonistic blasphemers of the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the early church was none other than the apostle Paul who described himself in **1 Timothy** by saying, ***“I was once a blasphemer.”***

Adapted from Swindoll, p 322

The same word Jesus uses here in Luke's Gospel.

“I was once a blasphemer, persecutor, a violent aggressor, but I received mercy.”

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is simply rejecting who Christ is, rejecting the gospel. And that cannot be forgiven, not because it's a worse sin than others; it will not be forgiven if that person does not ask to be forgiven.

But even today, if you're an unbeliever, and your conscience is troubled and you're wondering if it's too late for you to believe, my answer would be, “It isn't too late *because* your conscience is troubled; Satan would never trouble anyone's conscience to believe the gospel. That “troubling” is the ministry of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus here seems to be warning and inviting this unbelieving mob to believe in Him as their Messiah.

Now Jesus seems to speak more specifically to His disciples, here in **verse 11, notice**:

“And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

Luke 12:11-12

By the way, this is not a verse that you can claim in order to refuse to prepare; this isn't for Bible group leaders and Sunday school teachers and small group leaders and pastors to say, “Well, I'm not going to worry about studying because the Holy Spirit will teach me when I stand up what I'm supposed to say.” That's not what Jesus means.

I would agree with one author who said that the Bible teacher or preacher who doesn't know what he's going to say five minutes before he gets up to speak, well, most people won't remember what he said five minutes after he sits down.

Adapted from John Phillips, [Exploring the Gospel of Luke](#) (Kregel, 2005), p. 180

The Lord is referring here to those sudden moments in life when you're not expecting it; when you're put on the spot with a question from someone at work or school, but suddenly, there it is, you're summoned to answer.

You haven't had time to prepare anything eloquent, you simply speak the truth you already know, from your heart and testimony, and leave the rest to God.

Well, the Lord has addressed a number of fears and warnings about what we should fear: living a lie—allowing the hidden growth of hypocrisy; forgetting the future—living only for today and focusing only on the troubles of the day; caving into culture—that might even

mean softening the hard realities of the gospel that Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father.

Embedded in these warnings are some wonderful encouragements for the Lord's disciples to this day.

These are what we need never fear—let me draw out two of them:

First, don't be afraid of getting lost in the crowd.

If God knows about every sparrow out there—Jesus says, “Not one of them is forgotten by God,”—he knows all about them and He knows all about you.

Remember, He has your hair counted, and I've read that we lose around 75 hairs a day. That explains it!

Some of you are watching your hair turn gray, some of you are watching it turn loose, but imagine: God is keeping a running count.

If God knows that kind of minutia about you—the point is—He knows everything about you; He knows where you are right now and He's committed to shepherding you along the way.

You will never get lost in the crowd.

Adapted from William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 161

Secondly, don't be afraid of facing difficult times alone.

The Holy Spirit is there with you in that courtroom scene where you're summoned to speak; that sudden and unexpected moment of pressure, or problem, or pain.

What we could call those unscripted moments when you haven't had time to prepare for that moment in life.

We call those “spontaneous events”; you're responding “off the cuff,” you're “winging it with only a prayer.”

Here's the promise: you're not winging it; you are walking through it with God's Spirit.

You will never face difficult times alone. And you will never get lost in the crowd.

You can trust your Shepherd's presence and His wisdom and His guidance.

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