

# Conquering Fear

by Chuck Smith

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*The sermon 'Conquering Fear' explains how the presence of God can dispel fear and anxiety, and how the Christian life is one of overflowing joy and service.*

**Duration:** 28:20

**Scripture:** Psalm 23:1, Psalm 23:4-6

**Topics:** "Gods Presence", "Overcoming Fear"

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## Description

This sermon focuses on the comforting and reassuring message found in Psalms 23, highlighting the imagery of God as a shepherd, guide, and host in our lives. It explores the themes of fear, God's presence dispelling fear, and the hope of eternal life with God. The speaker delves into the deep symbolism of each verse, emphasizing the abundant provision, guidance, and protection that God offers to His people.

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## Transcript

This morning, we'd like to draw your attention to none other than Psalm 23. Probably many of you memorized this when you were a child growing up. I know that I did.

And it is probably one of the most familiar passages of scripture. It is one that is a favorite for so many people. And as we study it today, I think you'll discover why so many people find strength, solace, comfort, and just love this Psalm 23.

David, this shepherd boy, writing this Psalm as he was thinking about his task of watching over these unruly sheep. And that one verse, "Yea, though I walk through the valley "of the shadow of death, "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." The cure for fear, the consciousness of God's presence with us. I was looking this week through Google, and I Googled up the word phobia, the fear.

And I discovered that there are actually 615 different phobias that people have. And there is even a phobophobia, which is the fear of fear. And people who are afraid of being afraid.

And it sort of shows you just how a person can be gripped with so many different fears. There is a fear that is known as thanatophobia, and that is the fear of death. And that is a very common fear with many people, this fear of death.

There are many people that talk bravely about death until they face it, and then it seems to be a different story. I read of this fellow that was walking along, carrying this heavy, heavy load on his shoulder. And he

became so weary, as he came to the curb, he just sat down, laid his burden beside him, and he just said, "Oh, death, please come.

"Please come, death." And death tapped him on the shoulder, and he said, "'Did you call?' And he said, "'Yes, would you mind helping me "'get this load back up on my shoulder "'so I can keep going?' And, you know, sometimes we talk very bravely about death until we face it, and then it becomes an entirely different story. Years ago, when I was in sixth grade, they had a special class, and this teacher came in to teach us, and she taught us the poem of Invictus by William Hensley. Now, even in sixth grade, I was actually still serving the Lord at that time, as just a child.

I grew up in church. I think my first service was when I was two weeks old. I was sleeping on the pew next to my parents, but it's just something that's been there all my life.

And in sixth grade, when this teacher was teaching this poem, Invictus, I found myself rebelling against it, and so I began to make a lot of noise and just disturb the class so that the teacher had a hard time teaching this poem because of my disturbance. When I went back to my regular class, this teacher that had come in had reported to my actual teacher my disturbance of the class, and so he talked to me about it and said, you know, I've never had any problems with you. How is it that you so misbehaved in that class? And I told him, well, I just didn't want the kids to hear the junk that they were teaching this poem, Invictus.

I rebelled against it, even as a sixth grader. It just, it didn't add up. Out of the night that covers me, black as the pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods there be for my unconquerable soul.

In the clutch, the fell clutch of circumstance, I have not winced nor cried aloud. Under the bludgeonings of chance, my head is bloody but unbound. Beyond this place of wrath and tears looms but the horror of the shade.

And yet, the menace of the years finds me and shall find me unafraid. It matters not how straight the gate, how charged the punishment the scrolls. I am captain of my fate, and I am the master of my soul.

Did it ring with me? I had submitted my life to Jesus Christ, didn't consider myself the captain of my fate nor the master of my soul. But it sounds very brave. And people were drawn to this poem, Invictus.

Someone has noticed that there are many people who die a thousand deaths as they are fearing one. In this Psalm, which is commonly called the Shepherd Psalm, David sees God as a shepherd. But more than that, he also sees him as his guide and ultimately as his host.

David, as a youth watching his father's sheep was very familiar with the needs of the sheep. He knew that they had no real defensive weapons. They had to trust in the shepherd to watch and to defend them and their dependency upon the shepherd.

And so he knew also that sheep had no homing device. All they had to do is to get over the knoll of a hill and they would be lost. They had no sense of direction.

And if they are out of sight of the shepherd or the rest of the flock, they start bowing because they have no homing instincts in sheep. They're just pretty dumb animals and they really can't survive on their own. They are depending upon the shepherds to lead them to the pastures, to lead them to the watering holes and so forth.

In fact, they need a shepherd in order to survive. And David, in observing this as a shepherd boy, realizing how they were dependent upon him, he declared, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. I shall not want for comfort or rest because he makes me to lie down in green pastures.

I shall not want for nourishment because he restores my soul. There are others who are stronger than I am and they may want, but because the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. David wrote in a few Psalms further in Psalm 34, the young lions do lack and they suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want for any good thing.

Others who are wiser than I may want, others who are stronger than I may want, but because the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. As a shepherd, he is my guide. And so he takes us into the next trophy of the Psalm as he sees the Lord as his guide.

He is leading me. He leads me beside the still waters, not pools of rushing water, not by the rivers of rushing water because the sheep have no sense. They can't swim and they'll just walk right into the water and be carried away.

And if one does, the rest will follow and all of them be carried down the swift currents. And so the shepherd knows that he has to lead them by the pools where there is no rushing water, but just where they can get their refreshment at the pools. So he leads me beside the still waters, the pools, and he leads me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake.

Which way shall I take? Cries a voice in the night. I'm a pilgrim, a weary and spent is my light. To the right, to the left, on me if I knew.

But the night is so dark and the travelers so few. And so many times we come to that place where we just stand at the crossroads and we don't know which way we should take. And like that weary pilgrim calling out for help, it's so dark, I can't see beyond the juncture here.

Which way should I take? Cries this voice in the night. But when you get to those places of life where you don't know, what should I do? Which way should I go? Which path should I take? How wonderful it is to know that he will lead me in the right path. The path of righteousness for his name's sake.

He leads me through the path of life and thus I can follow him with great confidence because I know that he's gonna lead me in the right path. He goes before me, preparing the way before me. Moses, in writing in Deuteronomy, said that the Lord who went before you to search for you the place for you to pitch your tents and in the fire by night and in the cloud by day to show you which way you should go.

So through that 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the Lord going before them. The Lord preparing, it says, the place for them to pitch their tents. Interesting as they were journeying through the wilderness, the Lord leading them with the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

As they would come to an area and they would say, well, this looks like a great place for us to just bed down and we can spend some time here. And it was just the Lord had gone before them. He had prepared the place for them to pitch their tents.

And it's interesting as we go through life, we don't come into any place in life, but what the Lord has not preceded us there and prepared that place for us to pitch our tents. As he goes before us, he prepares us for the way and for the place that he has already prepared for us. So as the Lord really is behind us, he is

before us and his hand is upon us as David acknowledges in Psalm 139, where he said, you have beset me behind and before and you have laid your hand upon me.

And so with the Lord, he is behind us, he is before us and his hand is upon us. What a wonderful thing. One day as the Lord is leading me in the path of life for his name's sake, my path is gonna take a dip down into the valley that is called the valley of the shadow of death.

None of us can escape that. None of us can escape death. Ultimately, as we are passing through life, ultimately, we're gonna be brought into that valley of the shadow of death, you can't escape it.

But I noticed a few things about David talking about passing into the valley of the shadow of death. He speaks of, he said, yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. You know, you might be running through life and it might be that you're in a hurry every time we see you you're rushing off this place or that.

But when you get to that valley, when your path turns into that valley, you slow down, you get your cane and you know, you're not going so fast anymore because you're getting close to that valley of the shadow of death and a person slows down when you get there. And you're not in a hurry to get into that place, but just slow down considerably. It's called the shadow of death.

What does the shadow tell you? Well, the shadow tells you there has to be light on the other side. You can't have a shadow without light. And so death stands by the path and it cast its shadow over the path.

And so I'm walking past through, not walking in the valley, I'm walking through the valley of the shadow of death. But when I do, I will fear no evil for thou art with me. It's interesting to me how the presence of God always seems to be greatest at birth or at death.

Years ago, when I was pastoring in a very rural area, the lady across the street called us and said that she was going into labor and that she called the doctor who was gonna deliver the child and he wasn't available and that she needed help in the delivery of her child. So Kay and I got out our medical book, we looked up what to do when you deliver a child and we put on the, you know, on the stove, we put on the boiling pot and we boiled the instruments, scissors and so forth that we were to use. And we had the opportunity of being a midwife and deliver this child.

And it was one of the most exciting, interesting experiences that I've ever had, the delivery of a child, taking it from the mother, holding it into my hands, cutting the cord and things of that nature and just the new life and just, there's just an awesomeness about it. I can't describe it, it was just, you're so close to the eternal when you're bringing a new life into the world. And it was just a wonderful experience.

Of course, I've also as a pastor, I've been at the death of many of the servants of God as they took their last breath and passed into eternity. And that also is an awesome moment because here is this person, they've been walking with the Lord and you're with them and their breathing is maybe labored and they take that last breath and then that's it. And it is a remarkable experience again, because again, you're on the border of eternity and these people are crossing over into the eternal and there on the border is just an awesome place to be, it's an awesome experience.

So two times in life, you get that often experience, awesome experience, the time of the birth and the time of the death. And in both cases, there's such an awesome presence of God. Now, as we approach this valley of the shadow of death, there are some people who are gripped by this thanatopia.

Thanatopia is the fear of death. And David said, yea, though I walk through the valley, I will fear no evil because thou art with me. And the presence of God so close at the time of death.

It's interesting how that God uses the thought of his presence with us to dispel any fear that we might have. David said to Solomon, his son, be strong, be of good courage, do it, don't fear, don't be dismayed for the Lord God, even my God will be with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you.

In Isaiah 41, as we read this morning, fear not for I am with thee. And that is really the cure for fear, the consciousness of God's presence. He is with me, no matter where the path may lead, no matter what the dangers may be, the thought and the knowledge of his presence with me should dispel any fear that I might have.

And so David goes on to say, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. You know, the rod, I should not fear, it should be a comfort for me. My dad never used a rod on me, but he used to use switches and apricot tree, and though I love the apricots, I hated the little knobs on those apricot switches.

And yet there was sort of a comfort. I mean, dad never tried to switch me from the other room. It was always close by.

And so you knew that there's a closeness there, even when you get the rod or the switching. The staff was to keep the sheep in line. And so when they started to get out of line, the shepherd would use his staff to keep the sheep in line.

And so the comfort that I have, knowing that he is close. In the final strophe, David sees God as a host. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Thou anointest my head with oil. My cup runneth over. I don't know of any phrase that is more descriptive of the Christian life.

My cup runneth over. He doesn't just fill the cup of life, but he overflows the cup of life. My cup runneth over.

There are times when the Lord has been working in my heart and in my life, and I just feel, Lord, shut it off. I just, I can't take any more. This is so rich, Lord, I'm full.

And this is just so wonderful. And Lord, just shut it off for a little while. And he just keeps pouring, and pours until it just overflows.

And that's his desire. Not just what he can do for you, but what he can do through you. He wants the cup to overflow, because he's interested in not just filling your life, but he's interested that your life be of influence and all to those around you.

And that's what the overflow is about, that you might be the instrument through which God's love can pour out to a very needy world in which we live. My cup runneth over. He is not just a full cup, an overflowing cup.

He is a very generous host. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. Like a couple of hound dogs, everywhere I go, they're there dogging my heels.

And you know, how wonderful it is to have goodness and mercy just following you everywhere you go, seeing the goodness of God, experiencing the mercies of God everywhere we go. And surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. But what about when the days of my life have come to an end? I've entered into that valley of the shadow of death, and that shadow has crossed my path.

What then? Well, David goes on to say, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Past the shadow of death, on into the eternal kingdom of God. And in thy presence, he said, is fullness of joy.

And at thy right hand, there are pleasures forevermore. You'll get that in the 16th chapter that you're reading this afternoon. And that's a presumption.

And I'm encouraging you, 16 through 25 for tonight. What is death for the child of God? It's just a shadow that crosses my path as I am on my way to my father's house, where I'm going to be enjoying his love and his presence and his abundant provisions forever and ever and ever. And reading the Psalms and sort of breaking it apart, I can see why it's a favorite of so many people, why people memorize this Psalm, why it is on the little memorials that they usually have at a service for someone who has died.

So many times on the memorial, you'll read the 23rd Psalm because it is such comfort, it is such hope, and it gives us that hope that every child of God has for that eternal life that is ours in and through Jesus Christ. So the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside the still waters and he restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his namesake. And yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because thou art with me.

Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and when those are over, I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Thank you, Father, for the assurances that we have through your word and through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the good shepherd, who gave his life for the sheep, that we, Lord, might be able to have this hope of eternal life with you. And so, Lord, bless now, we pray.

And may our lives be encouraged and may our lives be strengthened as, Lord, we see the things that you have promised for those that know you as a shepherd, those that are following you as their guide, and those who are experiencing the bounty of being hosted by you. And looking forward, Lord, to that eternal hosting, dwelling in your house forever. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front to minister to you today. It could be that your life has been plagued by some fear. There's 416 of them that they have, so maybe one of those is sort of plaguing you and you have this fear, this phobia of something, but fear not, the Lord said, I am with you.

And his presence and the awareness of his presence can dispel that fear. And so they're here to pray for you today, to help you to discover that presence of the Lord with you and that presence that will dispel any phobia that you might have. And especially if there is that fear of death that so many people do have who are not prepared for death.

But you can be prepared by committing your life to Jesus Christ today. So may the Lord be with you, may the Lord bless you, may you experience the consciousness and the awareness of his presence with you

today. May you be strengthened by it, encouraged by it, and may you walk in faith, knowing that he loves you and he's gonna take care of every need in your life as you just yield yourself fully to him.

God bless you and keep you in his love, in Jesus' name. The Lord bless thee. The Lord bless thee.

And keep thee. And keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee.

And be gracious unto thee. And be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

God bless you.

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