

Conversation Starter

For the week of November 16 to 22, 2008

This week's theme: Will You Succumb To Fear?
Current sermon series: Living For Jesus
Sunday's Readings: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus told this story: "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. (Matthew 25:14-18)

And why did this man feel the need to hide his master's money? For fear of losing it and because he was afraid of his Master. Listen to this man's own words: "Master, I knew that you are a hard man... So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground." (See parts of Matthew 25:24-25) FEAR – an emotion that can greatly influence us. FEAR – an emotion that can keep us from moving forward. FEAR – an emotion that can keep us from living full and productive lives. FEAR – an emotion that negatively affects perspective, health and decision-making abilities. Perhaps this is why we find God and Jesus continually saying to people: *Do not be afraid.* To Abram, God said: "*Do not be afraid. I am your shield.*" (See Genesis 15:1) To Joshua, God said: "*Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged.*" (See Joshua 8:1) As for God speaking through the prophet Isaiah: "*Do not be afraid. For I am with you.*" (See Isaiah 43:5) And God speaking through the prophet Jeremiah: "*Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you now fear.*" (See Jeremiah 42:11) As for Jesus Himself: "*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*" (Luke 12:32) "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" (John 14:27)

Therefore, it is very clear from the words of scripture that God doesn't want us to be afraid. He want us to experience His peace that passes all understanding ... He wants us to experience His joy as our strength ... He wants us to experience His comfort, love and presence – not FEAR. Yet, all of us face challenges, difficulties, hardships, pressures and tough situations that can open the door to fear. In the book of Proverbs, the author writes: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5)* When we're afraid, we're not fully trusting in God or His abilities. This is why God is also saying to you: *Do not be afraid.* Regardless of what you are going through right now, will you succumb to fear or trust in the Lord?

1. If applicable, what are you currently afraid of? And why are you afraid?
2. Why is living in fear a sign of not trusting in God?
3. Do you find yourself easily succumbing to fear about different things? Explain your answer.
4. How do we grow in our ability to trust in the Lord?
5. Describe some ways fear comes into our lives?

If time permits, continue past this point for further discussion:

READ Luke 23:39-43.

6. The above passage from Luke's gospel describes a positive type of fear – the fear of God. What does it mean to "fear" the Lord?
7. Why is fearing the Lord a good thing whereas fearing people, places, things and experiences is not something positive?
8. What does it mean to "lean not on your own understanding" as written by the author of the book of Proverbs?