

“More Bad News May Come: Steadiness in a Year of Struggle”
Psalm 112:1-10

When you think of the past 12 months, what comes to mind? — Tens of millions infected and over a million dead, political hostility and upheaval, racial friction and distrust, economic uncertainty and instability, devastating wildfires, churches struggling to know how to respond?

With all that – and I imagine some other things that have come to your mind – do any four lines in Scripture feel more relevant and precious than Psalm 112:7-8? The psalmist writes of the person who fears the Lord: *“They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD. Their hearts are secure, they will not be afraid; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.”*

When I came to these lines recently, I read them differently — more slowly, more curiously, more admiringly. Surely the writer faced worse news and fiercer trials than many of us have, even with the past year. Where did his fearlessness and steadiness come from? How does someone see the waves of a world crashing and churning, or feel the swelling tremors of division and conflict, or hear the roaring winds of worse to come ... and still remain steady, firm, immovable?

As we continue on into 2021, not knowing what news may come in upcoming months, how might God make our *faith* stronger, our *joy* more durable, our *light* all the brighter? What can we learn about spiritual steadiness from Psalm 112?

The Hebrew word for *steady* - “His heart is *steady*; he will not be afraid” - is actually a passive verb meaning *upheld*. The same word appears again & again in the Psalms:

*“The power of the wicked will be broken,
but the Lord **upholds** the righteous.”* (37:17)

*“Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and grant me with a willing spirit to **uphold** me.”* (51:12)

*“Surely, God is my help; the Lord is the **upholder** of my life.” (54:4)*

*“**Uphold** me according to your promise, and I will live;
do not let my hopes be dashed.” (119:116)*

*“I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord **upholds** me.” (3:5)*

Marshall Segal sums it up: “Steadiness in the Lord is *upheld-ness*. It is not mere courage or patience or sobriety, but dependence on the Upholder — the all-wise, all-powerful, all-loving King over all. Steadiness comes from knowing who holds our life, from clinging to all that he has promised us in Christ, from trusting him to sustain us day and night whatever might come.”

If we want a steady heart in an unsteady world, among unsteady people, during unsteady days, we need to be upheld. And we need to *know* that we are upheld and *will be* upheld. Here in Psalm 112, God gives us at least three sure paths deeper into this divine, unshakable upheld-ness.

1. Let Fear Breed Fearlessness

The man upheld by God fears God. *“Blessed are those who **fear the LORD** ... They will have **no fear of bad news**”* (vs. 1, 7). The one who fears ... does not fear. Fearing God has made them suddenly and unassailably secure.

How much of our instability over the last year has come from misplaced, imbalanced fear? To be clear, we have faced real fears — a life-threatening virus, extended lockdowns, shuttered businesses, lost jobs, police shootings, violent riots, bitter politics, belligerent debates — all added to whatever each of us carried before our world was thrown into disorder. But a mightier fear, by far, rises above every other: the awesome, overwhelming, breath-taking power and justice of our righteous God.

If we fear how a virus or riot might harm us, perhaps we need to recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:28 – *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, **fear** the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”* But

also don't forget the words Jesus said immediately after this: *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So **don't be afraid**; You are worth more than many sparrows"* (Matt. 10:28-30).

This may seem puzzling; even contradictory. Fear, but don't fear. Fear nothing in this world; but be sure to fear the Lord. This fear of fears is a strange and wonderful phenomenon; because those who fear the Omnipotent One find a refuge, a sanctuary, a friend. *"The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him"* (Ps. 25:14). Because the One they reverently fear upholds them, the fear of the Lord becomes the safest place in all the world, the only truly safe place.

And, this holy fear makes them unusually wise. We see this in the psalm preceding our psalm this morning. Before Psalm 112 begins, this is how Psalm 111 ends: *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise!"* (v. 10).

All this points to the same ultimate reality: If we fear the Lord, we have nothing else to fear. Whatever trials we suffer, we suffer them in the strong arms of the Lord's compassion (Ps. 103:13). We lack nothing (Ps. 34:9). Our holy fear produces the surprising fruit of fearlessness.

2. Let Obedience Fortify Courage

The fear that drives out fear also inspires a resilient obedience. Look at vs. 1 again: *"Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who find **great delight** in his **commands**."*

The Lord is gracious when others would be harsh and unkind; merciful when others would be cold and unforgiving, and righteous when others indulge and rebel (v. 4). He gives when others keep for themselves and does all that He does with integrity and justice (v. 5). He speaks, spends, and loves in ways that the self-seeking cannot explain, because they don't know God (1 Thes. 4:5); while those who do know God, obey Him. Why? Because it is their delight! We can sing along with the Psalmist:

“I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches ... I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word!” (Ps. 119:14-16). For the one who trusts, fears, and follows; the decrees of God are finer than gold and sweeter than honey.

To add to the blessing, obedience becomes a forge for our courage, refining our boldness and dissolving our fear. Marshall Segal notes, *“It is an irony woven into reality that those who risk themselves in obedience to God are more secure and satisfied than those who try to serve and save themselves. And it is a tragedy everywhere in history that far more have preferred the awful perils of their perceived autonomy to the utter safety of obedience to God.”* Those are the options. Serving self brings about the *curse* of fear. Serving God brings about the *cure* for fear. Obedience fortifies courage in a world plagued by fear.

3. Let Hope Light the Valley

The one *upheld* by God knows whom to *fear* most ... knows whom to *obey* when our flesh resists and protests ... and knows the One for whom our soul *longs and waits*. Ultimately, the *fears of the present* fade and dissipate next to the light of our *future in Christ*. Look at vs. 7-8 again:

*“They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord. Their hearts are secure; they will not be afraid, **in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.**”*

Adversity will end; enemies will fall; triumph will come. Even when we are assailed by trials and sorrows – and those who dismiss God seem to be prospering – we know the truth, we know the promise, we know the certain hope to come. The comforts of the corrupt will be short-lived – and the joy of those justified by grace will be never-ending! The certainty of victory, of a weight of glory beyond all comparison, makes this light momentary affliction strangely and shockingly ... bearable (2 Cor. 4:17).

This is why the people of God can receive bad news with confidence – and even enduring joy – because we know the good news that will one day engulf and wash away every terror that might be.

Viruses will spread and be cured, nations will rise and fall, but those who *hope* in the Lord – who fear him, obey him, and wait for his return – “will renew their strength.” While others are weighed down with worldly concerns, “they will soar on wings like eagles.” When others are exhausted by their fears and troubles, “they will run and not grow weary.” When others give up and walk away, “they will walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

Our light will dawn not just after the darkness, but *in* the darkness (v. 4), until the darkness itself expires. Joy not only comes with the morning, but sustains us through nights of sorrow — until bad news itself is a faint and harmless memory.

And this is why we pray: *Come, Lord Jesus! We trust in you. We wait for you. We rejoice in you. As you make all things new. Amen.*