
kNOw Fear

Surviving Faith in a Culture of Fear

This conversation takes place between a King's student fresh from the Interdisciplinary Studies Conference and his friend who is fearful of the world around her.

Emma: Hey Jake! It's so good to see you after all this time you've been spending at school. What gives, anyway?

Jake: Oh, we had this huge conference for the last two days. I had to sit through four lectures and go to these really weird [finger quotes] "breakout" sessions.

E: I didn't know King's was big enough to have a huge conference. What is it on, anyway? How to read the Bible like a good little Calvinist droid-monkey?

J: Come on, Em. Cut it out. The conference was all about keeping faith in a culture of fear.

E: OK, that was totally out of a text book. What was it *really* about?

J: No kidding. It was about how everyone is being brainwashed into paranoia for no reason, and how Christians are supposed to resist and overcome fear.

E: That's total crap. The Bible totally tells everyone to be afraid. Seriously, this guy ran up to me on the street, Bible in hand, and told me to be afraid for my soul! I told him to piss off, and he did, but before he went away he muttered something about Luke 12 or something. I didn't bother looking it up.

J: I see what he did there. He was totally taking the Bible out of context. Besides, fearing God isn't about shaking in your boots. It's totally different, born of love. We totally covered this in one of the sessions; who knew I'd use it? Let me check my notes.

E: OK, but be quick about it. I think that guy over there is eyeing your laptop. I've seen his type around, you know, and I can tell he's up to no good just by how he's sitting there.

J: How can you be so sure, Em? I mean, maybe he's just some guy, having coffee...and he happens to find us interesting because you're pretty. Here it is: Psalm 111:10. "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and they who live by it grow in understanding." See? It's not about being threatened by God, but by seeking wisdom.

E: Look out, here comes that guy! [whispers] Hold on to your laptop!

J: Relax, Em. He's just going to the can.

E: Oh thank God. People like that are the reason I lock my door even when I'm at home. If it wasn't for Rufus, I wouldn't get any sleep! It sucks how the cheap rent is in seedy neighbourhoods.

J: Rufus is a Chihuahua. What's he going to do? Besides, I live in a less expensive neighbourhood, and I don't have any problems. You should relax a bit more.

E: That didn't take long; here he comes again!

Guy: Call me some time. [puts a slip of paper on the table]

E: [looking alarmed and disgusted at once] Uhh...thanks? [to Jake, whispering] oh...my...god.

J: See? I told you he likes you. You should call him...you know he likes coffee.

E: Seriously? God, I'll just bet he's one of those weird internet stalkers. You know, I heard on the news there was some psycho running around getting people on Facebook over to a garage somewhere and torturing them.

J: Wow.

E: What?

J: Nothing, it's just...OK, here's what we'll do. I'll tell you about this conference, and you figure out how to get your blood pressure under control. Honestly, I don't know how Rufus can deal with you being so high-strung all the time.

E: Jerk. [sighs] Go ahead, I'm listening.

J: OK. First we start off by looking at the difference between Canada and the U. S. as far as the different way each country handles fear.

E: Do they have a really big fear thermometer?

J: Funny. Actually, the media works like that. Down south, the media totally caters fear to the citizens. Look at CNN for starters. Here, I'll pull up their website. Look, see?

E: So some kid committing suicide over a leaked sex-tape. Looks like same-same to me; exactly what I'd expect. Oh, here's one! Al-Qaida is apparently getting smart...hey; you're not trying to freak me out are you? I mean, I have nightmares about this sort of thing!

J: Sorry, I was just making a point. Let's look at the Journal website. See? The scariest thing is Harper mucking around with the UN. No bombs, shootings, stabbings...

E: Stop! I get the point already! What are we, a bunch of wussies? Do we have our heads in the sand?

J: Not really. A few years ago, RCMP in BC decided to limit press releases, because some of the crime reports – and here's the important bit – some of the crime reports were causing *irrational fear* in the general population.

E: Oh sure, when?

J: I don't know; the speaker showed the article during the first session. I don't remember what paper it's from. Anyway, he went on to say that Canadians were usually paralysed by fear, as opposed to our neighbours to the south being enraged and goaded by fear. All of that to say this: it's irrational. We aren't supposed to be afraid of what some Iraqi insurgent is doing half a world away, or even what that guy behind the dumpster is doing, and whether or not he's going to mug you. The speaker said that our morals are being replaced by false virtues – stop rolling your eyes – in a subliminal, unspoken way.

E: What's the deal, then? What makes it so subliminal?

J: When was the last time you heard an advertising agency tell you that they are trying to make you fear falling behind? Even better, a horror movie trailer...you've heard them on the radio, right? They're always going on about "what if" this and "are you" that. They're making you uncertain on purpose, so you go watch the film. That's not the right way to fear. The media and the government are slowly allowing our virtues to be replaced.

E: Now you're sounding like a conspiracy theorist. You shouldn't talk like that; they'll put you away!

J: Relax; "they" aren't putting me anywhere. That's exactly the kind of thinking, though, that's keeping the population in line. Listen to this: the false virtues we are being brainwashed into believing are Suspicion, Pre-emption and Accumulation.

E: Textbook, Jake. Tell us regular people what you really mean.

J: Suspicion breeds feelings of paranoia and xenophobia. Remember that cute guy who gave you his number?

E: Ugh, please!

J: Well, it's valid. You were scared of what he *might* do, even though he gave no sign of direct aggression. You also told me to hold on to my laptop, which totally plays into the other two false virtues I mentioned. You wanted to pre-empt his supposed theft by hanging on to my computer, and you felt that I should – for whatever reason – keep my computer to myself. We've been conditioned into thinking "he who has the most toys wins." Well, it's wrong. We should instead fear well...

E: Here comes the sermon...

J: You bet. Good fear is born of love. God doesn't want us to remove fear from our lives; the Bible speaks often of fear, and its proper origins. Someone once said that by no means is God safe...but he is *good*. Love God, and fear Him, because he can pretty much do whatever he wants to you...and fear Him because He loves you. That's not all, though. We are allowed to fear for other things. In order to fear properly, we should fear a threat to a proper love...

E: Like family, or my cell phone? What about my shoes?

J: Family, yes. Cell phone, not so much. I'm not even going to address your two closets full of shoes. We should also only fear a threat of great magnitude, like death or maiming, and we should only fear that threat if it is imminent. That means you are allowed to fear losing a friend or family member, but not if you're just afraid they might get run over crossing the street one day, or they might get mugged or something. However, if they're being mugged, or if they have a terminal disease and not much time left to live, you can fear for them. Keep in mind, though, that fear serves to alert us to love.

E: That makes sense, too, doesn't it? I mean, a teacher at my school got cancer, and as soon as he found out, he quit his job and spent the last couple of years of his life with his family.

J: Yeah, you're getting it. The most important thing for us to remember is that fear is not something that keeps us from doing good. Too often, courage is misunderstood as fearlessness.

E: OK, so now I know what I should be afraid of, and why. So what?

J: So now, instead of tucking in your chin and walking quickly past that bum on the street, smile at him and take him for a coffee or something. Don't worry that the al-Qaida seem to be growing brains. It's not an imminent threat. Talk to people; be friendly with them. Seriously, Em. It's not healthy to be scared of our own shadows.

E: That sounds really dangerous...but if what you say about courage is right, this should really work, right?

J: Exactly. Listen, my bus is leaving in a minute. How about I send you my paper when I'm done writing it, and we'll talk more about this? I totally don't have time to go over the hospitality thing.

E: Yeah, I'm actually curious about this hospitality thing. I'll let you know when I'm free.

J: Great! It was really good to see you again, Emma.

E: You too, Jake...and, thanks. Maybe I'll get some more sleep tonight.