

Bible Study 1: Do not be afraid

In the first century, Paul wrote to the early church in Rome, a vulnerable community at threat of persecution and hardship: *“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38-39).

Discuss: What is the most common instruction in the Bible?

People will come up with various suggestions of what they think the Lord most wants us to do. It is often a great surprise that God’s most common command is this – “Do not be afraid.”

God so often tells us not to fear because, in life, there is so much to be afraid of. Every day we live in the midst of conflict and violence, hunger and disease, injustice and oppression. Yet in the midst of this God tells us, “Do not be afraid!” How can this be? Probably it is because we know that our ultimate security is with God, who loves us and values us so much that each of our names is written on the palms of God’s hands (Isaiah 49:16). God tells us not to be afraid because nothing can ever part us from God and God’s love.

Fear is created by many factors. Some of the most potent factors are the things we don’t understand, can’t control and that offer us the greatest threat. Often, we just can’t cope with our fears, and this can lead us either to deny what’s happening or to blame those we think are responsible for the threats that we face. When we reflect on all this, it’s not hard to understand why so much fear surrounds epidemics. Our task is to learn the facts, challenge misinformation and to encourage each other, as God tells us, not to be afraid.*

Questions for discussion

Read Romans 8: 38-39.

1. What does this text say to us?
2. What do we know about the fears and hardships of the early Christians in Rome to whom Paul wrote?
3. What experience do we have of COVID-19 (Coronavirus)?
4. What fears and concerns does it raise in us?
5. What are the people saying about COVID-19? (Please check the facts before the session and be ready to counter misinformation.)
6. How do people behave when they are fearful?
7. Think of a time before when we have been fearful. What helped us to get through that time?
8. We hear many people speaking at this time. Which voices give us hope?
9. In this dark and difficult situation, where do we find the good news, the gospel of hope?
10. How can we be bearers of hope to others?

Prayer

Keep us, loving God,
in your merciful love and protection.
Calm our fears in this time of great distress
and help us to heed your call not to be afraid,
that we may truly know your presence and your promise
that nothing can separate us from your love in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

[*Adapted from material by Dr. Isaac Muyonga and Rt. Revd. Michael Beasley]