

# TOSSING AND TURNING

## Week 1 Preaching Resources: Fear

### Scripture Passage

Deuteronomy 31:1-8    Philippians 4:4-9

### Focus Statement

Fear is a natural response to a threat. All of us wrestle with fears. The good news is that whatever fear we are facing, we never face it alone.

- ME** Share a story about a time when you were gripped by fear. Perhaps even a time when fear awakened you from sleep. It may have been when you were getting ready to fly, a health scare, fear of harm coming to you or a family member.
- WE** We have all experienced fear in our lives, fear of spiders, fear of the first day of school or a new job, fear of a bad diagnosis.
- GOD** Knowing we all toss and turn at night with different fears, let's turn to scripture to hear where God meets us in the midst of our fear. As Moses stood before the people and in the face of his own death, he shares the message, "Do not be afraid." Moses has experienced the providence of God for himself and as he prepares to die, he reminds the people the Lord will go with them wherever they go. He says to them, "Go and be strong and courageous." Moses spoke these words, even as he knew what fear was. In the midst of times in life when we are anxious, we can't reason our way out of fear. Paul gives us a source to rely on in Christ. Paul wrote this letter in prison. He, too, knew fear and how to overcome it.
- YOU** How do you overcome fear when it invades your life? Do you allow it to paralyze you? To hold you back from living life fully? Paul can be your role model for living with fear, not denying it, but living into it.
- WE** When we wake up in the middle of the night tossing and turning in fear, may we hear the words of Moses, "Be strong and courageous," and know that God goes with us even into the places we fear. We can also carry with us the words from Philippians, "and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." As you face the challenges of this week, every time fear grips you, imagine that God is with you, to walk with you. Don't back up when you are afraid; go with God. As a response to the word ask, "What burden do you want to lay down?" Have stones and sharpie markers, invite people to, in one word, write their burden, then have people bring their rock to the altar with a prayer to release their burden to God. Have paper sheep with phrases from scripture to take home. Because we count sheep to go to sleep.



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## Week 2 Preaching Resources: The Future

### Scripture Passage

Matthew 6:25-34, Isaiah 41:10-13

### Focus Statement

We often like to control the future of our lives, so much so that we toss and turn at night. We stress out and worry about things that we can't control. You may have heard the phrase, "God is in control," ... but what does the Bible say?

**ME** Share a story about a transition for the future, or a transition you have experienced in the past that impacted you greatly. Being a Methodist pastor is a great example of this. While each of us would like to control the future, sometimes God has greater plans.

**WE** Each of us has this sense that we are born with, this sense that if we knew exactly what would happen every step of the way that things would be so much better. We feel that if we knew the future, there would be safety, security, or that we could change something if we don't like what the outcome will be. The question is, do we really know what is best?

**GOD** Let's turn to scripture to see what God has to say about wrestling with the future in Isaiah 41: 10-13 and Matthew 6: 25-34. In this Isaiah passage, we see that God gives us guidance. We aren't alone in facing down the future, whatever it might hold. God is not only with us, but God will provide for us with strength, presence and help. In the Matthew passage, we see that God meets the needs of everything, including birds and flowers. Jesus reminds us that if God is willing to take care of birds and flowers, God will take care of us. We aren't called to worry; we are called to follow the heart of Christ.

**YOU** If we paused for a moment to take our stress and concern about the future to God, we might find it easier to breathe. We might be able to take a step back and see that God hasn't abandoned us and that God is still working. The future doesn't happen overnight, but God is there. Jesus tells us not to worry about the future; may we rest easy.

**WE** Think of how stressed people get when planning the future: weddings, funerals, moves. What if we lived in a world where we just took a moment and fully embraced the phrase: "God has a plan" and lived that way, that while we can't control every step of the way, God has gone ahead and is already there.



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## Week 3 Preaching Resources: Finances

**Scripture Passage** Luke 12:16-21, 1 Kings 17:2-16

**Focus Statement** Financial matters wake us up in the middle of the night and can make us sleepless. The world teaches us we can be free from the anxiety of money when we have more of it. The Bible says having more doesn't set us free but being contented does.

**ME** Have you experienced tossing and turning due to financial matters; i.e. retirement planning, paying a college loan? Have you thought if you won the lottery, life would be happier, more comfortable? Is this true? Describe a time of feeling that having more would bring added happiness. Is having more an answer to our anxiety and worry that money creates?

**WE** Do you know anyone who has enough, but still thirsts for more? Perhaps someone with enormous wealth, looking for more money? Search in today's newspaper and find an article about seeking more money.

**GOD** Two scriptural stories make a good contrast with each other. A rich man in the Gospel of Luke has enough harvest. He even has more than he needs. He thinks his life should be happy-go-lucky. But that very night, his life is going to end, and Jesus completes the story with a question: "You fool!... Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" The other story, in 1 Kings, tells us about a widow who lived through a great famine. She had only a handful of meal in a jar. But, when she shared with a hungry prophet, her jar was filled and never exhausted. The one who seeks contentment by hoarding wealth loses what he had, but the one who finds contentment in sharing what she has with others has endless supplies.

**YOU** To whom in these two stories do you feel more similar? As you think of times in your life when you have had more or less material wealth, consider that you may not necessarily have been happier in times of wealth. As Jesus said in Luke 12:15, "...one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions." You can share a story about a time a personal struggle with finances brought about an unexpected result, such as a closer relationship with a friend or family. This shows that a person's happiness does not consist in the abundance of their possessions. Challenge the congregation to five days without buying anything non-essential, if appropriate.

**WE** Are we anxious about money? Instead of starting by seeking more money, let's start with contentment with what we do have. Give your congregation an example of a community of contentment like Bruder Hope Community in Upstate New York. Ask them, "Do you really need that money to set you free from the anxiety that bothers you?" Visual: two jars: one almost empty and another filled.



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## Week 4 Preaching Resources – The Anxiety of Choosing

**Scripture Passage** Jonah 2:1-10, Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

**Focus Statement** Decision making can feel like hammering the nails into the coffin of opportunities. We agonize over making the wrong decision. Whatever decision we make, we can never stray so far that we are beyond God's redeeming grace.

**ME** Share a story of a time when you wrestled with making a decision. How did you cope? Where did you turn for help? Did you ask God for a sign?

**WE** All of us fear the finality that comes from choosing. We worry about making the wrong decision, agonize over the pros and cons, try to think through every possible outcome. Weighing all the variables can feel overwhelming, even paralyzing.

**GOD** God has given us tools to help us make decisions. In the story from Acts we can see the disciples engage in a process of discernment. They talk to others with experience and ask for their advice. They come up with a limited pool of options. They pray and ask for God's help.

In Methodism we also talk about a process of discernment. We turn to Scripture. We look at what our Christian tradition can teach us. We use our reason- our best thinking. We use our experience, and the experience of others to help us decide. The good news is that even if we have done all the discernment, and we still feel stuck, even if we get it wrong, we are never beyond God's redeeming grace. Tell the story of Jonah. He made all the wrong choices. He deliberately disobeyed God. Yet by the end of his story, he ended up exactly where God wanted him to be.

**YOU** It often feels like we are making decisions in a vacuum. But that is not true. You are not alone. God has given you the tools you need to make the decisions that keep you up at night. You stand within God's amazing grace.

**WE** Don't be afraid. Talk to some wise people you know. Pray, and then decide. God's got you.

