

## GOD WILLING TO HELP US COPE WITH FEARS AND PHOBIAS

*“...if we can imagine it, we can be afraid of it – everything from blood to bats to belly-buttons.”*

I grew up in school; quite literally. My parents purchased a sprawling schoolhouse, moved it to a five-acre plot and turned it into a home. Nine children were nourished there and coaxed toward adulthood.

During the day, walls resounded with expressions of sibling rivalry and revelry. But those same weathered walls were darkened by the shadows of night, releasing subtle squeaks, sharp creaks and, to my youthful imagination, groans.

Bedtime was terrifying. I'd huddle beneath the sheets desperately hoping those monsters would find my cotton fortress too daunting and move on to a nearby slumbering sibling.

Coping with fear sometimes took an unorthodox twist. I'd heard that if you thought of the Queen, fear would flee. Accordingly, I'd conjure up images of Her Majesty, cloaked in robes, crown-adorned and clutching a scepter. Sadly, it didn't work.

I'd like to be able to say that fears became non-existent with the advance of age, but I'd be lying. They simply became more sophisticated.

Monsters that haunted those schoolhouse walls moved to Wall Street. The world-wide financial crisis caused a pandemic of fear. Millions were lying awake at night; visions of Freedom 55 morphed into Slavery 66 -- then 77.

Phobias blossom in the garden of despair, springing up like dandelions after a deluge. It used to be that I couldn't even pronounce them, now I can usually attach a face: neophobiabia, fear of anything new; thanatophobia, fear of dying; and ornithophobia, fear of birds. Yes, if we can imagine it, we can be afraid of it – everything from blood to bats to belly-buttons.

No wonder our all-knowing God seasoned His love-letter with assurances like “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10) Close examination of such words reveal a game-plan for combating fear that can be implemented by all.

Know that God is aware of what ignites fear within. The psalmist David said it like this: “You know when I sit and when I rise...you are familiar with all my ways.”

Even the innermost recesses of the heart are familiar territory to Him.

Recognize that God wants to help us. Those who do not know Him imagine an iron-fisted deity poised on a throne, waiting and hoping for a human slip-up; anything to provide an excuse to hurl a lightning bolt in our direction. Nothing could be further from the truth. His personal attributes include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and self-control. What right-thinking person wouldn't want to access such a trove of treasure?

God is never far from us. In fact, He is merely a prayer away. When the sincere call, He is ever willing to step into our situation.

When He does, we will echo the words of King David, spoken in Psalm 144: "He gives me strength for war and skill for battle. He is my loving ally and my fortress, my tower of safety, my deliver. He stands before me as a shield, and I take refuge in Him."

No one else compares -- not even the Queen.