

What Causes Unhealthy Fear and Anxiety?

In my last article in this series I stated that unhealthy fears can come into our lives when we place our *primary* focus on our immediate *problem* rather than the *solution to our problem*. I want to share an illustration of this truth from my own life. When I was in my late teens, a friend and I went to Florida for a week. After we were there for a few days, my friend, Danny, wanted to go deep sea fishing. Although I wasn't, necessarily, excited about going fishing, there was something else happening that day. It was July 15, 1975, and an American *Apollo* spacecraft was going to lift off from Cape Canaveral to dock with a Russian spaceship (called, *Soyuz*) two days later. This fishing boat was going to take us close enough to see the Apollo spaceship lift off. Although the waters were rough that day, the fishing boat captain was determined to go anyway. An historic space launch doesn't happen every day. Now neither Danny nor myself at this time in our lives had been out on the ocean and certainly not in rough waters. This was not a large boat; it probably carried about 8-12 people including the crew. We were told that there was a potential to get seasick because of the rough waters. The captain informed us that the way to help keep us from getting sick was as follows: "Don't go to the edge of the boat until you've been out for a while and your body adjusts to the choppy water. If *you do* go to the edge, *don't stare* at the churning waters! Look toward the horizon or slightly upward or come back to the center of the boat and sit down."

Of course, neither my friend nor I could resist going to the edge of the boat, but Danny was, somehow, unable to keep from staring at the extremely rough water and waves dashing against the side of the boat. It wasn't long before he started trying to wobble slowly back to the center of the boat. Before he could even sit down he was heaving all over the deck. He was terribly sick for the rest of the day. He wasn't even able to stand long enough to see the Apollo spacecraft lift off. In this illustration, the problem was fierce wind-driven sea waters which produced a rocking boat. When focusing on the *problem* my friend got terribly and painfully seasick. When I followed the *solution* as instructed by the captain of the boat, I didn't get seasick; in fact, I had a great experience! It's the same for us. We can often hyper focus on the *problem* rather than the *solution to the problem*.

Notice the disciples focusing on the *problem* in the next portion of the narrative: "When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat and they were frightened." Although John doesn't mention it, Mark informs us that the disciples thought that Jesus was a "ghost" which caused them to be terrified. Now picture this scene in your mind; there's a great storm. The water is rough—likely as rough as any of these experienced

fishermen have ever seen. The boat is being tossed around. Every muscle in their bodies must have been aching! Would they ever survive this awful night? Notice that these disciples are experiencing unhealthy fear and anxiety because they are focusing on the problems rather than the solution to their problems. Let's move on now from **Suffering and Fear** to:

—Savior's Love

I want to break this section of the narrative into three smaller sections beginning with:

—Watching

Mark records that Jesus is watching this entire scene. Mark writes, "And *he saw* that they were making headway *painfully* for the wind was against them." Jesus sends his disciples on ahead of him, but he doesn't intend to leave them to fend for themselves. He is ever watchful and this is one important point that we need to think of in our own lives. We've already seen that Jesus, watching what's going on, walks out on the water to the disciples. We also saw their fear because they didn't recognize him. In this article we've addressed unhealthy fear and anxiety in our lives. We saw that this can happen by placing a priority focus on the *problem* rather than the *solution to the problem*. Although this is helpful, there's more that Jesus is teaching us in the narrative. It's not enough *merely* to identify our sin. If we're going to fight our sin, by grace, we want to seek to find the *root cause* of our sin. We'll pick the narrative up at this point next time.

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