

US DISASTER PROGRAM

Combatting Fear



Bible Study for times of disaster

DO NOT BE AFRAID

What is the most common commandment in the Bible? Ask this question, and people will come up with various suggestions of what they think the Lord most wants us to do. It's often a great surprise that God's most common command is this – "Do not be afraid."

God tells us not to fear with such frequency 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 him and his 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.

The story of David and Goliath is a tale that almost all of us are familiar with from childhood. But have you ever read it as a story about encountering fear?

The narrative begins with the armies of the Philistines and of Israel facing each other across a valley. The Philistines believe that they have an enormous advantage, a seemingly invincible champion called Goliath who they believe that no one living could beat. Goliath challenges the Israelites to send their champion against him. The Israelites don't believe that they have anyone capable of defeating Goliath. What is their completely natural response to this situation? As 1 Samuel 17:11 puts it, "When Saul and all Israel heard these words of

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).

Adapted from *La foi en temps d'Ebola* by Dr. Isaac Muyonga and Rt. Rev. Michael Beasley



the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.”

Read 1 Samuel 17:4-7. This passage describes why Goliath is so understandably the source of the Israelites’ fear.

One Israelite has the ability to see things differently – the boy David. In 1 Samuel 17: 24-27, David sees two things. First, he sees the fear of the Israelites. Second, he sees that a different outcome to the situation is possible. David sees that Goliath is not invincible. Not everyone welcomes David’s conviction. His older brother Eliab resents David’s ability to see things differently and tries to silence David (1 Samuel 17:28-30). Thankfully, news of David’s perspective on the situation reaches Saul. Saul is skeptical. But David is able to convince Saul that all is not lost and that he is capable of taking on Goliath (1 Samuel 17: 31- 37). David’s confidence comes from two sources. First, he has experience in taking on difficult situations. Second, he puts his trust in the living God who has sustained him through past difficulties.

Saul tries to help David by offering to loan him his own armor. On the surface, this seems to be a good idea; but, in reality, the armor is so heavy that David cannot even walk in it! David rejects the burdensome equipment Saul offered him for facing Goliath. Instead, he chooses to face the giant using the equipment with which he’s familiar and that enables him to move easily and lightly.

Finally, David encounters Goliath (1 Samuel 17:41-58). The giant does not believe that he has any weakness that could be exposed and leave him vulnerable to a young boy. But Goliath is wrong. A pebble from the brook swung with faith in just the right way not only defeats Goliath but also sends the whole Philistine army running. Overcoming fear leads to victory.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

As people of faith, we aren’t equipped with the clinical skills and facilities that medical practitioners use in their work to stop an outbreak. If we tried to take these on, we’d be like David trying to wear Saul’s armor. But we do have our own skills, abilities and opportunities that can enable us to play our part in stopping this infection. What might these be?