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→ **MINISTRY UPDATE** ←

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# UPDATE

It is very frustrating, but we are still waiting on the CPA to complete our paperwork so we can refinance. Please pray for a speedy solution. There are other reasons besides my impatience. All good reasons I can't share right now.

I just returned from a visit to the Jim Hamilton prison in southeast Oklahoma. If you had to be in prison, that would be the best one I have seen. The staff is great to work with and the inmates are all low risk. The fear of getting out is the same in any prison. The big questions are, "How can I survive? Where can I live? Can I find a job? How can I get to and from work? What will I eat? How will I pay for my fines?" And many other questions that are serious concerns.

There is one answer that answers all the questions and calms all fear. That answer is, "Get accepted to Hand Up Ministries." And being able to say "yes" to these men is partly due to our friends who donate to the ministry. Every dollar makes a big difference in someone's life.

Most of us take a lot of things

for granted because we have a steady income and our health is "ok" or "so-so". We get to grumble about how hard we work or how bad we feel, or what we think someone else should be doing, etc.

Here are Hand Up, we only wish our problems were that good. Some men come here just to be able to die in peace. Some have cancer, some are handicapped, some are just not able to work but not old enough to be able to retire. Many have mental problems that are serious, and others can work by staying on their mental health medication. We average about 6 per year that die. We also carry up to 10 men each month that can't work or pay until they get on Social Security, which isn't easy and takes time, (sometimes years).

Since all the men Hand Up takes care of are going to be successful tax paying citizens unless they don't want to be, why would politicians try to shut Hand Up down instead of boasting the benefits? There isn't a good answer to be found. And the only answer I have heard is, "We don't want them in our neighborhood." The truth is your family and close friends are many, many, many times more likely to commit a sex crime than men at our campuses. Over 99 times more likely. Politicians have played on peoples emotions to get votes. That part may not change anytime soon. That is why we will spend our money on trying to save one more

soul.

You see, the reasons for sexual deviancies are all around you. The phone, TV, computers, radio, ungodly friends, separations and divorces, workplaces, too much busyness, removing God from schools and churches, and a host of others. Satan has spun a good web to catch people who do not watch where they are walking. No one is exempt in this world. Let's do what we can to make a difference. Keeping the right things in front of our eye and into our ears makes all the difference. Sexual sins are not just what is illegal on earth. Sexual sins are what is offensive to God according to His Word. What we decide is right in our own eyes doesn't change His Word.

— David Nichols

# FEAR NOT!

What would you guess to be the most common command or encouragement in the Bible? Is it the command to love? That is an important command and the core of God's desire for human life. And yet, it is not God's most frequent instruction to his people. Is it the command to be humble, or perhaps the command to trust the Lord, our God? Or maybe the command to guard our

sexual purity, or to walk with moral integrity and holiness?

As important as all of these are, the one command in Scripture that occurs more often than any other - God's most frequently repeated encouragement is the command to "fear not", or "don't be afraid" of this or that fear. There are 366 "fear not" verses in the Bible - one for each day of the year, including one for leap year. Our list of fears seems endless:

The number one fear of North Americans is the fear of public speaking. In fact, more people are afraid of public speaking than of death and dying, though death is a very real fear for some of us. There are all kinds of fears and anxieties that all of us have to face

The first negative emotion recorded in the Bible is fear. When Adam and Eve sinned, and God sought them out in the garden, calling to the man, "Where are you?", we read in Genesis 3:10, that Adam answered, "*I heard... you in the garden and I was afraid.*"

Sometimes the challenges of life in this broken and sinful world can make it seem like God has forgotten us, like he has left us to fend for ourselves, like he has abandoned us. The loneliness that never gets alleviated. The bad habits that continue to bind us. The depression that doesn't go away. Sometimes, it makes us wonder if God still loves us. Maybe we've really blown it; and we can't believe that God wouldn't leave us in our sin. Not every child of God faces this kind of struggle, but many of us have times when we wonder if God has forgotten us, if he's left us alone in our miserable situations, whatever they may be. Maybe it doesn't seem that way in our heads. But it can sure feel that way in our hearts.

Fear not! God proclaims 3 salvation promises to comfort His people who

fear they've been abandoned.

### **1) FEAR NOT BECAUSE I HAVE REDEEMED YOU**

First of all, fear not.

You don't have to be afraid any more. I'm not going to abandon you. I'm not going to leave you in your sin. I have and will redeem you. The kind of redemption God proclaims here is the kind paid to get a family member out of prison for debt. Here, sin is compared to an impossible financial debt that you can never, ever repay. But you're part of my family, says God, and I'm going to buy you back.

In fact, I've pre-paid your release. God has stated our future redemption in the perfect past tense. That means it's as good as done. God has spoken! It will happen. Because I've already paid the price. I've paid a huge price in exchange for you. I've given up entire nations for you so I could form you into my own special nation. And I've exchanged thousands of people for you.

And from this side of the cross, we can see that God has exchanged one special person for us. You are so precious to me, I love you so much, He says, that I paid the biggest ransom I could ever pay. I exchanged my own Son for you.

Imagine that! Imagine you're in debtor's prison - which may be harder to imagine because we don't have debtor's prisons in North America - but imagine you're in debtor's prison and you can't pay the fine. Your Father wants to get you out, but he can't pay it either. So instead, he sends your oldest brother, with his full agreement, and exchanges him for you. That's what God did. He gave up his only Son, to become our older brother. And God sent him to prison in our place. 1 Peter 3:19 calls hell a prison where God sent

Jesus to redeem all his other children from their bondage to sin and its fearful, lonely consequences.

So fear not people of God! I have redeemed you. And I will redeem you.

### **2) FEAR NOT BECAUSE I HAVE SUMMONED YOU BY NAME**

God's exchange of others, in our place, is directly linked to his second promise at the end of vs 1: Children of God, "fear not because... I have summoned you by name, you are mine."

Out of all the sinful people God could have possibly chosen for redemption, God picked you. And he called you by name. One by one, God is calling his children out of spiritual exile and on to a journey home.

Don't be afraid. I have summoned you by name. I've called you on a journey to the promised land. I've called you out of bondage and into glorious freedom as the children of God. Has he called you by name? Then don't be afraid. You're on your way home to the promised land. Where the meek shall inherit the earth.

If you're tempted to think that with the name of Christ attached to yours that anyone can keep you in bondage, that anyone can keep you from travelling to the promised land, then listen to the words of Jesus in John 10: "I give them eternal life . . . and no one can snatch them out of my hand. And my Father, who has given them to me is greater than all [and] no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (Jn 10:28-29).

No one can refuse God's command in Isaiah 43:6: "Give them up! Don't hold them back!" They are mine! I created them for my glory. I have redeemed them in Jesus. I have called them by their name. And they

are mine. They are not their own, nor anyone else's either--not flood, not fire, nor any spiritual power in heaven or earth--but they belong, body and soul, to their faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all their sins. And He will keep his promise to bring us safely home.

One by one, God is calling his children home. If he's called you by name, fear not! No matter how long or lonely your struggle, you have not been abandoned in your misery.

### 3) FEAR NOT I AM WITH YOU

Christians are on a journey home. And that removes much of our fear. But it doesn't remove all of it. Which is why we need God's third salvation promise. Although we're going home, it's a long and dangerous journey. A journey with many potholes and detours and side tracks that slow our progress and threaten to stop us in our tracks.

Fear not, for not only have I redeemed you, not only have I called you, by name, into this dangerous journey, but I will be with you! I promise to travel with you all the way, on your dangerous journey home. That's my third promise to you.

When you pass through the waters - not if but **when** you pass through the flood waters - I will be with you. God doesn't promise that there won't be floods or fires. The overwhelming floods of your own struggle will not wash you away. They will spray you, they will soak you, they will freeze you, they will threaten to drown you, but they will not wash you away. And when you pass through the fire, you will not be burned. You will sweat, you will tire, you will faint, but the fumes will not overcome you and the flames will not consume you.

And when you pass through eve-

rything else, every other struggle imaginable, everything from A to Z, everything from water to fire, every natural and spiritual disaster possible, nothing will stop your journey. For I will be with you. Nothing will stop you from reaching your appointed destination. Fear not, I am with you.

In your Christian journey, even though you don't always know where God is leading you, do you think you could keep on travelling if you knew without a doubt that God was with you? No matter what God brings you through, no matter what fire or flood, even if something dreadful should happen to your family or closest friends, and you would have to travel without them for a while, do you think you could keep on travelling, as hard and devastating as it might be, do you think you could keep on going if you knew without a doubt that God was with you?

Do you have times when God seems far away? Are you sometimes afraid that maybe he's abandoned you? That he's left you to struggle all alone? If you have heard him call your name (and rest assured that he's calling your name right now), and if you have accepted his redemption, then fear not, God is with you. He is with you always, even to the very end of the age (Mat 28:20). — *Jeff Wendel*

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