

Walking Into the Fire with Jesus

By Bobby Schuller

You know life is better when you are relaxed, can I get an amen? Life is better when you're relaxed. And many of us, we have come to church today un-relaxed; tight, tense, and I just want to begin today by saying you can relax, you are relaxed and life is better when you relax. Yes, there are all sorts of reasons you can have to be tense, stressed out, and angry, and frazzled, but today I want to recommend to you that life is better when you relax.

So today you can smile, you don't have to be afraid, you don't have to worry, you don't have to be stressed out. Wherever you are in life, you know God is walking with you. Christ walks with you and that you're not alone. So today relax, smile and enjoy the good things God has given to you. You are brave! You are strong! You're getting stronger. You're stronger than you know. You are bold! You are relaxed and your faith inspires other people to see the best in their future and in themselves.

We live in an anxious world. In fact the series we're in right now is called "Lions in the Daniel Den: Living at peace in an anxious world." This word anxiety or anxious that is used in the scripture, it's also the word for worry in the scripture is a Greek word called merimnato. Everyone say merimnato. Merimnato. It means to be torn into pieces. It

means literally to be pulled apart so that there's a stretching to the point of breaking, snapping, pulled apart. And our world is stressed out. It's anxious, it's worried, its being pulled to pieces in a million directions. So even when the world is not at war, it is not at peace because it is anxious, stressed out, worried and afraid.

When you turn on the TV, all you hear about is politics and let me just pause there for a minute. Many of you are worried about politics and the politics of your country. And let me just tell you it is not politicians that make a nation great, it is its people. If God makes its people great, its nation will be great. So don't worry!

And many of us are worried about terrorism. We hear about it all the time. And the purpose of terrorism is actually not to kill people as much as it is to make everyone afraid. So don't let that side win by being afraid. You can be at peace, you can relax. And we hear about the economy. We have personal things in our lives; stresses about sickness and about our job. Will I keep my job or will I get a job? You're aging. You worry about your children. You worry about your parents. But I just want to tell you what you already know - God's going to take care of it. In the midnight hour, God's going to turn it around. Good things are coming on your behalf and although you can't see through the fog, don't be afraid, don't worry, just smile, and relax, and act, and release your

faith, and know that God is at work; he's going to do great things in your life. God cares more about you than you do. Just think about that for a second. God cares more about you than you do. He has a plan, he has a purpose, he has a process for you. It's coming.

And so in an anxious, stressed out world that's worried about everything and a million things, in that kind of society, you are a breath of fresh air because you are not that way. You are not the worrying, stressed out, fearful person that you see in society. You are the anchor. You are the light. You are the encourager. You are the optimist. You are the person of faith that people need in this stressed out world because you can see what Christ can see. You can see the world behind the curtain. That behind all of that terrible stuff that happens, we live in a wonderful world that God is at work in, and that great things are happening in this world and there are limitless possibilities and opportunities for you and others who trust in God. Do you believe it? I believe it, too.

Daniel, this passage that we're in, is a famous chapter about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And in this passage, there were these three young Jewish men. They had been taken from their home in Judah and they have been brought all the way to Babylonia. And there they have been put to work as advisors in the king's retinue, but they've

found themselves sort of out of place because they love the Lord, and they love the word of God, and they have certain religious standards that they have to follow that are at odds with the Babylonian culture. And very often, this friction actually creates a life or death kind of scenario for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

In one of the most famous stories in the book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man in the whole world, builds an idol. And, he speaks to all of these people, many of whom are captives from other nations that he's conquered, (speaking) many languages. He says to them, "All of the nations and the languages of the world are going to bow down to this image I have created." And everyone does except for three dudes: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And they stand up and they say, "No."

He comes to them and he gives them a second chance. "Guys, I've built this idol. When I say the music plays, you need to bow, so go ahead, and do that." And they say, "No." And he said, "If you don't do it, I will throw you in the furnace. And they say, "No. God will deliver us." And I love this part: "But even if he doesn't deliver us, we're not going to bow." Do you like that? I like that. I like the idea that there's this conviction, this faith that God's going to deliver them from that furnace somehow, but you know what? Even if he doesn't, I'm not going to do that. I am not

going to be bullied, I'm not going to be picked on, I'm not going to be ordered by you to bow down to anyone except God. Not alone is God.

And so of course, Nebuchadnezzar is furious. And he has this furnace lit to seven times the temperature. So hot that when these three men are bound to be thrown in the fire, the soldiers are killed who throw them into the fire. And Nebuchadnezzar is sitting there and he looks into the furnace, and all of a sudden, he stops, and he looks to his counselors, and he says, "Didn't we throw three men in there?" And they say, "Surely, King, we threw three in there." And he said, "But I see four men in there and the fourth looks like the Son of God." And he goes and he says, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego come out of there. Come out."

Of course, in the story, God rescues them, but this is a great symbol for those of us who are called to have courage. To stick up for what's right. To do something that scares us. To take a risk for God. To be generous. To open our lives to new possibilities. This is a promise to people of faith who trust in God and not in the material world. That God says, "Even though you make those decisions, you may be thrown into the furnace, but you won't go alone. I am there with you in the furnace."

Friends, you are not alone. What's your furnace? Are you in the furnace right now? What's plaguing your heart and your mind? I want you to know you are not alone in the furnace. God will save you. Don't be afraid and don't worry. Be at peace and relax and smile today as you trust in the love and power of God to rescue you. He will.

I had this thought as I was reading through the text. We know that these three guys were thrown into the furnace and the scriptures say that their hair wasn't burnt, that their clothing didn't even smell like smoke or cinders. But I wondered for them, obviously, it was hot in there, so do you think they were warm? What did it feel like? Was it cold? Was it room temperature? And this is just me. The scriptures don't say this, but I actually think that they were sweating when they got out. I think knowing how God is in life, my guess is it was hot. My guess is it was hard to breathe. My guess is there wasn't a lot oxygen in there because the fire was burning the oxygen. My guess is that, although they came out unharmed, they came out sweating. And I just want to say this to you: God lets the furnace get just hot enough to let you sweat. I really think that is true. That is God's nature and timing. God does not allow the furnaces to burn us, but he does allow them to be like the crucible. When we go through the fire, we come out refined, stronger, and more flexible. We look back and we say, "You know what, that was a really difficult time for me, it was really hard, but now that I look back, I see

that the Son of God, Christ was walking with me through the flame. I have learned that if I'm ever in that flame again, I know who's there with me.

I think that it was hot, and I don't know if they knew whether or not they would get out of there. And I'm so glad to tell you that whatever you're going through, you may be hot, you may be sweating it, but you're going to be fine, so relax. Enjoy the furnace. Nothing wrong with a sauna. Saunas are good for you.

What we're really talking about today is the power of both faith and fear in your life. Faith and fear are essentially the same thing in different directions. Faith and fear are the things that give spiritual power to whatever it is you're afraid of, or to whatever it is you believe in. I have seen this over and over that faith, if you believe and have faith, it gives spiritual power to the thing you believe in. If you have fear, it gives spiritual power to the thing you're afraid of.

I want to be clear about something. As I talk about faith and fear today, and if you hear anything, hear this: I am not talking about the feelings of fear or the feelings of faith. I'm talking about releasing your fear and releasing your faith. This is something I learned from Oral Roberts. Oral Roberts said, "I don't care if people have a lot of faith.

Everybody has faith. God gives faith as a free gift to everyone. What I care about is seeing people release that faith.” Release that faith. And that’s what Oral Roberts did. That’s why he had a healing ministry. He was always praying for people to be healed. He wanted to see people releasing their faith.

All of us have faith in our bodies, and all of us, by the way, have fear in our bodies. But you have a choice on what it is you’re going to release today. Are you going to release spiritual power into the things that you’re afraid of? Or are you going to release spiritual power into the things you have faith in? And to release means things like what kind of actions do you take? What kind of words do you say? What kind of things do you dwell on? So that when we release our faith, we give power to the thing we have faith in. When we release our fear, we give power to the things we’re afraid of.

Somebody who releases fear, I’m sure you have people like this in your life. Fear is the easy thing and faith is the hard thing. It’s easy to be negative. It’s hard to be an optimist. It’s easy to be afraid. It’s hard to have courage and to have faith. But you are a courageous person.

There are people in this world who are releasing their fear all the time. They’re like Chicken Little always going around saying the next bad

thing that's going to happen, not like in a healthy way. It's good to talk about your fears with somebody you love, like "I'm afraid of this," "I'm worried about this." It's okay to talk about it as a process, but I'm talking about the people that are saying it like a declaration. Do you know what I mean by that? They're saying, "Everything's going to hell." "Everything's bad." "I'm going to lose my job." "I'm going to get sick." "You're going to get sick." "We're all going to get sick." There are these people in life that make these declarations constantly about all the bad stuff that might happen, people that are releasing their fear everywhere. They are like people who cough and don't cover their mouths. It's like that guy who coughs and you're worried. So am I. That's what people do. They go around, and if you're having a good day, you're fine, you're relaxed, and then all of a sudden somebody comes in and they're saying, "I'm so worried, and you should be worried, too, and we should all be worried." As people go around coughing, some people get sick. At the very least, most people are just annoyed.

So people who spread and release fear and worry around are like people who cough without covering their mouths. But you are not that kind of person, thank God. You are the kind of person that releases your faith. You go around saying, "Hey, look, I know you're going through a challenge, but man you're going to come through strong. I know who you are. I'm praying for you. I believe in you. Your best days are ahead." That

is releasing your fear. "I don't know how I'm going to get out of this, but I know I serve a good God. He's never let me down."

People who are releasing their faith in the world, they're like that guy that comes to work at two o'clock in the afternoon on a Monday. He's the guy that comes and brings snacks. I love that guy. The guy who comes into the office; it's two, it's two o'clock, you still have three hours of work left, it's a Monday. You've got a whole week ahead of you and then some guy comes in with Starbucks for everybody, and warm cinnamon rolls. And honestly, the person of faith, the person who's encouraging, who releases their faith everywhere they go is like that guy - just lifts everyone's day, just nourishes people and makes you feel like, oh, it's Monday, but it's not so bad, I got a cinnamon roll. Nothing is better than that.

And that's the kind of person you are. You're the type of person that releases your faith. See, living a life where we release our faith is a generous life. It's generous. And I don't mean just money. I mean it's generous in time; it's generous in energy, generous in good words, in love and compassion. The life that releases its faith is the life of the open hand. And that's the kind of life you live, your life with open hands. Open hands are the symbol of trust. That's why we do it every week. We say, "Look, God, this is what I got. Nothing. What I got, take it. What you got,

give it to me.” Life with the open hand means an open posture to the world; that you’re ready to receive whatever it is God has for you. You’re not afraid.

And it also means that you’re generous. Whatever you have, you’re willing to give to help others in need. It’s the open-handed life. A life of fear is a life of a closed hand. A closed hand means you hold onto things. A closed hand means you can’t receive, your hands are closed. A life of fear is a life of closed hands. A life of fists. It’s a life that always wants to fight, that’s always defensive, never ready to receive, never open to anything. But that’s not you. You’ve opened your hands. You’ve released your faith and good things are coming to you because you see what others can’t see. You see what God sees. You see a bright future, and I do, too.

This generous life of the open hand is a life that gives, it is a life that endures, and you endure. You’re like the person who just won’t give up because you’re so hopeful. Like these guys. They’re going to throw us into a furnace that’s so hot it’s going to kill the soldiers, but I don’t know; somehow, God’s going to save us. I know that because of your hope, and because of your faith in God, you endure. When things cut you back, it’s okay, it just helps you grow even more. My grandpa used to say that

faith is spelled r-i-s-k. He said that to truly live a life of faith means you're okay taking risks, risks for God, and you are.

Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. We serve a great God. He will conquer your sickness, he will conquer your challenges, and he will even conquer death for you. And that is perhaps one of the greatest things for believers. It's that we have the sure conviction that in this life, no matter what, death is just a doorway to something greater. If you don't know Jesus Christ, become a Christian today and receive this assurance. Repent and become a believer. So, do not be afraid.

Did you know "do not be afraid" and "do not worry" are the most common commandments in the Bible? The Bible has a lot of rules and laws and things that say do this and don't do that, right? The most common thing the Bible says is "Do not be afraid" and "Do not worry." And, by the way, it's usually an angel that says it, and it usually says it before something awesome is about to happen. Why do you think that is? I think it's because the only thing that prohibits the next great thing from happening in our lives is fear and worry. And the thing that releases the great things that God has in our lives is faith. Risk is a wonderful thing. And so it's so common in the scriptures that God says "Don't be afraid" and "Don't worry."

Many of us, especially if you grew up in the church, are caught up in always trying to manage sin, but in a way, not feeling fear but releasing your fear is a sin. In fact, I want to argue that chronic worry, chronic fear is a form of idolatry. It's a way in which you're trusting in the material things of this world instead of trusting in God.

And so I just want to say to those of you, if you're that Chicken Little character that constantly goes around telling people the sky is falling, I just want to say you need to repent. And when I say you need to repent, I don't mean just to God; you need to apologize to all the people that you have trained to be worried because that is not what God wanted for them or for you. And you've had enough blessings in your life to know that that kind of chronic worry is unfaithful and unfair to God. God is better than that and he's been better than that to you.

So, if you've been a chronic worrier and you've spread it around to everybody, it's time to apologize to God and to others, and to make a decision today: "I will be braver and stronger because Christ lives in me." Got a little quiet there, but can I get an amen?

Look, there is only one way to get rid of fear and it is not thinking it away; it is facing it. The only way to be a less scared person is to do scary things. That's why I think it was Eleanor Roosevelt who said, "Do

something scary every day.” That is such good advice. Look, unless we do the things that scare us, we’ll always feel afraid. There are only two ways to respond to fear. One is to withdraw. And we all withdraw into our own things. Sometimes it’s food, and sex, and substance, an old boyfriend, an old girlfriend, whatever. The things we do to escape, to get away, entertainment, but God has not called you to withdraw, and you don’t withdraw. When you have something you’re afraid of, face it! Fears only go away when you face them. Scary feelings only go away when you do scary things. Even if those scary things get you, you actually still feel more brave, believe it or not. I can tell you, being a boy, I’ve done lots of scary things, and they haven’t always gone my way, to be honest with you. But even when they didn’t, I felt braver, and you will, too.

I remember when I was a kid and Magic Mountain Six Flags opened. It was the early nineties and there was this new ride called the Viper. It was the first ride with a corkscrew and two loops. I went with a group of friends from school and I was the only kid tall enough by one inch to go on the ride. So all these boys looked at me like “You have to go on this ride,” and I was like, “I don’t want to go on this ride. You guys aren’t going.” And of course all of them are like, “Well, we would totally go if we were tall enough.” I’m like, “Yeah, right.”

Anyway, I was terrified! I did not want to go on the ride, and I was essentially peer pressured into going on this ride. And let me tell you, after I went, not only was it awesome and seriously fun, and not only did I become a big roller coaster fan after that, but I was like the man. In my little group, I was like, “Not only am I taller than you, and you, but I’m the only one who went on the Viper because I’m the only one who’s man enough.”

Conquering and facing. There might be some of you who need to go on a rollercoaster after this. Seriously! You’re so afraid of everything. Just do something safe that’s scary just to break some of the fear up in your life. God can use rollercoasters to build faith in your life.

I remember when my mom, who’s Irish, told me, “Don’t let bullies push you around. You punch them.” It was so funny because, if you know me, I teach Sermon on the Mount. I do not believe in violence, but I remember when I was in seventh grade I was a scrappy guy and I felt this responsibility to stand up against bullies. There was this big kid picking on this other kid, and this other kid was kind of mousy and afraid. So, I went up to the bigger kid and said something dumb like, “That’s not very nice to say that.” Though, in your imagination, you’d be like, “Step aside!”

But this guy then turned on me because what I said was a bit weak. And as he's talking at me mid-sentence, I just went BAM and punched him in the teeth. He fell back onto the ground and looked absolutely stunned. Let me tell you, there's no greater feeling in the world than to punch a bully in the teeth.

And by the way, violence is not good; don't do that. But really, on a side note, he became one of my best friends, which is a weird thing that boys have. All of this to simply say I'm thankful for the times in my life that I did what was brave even though I was terrified and I'm angry at myself for all the times I cowered and slinked away.

You are brave. You can face the challenge that's before you. I believe in you and God believes in you. So don't be afraid. Relax. You have this. You've totally got this. And one of the reasons you need to be this way is not just for you; it's for others because there are others in your life who are watching you and need you to be this person. You are an optimist. You can see what other people can't see, that's why you can't be afraid. Release your faith. You are an optimist.

The word optimism and the word optics come from the same Greek word - to see. To see. An optimist is someone who can see, is a visionary. He can see or she can see what others can't see. And you become a lens

or a window for people to see a world they didn't know existed. Being positive is hard; being negative is easy. And you're the kind of person that believes in a big God who believes in you, as my grandpa used to say. You see a world and you offer it as a gift to others. Look at this amazing world that stands before you.

When you become a fearless, brave person who releases your faith, you become like music. There is nothing more powerful than music. Music can make a happy person feel sad, music can make a sad person feel happy, and you are music to people. You're music. You bring joy, you make the move, you shake them up, you get them dancing, and that's a good thing.

And you're bamboo, too. Do you know that? Yes, you're music and you're a lens, but you're also bamboo.

Ronald Rolheiser told a story about bamboo growing in his backyard and he hates bamboo. And the enemy hates you, too, by the way and this is why. In his backyard, this bamboo was there and so he cut it all down. And then it grew back twice as strong and awesome as it was before he cut it down. So then he cut deeper and POOF! It got even stronger. Then he dug a hole two feet deep, put poison on it, gravel and cement over it, and within a year, the strongest, biggest, badest bamboo

was breaking through the concrete and he decided to just let it go. And the reason is, in this particular type of bamboo, when you cut it back, you make the root system stronger. So every time he cut it down, he was making it stronger. You're bamboo.

Maybe you've been cut down, maybe you've been poisoned, and maybe you've been graveled and cemented over. You're stronger, even though you're not as tall as you were, you're stronger now. You're stronger now than you've ever been. That's what God does. He makes the weak strong, he makes the poor rich, he makes the sad laugh, he makes the cowards bold. You are braver, stronger than you've ever been. Be bold, be strong for the Lord is with you. God has not given you a spirit of fear. God has given you a spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. So release your faith, let go of your worries, relax and smile. He's going to take care of it. He's on your side. He's at work even now. So you can enjoy your day and you can trust in the goodness of God. Amen?

Let's pray: Father, we thank you that you are a good God. We thank you for the joy that you've given us. We're not going to allow fear to poison our joy. We're not going to allow fear to poison our present. We're going to take life as a gift. Every breath, every moment, every friendship, every good day, we're just going to take it, and thank you, Lord. It's in Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

