

Confident in Advance – Proverbs 3:25-26

Most of us assume that we will never experience trauma. Others may be burned in fires, assaulted in their apartments, involved in plane crashes or diagnosed with cancer, but not me!

Yet surely each of us must wonder what will happen if I lose my job or develop cancer or go through a divorce. What if my children break the law or my house is destroyed by a tornado or my car skids off the road?

Sometimes we wonder and imagine until we become immobilized by fear. We won't fly because the plane may crash. We won't go out at night for fear we'll be mugged. We are too protective of our children for fear they will be wrongly influenced. We become jealous because our spouse might have an affair.

There is a right place for caution in our lives, but it is sad when it robs us of joy and replaces joy with fear.

God gives us powerful truths in the Bible to chase away such fears and enable us to live confidently in advance of difficulty. One place we find such truth is in Proverbs 3:25-26: "Do not be afraid of sudden panic, or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught."

The sage of Proverbs, writing under God's inspiration, begins by telling us not to fear "sudden disaster" or calamity. This speaks of those unexpected tragedies that impersonally hit individuals and shake up their lives. Lightning strikes a house and burns it to the ground in minutes. Drought sweeps across a continent and causes starvation for millions. An earthquake splits a dam and floods the entire community.

But calamity need not be limited to broad natural phenomena. It can be more personal and specific. A college classmate of mine was bed-ridden for months because of hepatitis from a physician's needle. A missionary I met in Co-

lumbia buried her son along a back road in Africa after he died of an unnamed sudden illness. Then her husband was gored to death in east Kenya by a water buffalo. And we hear about skiing, boating and swimming accidents where people one minute are enjoying a marvelously good time and the next minute they are dead.

Stories of such "sudden panic", such calamities, are enough to cause anyone to live in fear. And it can become much worse when we or a neighbor or a family member are involved. Those who have already been hurt or who have seen first-hand how others have been hurt fear that it will happen again. For example, after an accident we may not want to drive again. After an assault we may choose to stay at home. After seeing the devastations of lightning we may panic at the sound of thunder. And yet God says, "Do not be afraid"!

"Do not be afraid of sudden panic, or of the ruin of the wicked . . ." This is quite a different kind of fear of the unknown than calamity that may not be directed at us personally. Instead, "the ruin of the wicked" refers to the specific sins of evil persons.

Several years ago a wicked person placed cyanide in Tylenol capsules and returned them to store shelves. Unsuspecting innocent people died awful deaths because they fell victim to the deeds of this wicked person or persons.

A missionary couple in the Philippines was kidnapped and held captive for many months before the husband was killed during a rescue attempt.

Our neighbors had their home burglarized and felt the invasion, loss and fear that comes from "the ruin of the wicked".

Sometimes it becomes even more personal

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still. You lose your job because of a lie that is told by a fellow employee. A spouse wickedly destroys a marriage. A gossip wickedly and intentionally destroys your reputation. All this is the result of the “ruin of the wicked”.

And if pessimism has not already overwhelmed us, there is even more discouraging news at the end of Proverbs 3:25 where the writer says, “Do not be afraid of sudden panic, or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes.” Not “if” it comes, but “when”. There seems an inevitability about it. Frankly, it is easy to fear in our sinful world.

Prior to his retirement, my father-in-law was a social worker in Newark, New Jersey. He told us about things done to children in the restrooms of New Jersey shopping centers that are too shocking for me to share with you. Since hearing it, I find it hard not to be afraid to ever let a child enter a public restroom alone.

It’s easy to fear in advance what might happen in the future. But God doesn’t want us to live that way. God wants our lives be free of fear. That’s why Paul tells us in II Timothy 1:7, “God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and love and self-control.”

Proverbs 3:25-26 does far more than tell us not to be afraid of calamity and wickedness. It goes on to tell us how: “. . . for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.”

In other words, we have confidence in God, we depend on him, and here’s what he does for us. First of all, he protects us: “. . . (he) will keep your foot from being caught.” That does not mean that God guarantees freedom from calamity or wickedness. But it does mean that God often protects us from difficulty and always protects us from disaster. He protects us from many of the calamities and much of the wickedness in the world. All the “near misses” and “avoided tragedies” are because of God’s providential care. So, next time you almost have a car accident, almost get robbed or almost drown, make sure you thank God who “kept your foot from being caught”!

But, even “when it comes”, even when we are the victims of calamity or wickedness, God protects us from the complete devastation that would come without him. He brings good out of bad. He gets us through.

We can be absolutely confident that God will protect us from many difficulties and that he will never let even the worst of disasters ruin us, separate us from him or end up completely wrong. We need not be afraid. The Lord will be our confidence. We can depend on him and be assured that he will protect us.

And if that’s not enough, the Bible also tells us in 1 Peter 5:7 that God cares for us: “Cast all your anxiety on him, for he cares for you.” God says, “My child, you don’t need to worry because no matter what happens I’ll be right there with you and I’ll take special care of you.”

You may ask him, “Even if I’m struck by lightning?” And his answer is, “Even if you are struck by lightning!” “Even if I’m robbed?” “Even if you’re robbed!” “Even if I get run over by a car?” “Even if you’re run over by a car!” “Even if my worst fears come true?” “Even if that happens!”

How will he take care of us? He doesn’t say!

Suppose you were to go into the emergency room of a hospital when you’re in good health and ask, “How are you going to take care of me?” The emergency room employee asks, “What’s the matter with you?” You say, “There’s nothing the matter with me right now, but there might be some day.” And the nurse says, “Look, don’t worry. If and when anything happens we promise we’ll be here and we’ll give you the best care we can. You can trust us!”

That’s what God says: “Don’t worry. If and when anything happens to you I promise I’ll be right here and I’ll give you the best care I can. You can trust me!”

“Cast all your anxiety on him, for he cares for you!”

We can have confidence in God because of his protection, because of his care and because

of his grace. James 4:6 says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” And in II Corinthians 12:9 God guarantees that he will give sufficient grace for whatever we face when he has says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Those words were spoken to Paul after he was turned down by God the third time in his request for relief from a physical malady. God said no to a cure but yes to the grace to cope and be victorious.

God’s grace is sufficient when the need arises. He does not give grace for old age when we are young. He waits to provide grace for parenting only when we have children. He waits to give grace to face calamity and wickedness until “it comes”. But we can be absolutely confident that God will give all the grace we need when we need it! So, “do not be afraid of sudden panic, or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes . . . the Lord will be your confidence.” But when the time comes God promises that his grace is sufficient.

Protection. Care. Grace. They all culminate in confidence, depending on the Lord, instead of living in worry and fear! Philippians 4:6-7 may say it best:

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

But does it really work? Yes, it really works!

I saw that for myself in Bogota, Columbia. Charleen and I stayed in the Wycliffe Group House from which Chet Bitterman had been kidnapped by a group of guerillas. Seven weeks later his bullet-ridden body was found in a hijacked bus on the city streets. I saw the confidence his fellow missionaries had in the Lord as they lived under a similar threat. I heard them

pray for the salvation of their enemies. I saw peace where fear would be expected. It works!

And what works for them will work for you! “Do not be afraid of sudden panic, or the ruin of the wicked, when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.”

We need not be afraid. The Lord will be our confidence. We can depend on him and be assured that he will protect us.

But there is one more thing that must be said. To leave it unsaid would be a terrible omission. It is the fact that in order to have confidence in the Lord you must first belong to

the Lord! You see, these promises are not for everyone. They are only for Christians. And you are a Christian only if you have personally accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Have you?

Are you sure?

Would you like to?

Here’s how. There’s something you must know — and something you must do. First, you must know that you are a sinner in need of salvation and that God’s Son, Jesus, died on the cross and rose from the dead to provide your salvation.

Did you know that? Do you believe that?

Then you must accept Jesus as your only Savior from sin, trusting in him alone for forgiveness and eternal life. You must acknowledge him as the Lord of your life, from this day on . . . and forever!

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