

Are We Not Afraid?

Worship: Beyond the Ritual series

by Chris Famisaran

All right. Good morning, everyone. How are we doing today? Y' all survived the heat this week. It's been a week. Let's pray.

God, as we take a moment now to reflect and look forward to your soon coming. Be with us. Open our hearts and our minds as we talk about fear today. Help us to leave trusting and convicted with confidence in you. In Jesus name, amen.

If you look at the screen, what an amazing picture, right? Thank you, Bill, for building that. And you can look at this in several ways. The first is the immediate. You see this, it seems like, is it fire, is it flames, or is it light? And here in this case, it's light. You see the character at the bottom with arms wide open. Is this person scared to death? Or are they looking gleefully and hopefully with wonder? Is this God? Is God returning? And then you see in the backdrop as well, little stars, which I was reminded by Bill, you know, those stars, they are all what they're made up of, what galaxies? It's not just star. How big and vast is our universe that God desires to be with us on this little speck of a planet? This image gives me hope, it gives me confidence in how great and big our God is now.

As a child, okay, when you got mail, did you look forward with gleeful anticipation? Something came in the mail for me. Maybe it was your birthday and a family member sent you a little check or maybe a \$20 bill to get pizza or toy or whatever. Right? Now, fast forward when you get the mail as an adult, how does that feel?

There's a young lady by the name of Neha Wright. Her story was shared. I don't know if it was a magazine or an article or what, but Freddie Chanel writes several years ago, I think it was in 2023. Neha was 29 at the time, and she checked her mailbox. And in the latest batch of mail, she realized the moment had finally arrived. Her childhood love of receiving a letter in the mail

had been replaced with a very adult fear of receiving a letter in the mail. Niha's parents recall that as a kid, she would teem with excitement. As the article says, when she got a letter addressed to her, she would run to open it. Neha's mother said most of the time it was something boring like a postcard from a cousin or a school paper. Or do you all have pen pals when you were younger? Okay, I tried. I was not very successful. But you would look with anticipation. Your pen pal, what's going on in their lives, Right? It was way Better when grandma or grandpa or an aunt or an uncle or somebody sent you a little cash, right, so you could do something with it. But here she checked the mailbox every evening after school to see if there was a letter that was sent. And as she got to her adulthood, she realized that seeing a letter maybe sent a little chill down that spine of yours, it sort of was up in the air whether she wanted to even open this letter up. And she continued, it's almost always my electric bill or a notice for the bank. Two of the scariest things a girl can receive. And I'm pretty sure that if I don't open it, I can't be legally held responsible for it, right? Eh, depends on how litigious. Some say, though, that this is untrue. And when reporters tried to inform her of it, she literally put her hands up. I'm not hearing it. La la la la la la la la la.

Ever felt that way? You know, the letter's getting really serious. Well, when they send you the first notice and then they send you the notice in yellow, maybe orange, and the last one is usually it's pink or red, right? Now, I've never received one of those letters, but in organizations I have worked with, I have seen those kinds of letters. And that's not a good letter usually because what you're behind, you don't want to open those letters.

And so Neha's adult disdain for mail does not, however, apply to packages. Because when you order a package, it's something that you purchase that you look for with gleeful, again, anticipation. Maybe it's a part. It's makeup. It could be a pillow, anything, right? So Neha's joy in receiving packages is awesome. But receiving mail, especially when it has an address, professionally done, gives her a little scaredness.

Now, when we look at this world, there are some things that just can be naturally scary. You think about the physical environment, you know, loud noises, you're driving around the highway. A couple weeks ago, I was driving home around 10 o' clock at night, and all of a sudden I heard like a bang.

And I kind of actually, it almost seems like I felt it. Even after the Fourth of July, somebody decided. No, Fourth of July, somebody. I was driving down a park and somebody was literally lighting fireworks that I know for sure are not legal in this country, at least in California. And as I drove by, my car rattled because they were lighting up literally in parking lot of a park, and everybody in the surrounding vicinity was having to be on the receiving end of this obnoxiousness. As you can tell, I don't really like fireworks that are lit within close proximal range. Okay. Have your fireworks. Just do it in a safe, responsible manner, not in the middle of the street. And when I have to come home on 4th of July, I wonder about the underside of my car. What am I going to drive over? Right.

Sudden movements, maybe a pain signal in your body telling you to react that is there for a reason to protect you. But there's also other elements, such as high places, deep water storms, maybe even are you scared of the dark? How about startling creatures like spiders, stinks that triggers alarms, maybe bad memories. You go to the doctor and you had to have your blood taken. Okay, maybe for some of us who have been on medication, at some point you have to have your blood drawn. Certain amount of time I had to do so when I was a teenager. And I just remember, like with dread, going to get my blood drawn. And then of course, you also have maybe the social and emotional stress. Social pressures.

Speaking on this platform, to be fair, I get nervous every time I get up here. Okay, right. Or Linda, we talked about that a couple weeks ago. I don't get anxiety, super anxiety, but I definitely. My stomach gets butterflies every time I get on the platform, even though I prepare. And I think that's actually a good thing. Would you be worried if I just came up here arrogantly and just saying, here's what I gotta say versus Lord made this. This, especially this series? I have a little trepidation because it's very important. It's important to us. As Seventh-day Adventists. Being rejected or failing a task maybe creates deep worry, uncertainty of not knowing what will happen in the future or a sense of you're not able to control things. I think also can be very revealing and very scary.

I did a search on what are Americans most afraid of. And in 2025, here are the top fears. And it changed a little bit. I'm actually going to start from number 10 and go up. Okay.

Number 10, government tracking of personal data.

Polluting of oceans, rivers and lakes is number nine.

Use of nuclear weapons is number eight.

Pollution of drinking water. Polluting of drinking water is number seven.

Number five was tied with the US becoming involved in another world war.

People that you love who are dying or will die.

Number four was cyber terrorism.

Number three, economic or financial collapse.

Number two, people I love becoming seriously ill.

And then number one, this surprised me because it was a little lower a few years ago, but it went to the top and it makes sense. Corrupt Government officials.

I know some of you are. Mm. There's a lack of trust in our government, and not just the top, but everywhere. And when you have the head of an organization that you can't trust because you feel that they are corrupt, how does that make you feel in everybody else? There's this low grade anxiety. It can be low grade or it can be high grade. That just when you walk or when you drive or wherever you go, people are tense. Amen.

What does this all mean for us? Is it okay to be anxious? Or is there something that we can look to? But going back, I think one of the biggest reasons why we're fearful is because we're unable to control our destiny, our life. At times there's some things we have to deal with, things that happen to us that we cannot control. The only thing we can control is our response to it. But there are some things beyond our control that can be very frustrating. In scripture, we're going to look at a couple of passages today.

I want to go to Titus 2, verse 13 first. Okay. Titus 2, verse 13. So buckle in. We're going to get through this. And I love this first part of this passage. Titus 2, verse 13. If you've never read the Bible, Titus is a small little couple of chapters towards the end. It's one of the last things that Paul wrote. So I think if you got Thessalonians, Timothy, I think then it's Titus. Titus 2:13.

It says, while we wait for the what? The blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now what is our name? We're Downey. What? Downey, Florence, Seventh day. No, sorry. Downey Florence. Okay. I haven't been officially informed yet, Gustavo, so I have to technically say Downey-Florence, SDA Church. But what does the SDA represent? Seventh-day Adventist. What's the seventh day mean? We worship on the Sabbath. But the Adventist. Or the advent of what? The arrival of Jesus to come back to take us home. Amen. Okay. That's who we are. We have this blessed hope, a promise in the future that Jesus will return, as has been promised in the scriptures, to live forever with Jesus. That is a blessed hope that we can look forward to. We're going to come back to that again.

And so here's another thing that I did, too. You know, we're kind of fearful or what is true, what is not. I googled, I looked up Merriam Webster. They always have a word of the year. You know what the word of the year in 2025 was? This is going to blow your minds. I was kind of upset. The word was slop. And some of you were thinking, like, what? How. Why some Gen Z kid make that up? I have nieces who are nieces and nephews who are of that age. And there's just some days I love them, I hug them, and I just don't understand them because of the way they talk. But then I also go back to the time that we grew up. And I'm not going to say certain shows because I don't want to. I do not want to give them credit, but there were some shows that maybe had a character, and I'm not going to mention that character because you know what I'm talking about. That just. It didn't make sense.

Okay, so slop could mean today, AI. Fake news, weird images, cheesy ads, and just bad, bad content or screen pollution where you put maybe a video or a meme or whatever up. It's low grade and you can't tell is this real or not? Or the slop could be how public mood is being experienced. A number of people are tired of just this fake computer stuff because if you watch it long enough, you're gonna get influenced. Right? The other day I was watching a wonderful, beautiful video of a man who had lost his dog or had to give it up because he had to move and he couldn't take the dog with him. So for 14 or 18 months, he did not be able to. He was not able to see the dog. And then I did the horrible thing. I made a mistake. And I went to the comments and the comments said,

that's AI. I was like, no, because I had a beautiful memory, a beautiful thought, such a beautiful idea. Guy reunites with his dog and it's all AI. And I looked closely and I realized it's fake.

We're now at the point, how long is it going to be till where we can tell or not tell what's real, what's fake? That's scary. And I think, to be honest, a lot of us, we're already there. It's hard to tell what is real. Some of the top words were gerrymandering. Touch grass, meaning you leave the Internet to go back to the real world. Or performative acting like you care or you like things to just look good.

So all of this points to the fact that I realized, again, I was reminded, the older I get, the less I know. The older I get, the less I know. There is so much in this world to be discovered and to learn. And I Don't have the time. And I don't think I have the bandwidth in my brain to know everything. And that's okay. I think it's good. Because if we knew everything, how would life be? I think it'd be too easy. I love the sense of. There's always a sense of wonder and a sense of the ability to grow.

Now, if we continue on, I think it's important to know that the older I get, the less I know. Means I have to trust God for wisdom and understanding. Not just me, but all of us. Okay. We don't always understand the big picture of why things happen. Right. But there are times where we have to be patient, even when we're really extremely impatient. And it's a recognition for the need to be humble and trusting in God. Now, I titled this series I'm not Afraid. And when you first think about that. Yeah, I mean, we're Adventists. We're confident this and that. But then I realized, wait, that kind of sounds a little arrogant, Maybe a little. So I revised it. And so I led with, I'm not afraid to be a little provocative. I clickbait a little bit. Okay. I'll be honest with you. But I'm not afraid when I put my full trust and confidence in Jesus. Does that work? Okay.

And so I want to now go to John 14. John shares a few things that are important for us to know. John 14:1, 3. We all there. Okay. Do not let your hearts be what troubled you. Believe in God. Believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I'm going where? Going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and

prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me. That you may also be where I am.

It's a beautiful passage because it's another reminder that we're not here to live on earth forever. We're gonna be reunited with God. But Jesus says here, he's in this middle of a dinner with all the disciples for a number of chapters, and he's sharing. Here are some things that are gonna happen. I'm gonna go for a way. And some of them kind of freak out, but you're here. Why? Why are you leaving? There's more that Jesus has to do, but he's giving them some things to think about and reflect on for the future. Do not let your hearts be troubled.

And this is beautiful, right? It gives us hope, but hope also, it's not wishful. Thinking it's confidence in the faithfulness of God. We believe because we know that God will do. How that happens, though, can cause impatience on our part because we want to know things now, right? We don't like the microwave. We like. We prefer the microwave method versus the slow braise where it takes hours. We want things immediate, we want it now. And life is not like that.

If you go further, let's go to verse 25. Okay? All of this I have spoken while still with you, but the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things that will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace, I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Again, that's a reminder. Do not let your hearts be what? Don't be troubled, don't be fearful. Don't be afraid. Have confidence me. I'm going to follow through. But also there is a promise here in that God has sent what the Holy Spirit. We're not alone in this endeavor.

And so while Jesus may not be physically here, we have the Holy Spirit to help mold us, to shape us, to move forward, to prod us. Hey, maybe you shouldn't do that, or this is a better way of doing things. The other thing is God meets us when we are fearful. I think sometimes fear is actually good because it keeps us humble. And so how do we balance that tension where in real life there are real things that we probably could be fearful of? Right?

You see that video of the lifeguard having to rescue a couple kids? Rookie guard. Oh, I was so happy. I'm a. I'm a former lifeguard trainer. I never worked the beach. I only worked pools. But I finally thought, man, lifeguards are finally getting the recognition and respect that they deserve because they work hard. That situation, I've been surfing my whole life as well. You watch that move, that water move in with how much power that kid would never have gotten out. And you could also see even the guards, even with by himself. He couldn't do it by himself. He had to have one of his teammates help pull this kid out. There were several stories of this happening within the last couple of weeks. And good thing that guard was there watching over my first sermon. What did I talk about? I talked about lifeguards, right? Jesus is your lifeguard. Jesus will never leave or abandon you and is always watching. But sometimes there are places where we do get. We're fearful.

Tyler Stanton I think he's the pastor of the Bridgetown Church. He shares this. I came across this. This quote this week. Why is waiting such a part of spirituality? Because waiting is where faith actually becomes what necessary. I mean, when you think about it, a God of immediate gratification requires. No, what faith. It's in the waiting and the silence where faith actually develops. And so the three days that exist between the cross and the resurrection teach us what? That the presence of silence never equals the absence of God. And the eight days that exist between Thomas perhaps screaming in doubt into the sky and God actually appearing to him. Teach us that God is in both the miraculous appearance and the eight days of silence. The presence of silence never means the absence of God. And so the challenge of waiting is to actually allow faith to. To do its work, trusting that on the other side of this period of silence, I will have a richer, deep, more alive faith than I did before.

Oh, I had chills when I heard that if we live on life, if we live life on earth here long and long enough, you're going to be fearful of something happening. But we're not alone. We have the Holy Spirit. And if we trust in God, even when there is sometimes silence, that doesn't mean that God has abandoned us.

Let's jump over to Romans 8. Romans 8:18. Okay. And this is a perspective of how do we see the resurrection and how do we deal with suffering? Okay.

Romans 8, verse 18, verse 18. Go there. Okay. I consider that our present, what sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

And keep your finger there, because we're going to come back to Romans 8. I also believe that the resurrection changes the way that we see our suffering. God suffered the worst for all of us. Amen. And so here on earth as well. This is not a beautiful, wonderful place. At all times, it can be challenging.

Let's jump to verse 31, one of the most powerful passages, what we're going to read here. Okay. Romans 8:31. It says, what then shall we say in response to things, these things? If God is for us, who can be what against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. How will he also not also along with him graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those who God has chosen? It is God who what justifies? Who then is the one who condemns no one? Christ Jesus, who died more than that, was raised to life, is at the right hand of God, and is also what interceding moving ahead for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, for your sake, we face death all day long. We're considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels or demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither heights nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

And as we walk with God, we're gonna have the joys and love that is beyond understanding. But there are also going to be times where there are going to be stories of pain in our lives and struggle. You look at the Bible, how many of them had an easy life? None of them did. All of our biblical heroes all struggled at some point. And a lot of them had the D word. Doubt. They all experienced, not all, but a number of them expressed at some point some concern and some doubt. But did God abandon and leave them? Did they always get what they wanted, exactly how they wanted? No. And the same story is true for us brothers and sisters as we move forward.

While life can be challenging, there are things that it's. I'm not going to say it's easy, but sometimes there are moments where we are afraid because that's who we are. In some ways that's part of our DNA. But if we choose to, then say no. I have the promises in scripture and I know my God is not going to abandon me, even when it seems like everything else is telling you the opposite. Put your trust in God.

Any journey you go on has to have a vision or objective. Why do you go? Why did you get in your cars and drive here? Because you wanted to be here at church. You wanted to worship with God, you wanted to see your church family, you wanted to be together versus well, you could have got in the car and you could have drove to the beach, you could drove the mountains, you could have drove anywhere. You could have drove the donut shop. Right, but would that have accomplished what you wanted to do today? No. You wanted to be here. And so life, you have to have vision and a mission. You have to know where you're going. And I think at Seventh-day Adventist, the context for us is such that we desire to want to know who God is and to be ready for that wonderful, beautiful day. Amen. But also I want to be loved. I want to hug, I want to get together. I want to share and do life together.

So I'm going to steal Bill's phrase. What do we want to do here at Downey Church? We want to make what? heaven crowded. That's why we are here. So when we look at the whole perspective, when we look at it from a macro, a big view, it sometimes kind of feels a little daunting, maybe a little overwhelming. And maybe we have to. We have to have perspective of the macro in that Jesus is returning. Beautiful, awesome, wonderful. But what are the next steps? What are the things that I need to do to be able to get to that point? And we're going to talk about that more in the next couple of weeks.

But ultimately we have to keep perspective that we read in Titus 2, verse 13. Actually, I want to go back now. Let's go back to Titus. And I want to read a couple of verses even before that. Now, okay. We have to know where we're going. We have to have hope.

So Titus 2:11, 13. For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to who? All people. Not just me or a few people, but all people. It teaches us to say that no to ungodliness and worldly passions, to live self controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age.

While we wait for the blessed hope. We're waiting for the blessed hope. I want you to take that away, okay? While we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, meaning the blessed hope, guides how we live today. How should we be living in anticipation of Jesus returning? Should we be kind? Should we be loving? Should we take the example of Jesus and replicate that or just act like a complete jerk? No, we take on the characteristics because why are we waiting to act like we're supposed to in heaven and just have a complete turnaround here on earth? Saying, I'm here on earth, I'm going to do everything, I'm going to live. Life is going to be great. It's not really great because you live that life long enough, it's going to become miserable. Why wait? Live it now. Live with integrity, because you don't have to worry about anything behind you. Move forward with confidence and trust in Jesus. So to do so requires something, though, that all of us can practice today, and that is prayer.

The last passage I want to go to. Let's go to Philippians 4. Okay. Philippians a little bit to the left. Philippians 4, verses 4 through 7. Are we there? Okay. What does it say? First to do rejoice. I'm not gonna lie. I didn't wanna rejoice. The other day when I woke up, I was like, lord, I need a few more hours. And in my prayer, I always try to lead with a little bit of praise and glory to God. I didn't want to praise God that moment. Like, why do I have to wake up now? But I think it's important. When we start all prayers, we need to recognize who God is and majesty. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. That's another trait that we should probably carry out and practice. Be gentle. The Lord is how far. Do not be what? Anxious about anything. But in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.

So one of the key antidotes is in everything, in the good and the bad, Rejoice, but take everything to God. You got a problem, pray about it. You got an argument with somebody, pray about it. Somebody mistreated you, pray about it. Or think about it before you speak, because you could make it worse.

As followers of Jesus, faithful followers of Jesus, may you lead with trust and prayer in God. And when God responds, though, take action. Don't wait. Faith doesn't mean. Though, okay?

Faith does not mean you can sit on the Lazy Boy or lay in bed waiting for God to just open opportunities. Sometimes God may do that, but the reality is, most of the time, what do we have to do? We have to knock on opportunity. And sometimes some of those doors, they ain't going to even open. Number two, when you knock, they're going to open the door, look at you, at you, and say, nope, and slam it in front of you.

And the third opportunity, the door opens. But guess what? What do you have to do? You have to walk through. And sometimes when you open that door, it may not be clear, it may not be brightly lit, it may be a little dark and shadowy. But when you trust in God, you still have to move forward. And that requires what? Faith. So don't be afraid, but trust in God as God leads, you have full confidence now to be fair, though, okay? This is not something where I just say, okay, just trust in God and you'll be fine, okay?

The reality is we deal with a number of things that the devil just does not want us to move forward. I will say if you're dealing with a real issue, such as a health issue, or maybe there are times where you need to talk to somebody. If it's a professional, go and do so get help. Why do we dedicate a month especially that we don't like to talk about, but among men, we always say, I'm fine. When somebody said they were fine, I wanted to say something that I can't say here because I knew he was lying to me. And the only reason I showed up is because I cared enough and we talked about it. I can't tell you enough how many friends I've lost. Talk. So there may be times where you have to seek help and it may be professional and that's okay. There are individuals who train professionally to help the other thing too. Like, you know, guys, we do, we like going to the doctor. We don't. And I'm not just saying guys, a lot of us just, we don't like to go. But if you're hobbling along or your arm is shaped in the wrong way, the Internet, the YouTube baffles and really entertains me because I see people try to do stunts and they do the stunt and it doesn't go well and you can tell something is obvious and they're kind of just chilling like, no, I'm gonna get up and go do it again. And you're thinking, you're screaming in your head, you don't look right physically. We

need to get you to the ambulance, go to the doctor, get help. It's okay to ask for help because if you don't take that step, then what are you gonna do? You're gonna be in the same place. You're going to be holding yourself back. And as hard as you want to move forward with God by not getting that help, you could also be saying limiting how God can help you because we are afraid to let go of what's wrong or what's in the past. Now there are some things we can do as well. Okay?

So number one, even though we have faith, we have to have action. But don't just go off and run willy nilly. Speak and reach out to God and allow God to help reveal and guide you. Being passive, being stuck, it's not going to necessarily work out. Sometimes God responds, but sometimes just by sitting there.

How can you move forward when you want to resolve a difficult issue? Pray about it, ask God, help me to get past this or to deal with this. And then when you have that difficult conversation, the gorilla or King Kong that's been on your shoulders maybe for a couple of days, months, years, gets off your back and what can you do? You can breathe when you're trying to deal with a difficult issue. Sometimes we get so narrow minded, so vision focused that maybe, just maybe, what are some other opportunities? What are some other ways of addressing this issue?

Think outside the box. Being passive and not doing about anything is going to only make you more frustrated and more painful. And focus on what you can change. What can you influence? At the end of the day, align yourself with God's principles and vision for your life.

So as we move forward this month, we're going to be diving into some topics. We're going to be talking about literally the second coming. We're going to be talking about the great controversy and what does it mean? How can I now live moving forward until that wonderful, beautiful, glorious day? Does that sound good?

All right, so this week I want to ask, what causes you the most anxiety about the future? Okay. What causes you about the most anxiety about the future? Some of you just, I already know I've been thinking about it here all day and

some of you may be, hey, you've been good. That's great. But what is it this week?

When you're feeling anxious, pause, take a timeout and identify your true emotions. I don't want you just though to identify. I want you to tell God honestly, what are those feelings? Share those feelings with God and seek God in prayer on how to resolve it and do it. Because it all means nothing if you just sit there. Have faith and allow God to open doors and walk through them. Confront your fears and anxieties.

Let's pray. God, there's a lot to think about, especially when we're dealing with anxiety and a lot of things on our plates. Help us to have clarity. May we not be afraid and fully trust and have confidence in you leading the way in Jesus name, Amen.

Grace and peace, everyone.