



PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

Program #5103

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WELCOME

Lydia Talbot: Welcome to “30 Good Minutes!” We’re glad you’ve joined us for this half-hour of reflection on faith. I’m Lydia Talbot.

Daniel Pawlus: And I’m Daniel Pawlus. Our guest today is the Rev. Dr. Benjamin Reaves. He’s a long-time *30 Good Minutes* speaker with keen insights into the spiritual life. He’ll be talking to us about how to face our fears.

Lydia Talbot: We also have Christine Chakoian with us today. She’ll tell us how her own experience of being afraid helped her to be a better pastor to her congregation.

Daniel Pawlus: And we begin with the story of a woman whose brush with death on a Chicago commuter train changed her life forever by reawakening her relationship with God. Here’s Lisa Klare to tell her story.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Lisa Klare: The first thing I remember was just the sounds. Even before the pain that I felt I remember the sounds. You know, crying, sobbing, screaming, people praying. I mean there was just sound everywhere and it was not good. Then you sort of have this foggy moment of, “Oh my God, what happened?” The train car that I was on was a very, very old cast iron, concrete floor, just a monster of a train. It plowed three-quarters of the way through the rear car of this double-decker, kind of tin can they described it, and that’s where most of the casualties occurred. When I woke up, I was encased in metal.

I was a senior in high school and I had been invited to participate in a work-study program my senior year. So I hopped a train, usually by about 7:20, 7:25 in the morning, to go downtown to the Time-Life building where my job was located. And it was the 30th of October, but that year we had already had snow. We were maybe three-quarters of the way to Randolph Street, around McCormick Place. I, to this day all these years later, don’t remember the impact.

First, one of us asked the other, “Are we alive? What is this?” And we realized then that nobody knew we were there. And so we decided we had to start crying out so we started calling out and we heard footsteps. And I’ll never forget the footsteps. You could hear footsteps approaching and then someone saying, “Oh, God, don’t tell me there is someone alive in there!” Once they found us, they assessed the situation. So here we were at the bottom of the twisted metal of two trains. So there were bodies stacked above us. If they lifted it all up and pulled us out, we would

hemorrhage because the heavy metal was acting as a tourniquet on our legs. So they decided that what they needed to do was peel the wreckage and the bodies off like lettuce leaves above us. It ended up taking six hours and it was cold. They brought a fireman in and they said just stay with them, you have to keep them calm. At one point a chaplain came and gave us last rites. That was not a happy moment but the fireman was very cool. He was like, “No, no, no, no. This guy just needs the practice. He’s new at this. They just come around and pray.” And he settled us right down. It was amazing.

There was another fireman that came by and asked if I could see the sign that was hanging in the wreckage, practically over my head. And what I remember of the sign was that it was “Jesus Saves” or something along that line. And it was a huge marker in my life. When I was in the hospital after the train accident, I really felt that I wanted to work out this God thing. That sign in the train kind of did something to me and I needed to know. Someone, after one of my surgeries, sent me the Daily Word which was daily messages, readings. Something about it drew me back again and again. When you watch spirituality take root and begin to blossom, it is a remarkable experience.

INTRODUCTION

Lydia Talbot: Lisa Klare’s near death experience – and the spiritual hunger it uncovered – remind me that God is present in every moment. Our thanks to Lisa for sharing her story.

Now, let me tell you about today’s speaker. The Rev. Dr. Benjamin Reaves is a minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He serves as Vice President of Mission and Ministries for the Adventist Health System in Orlando, Florida. Ben holds a doctorate in ministry from Chicago Theological Seminary and is the former president of Oakwood College. We’re always happy to have him back on *30 Good Minutes*, and today marks the 17th appearance of Ben on this program. Welcome, Ben.

MESSAGE

Benjamin Reaves: Thank you, Lydia.

It’s been on my mind. Facing fear. Oh, not a sermon “Facing Fear” but *facing* fear. Its not the first time its been on my mind. I remember when I was 7 or 8, staying awake half the night because my grandfather’s coat hanging on the door looked like someone in the doorway. My solution to the fear was to put my head under the covers. If I couldn’t see it then it couldn’t see me. How childish! But would you believe at 74 my wife had been hanging clothing on a rack and rolled the clothing rack in the hallway. Engrossed in study, I forgot the rack. When I turned out the light to go through the hall, fear enveloped me.

I know I’m not unique, for all of us at various times and in various situations are facing fear. The real issue is, *how* do we face fear? Deny it, repress it, run away from it?

You see, it’s on my mind ever since I noted a hoarseness, a difficulty in clearing my throat. After three weeks I decided to visit my primary physician and then things moved swiftly. Following his exam he directed me to an ear, nose and throat specialist. His examination proceeded and after use of his special instruments, in a matter of fact way, he informed me my right vocal cord

was paralyzed. At that moment I was face to face with fear, that somehow the world had caved in.

Next I was directed to a series of CT scans which ruled out causal factors such as growths or lesions or tumors. However, they did reference an aortic aneurysm. Then facing fear was really on my mind, since my father had succumbed to an aneurysm in the chest at the age of 53.

For the next few days I was facing the fear that my life as I had known it was over. As I look back on it I am saddened that I was so distraught over the loss of my voice that I failed to note that if it hadn't been for the paresis or paralysis of the vocal cord, the dilation of the aorta would not have been noted and subjected to attentive monitoring. During those days of tests and unresolved questions I found myself a frequent visitor to the land of midnight meditation. Where as Dottie Rambo penned it, "I would run to the rock." During those times a small verse took on mountainous proportions. The text in Psalms 56:3 that says, "When I am afraid I will put my trust in thee, O God."

Note, it's *when*, not *if* I am afraid. And who is this talking of being afraid? David! You mean this is David, the giant killer? Yes! The one who, while others in fear ran from the giant, ran toward the giant. How come? "When I am afraid, I will put my trust in thee, O God." Another reading — the Contemporary English Version — puts it this way, "When I am afraid, I will keep on trusting you."

Now, the dictionary tells me: Fear is a normal human emotional reaction, a built-in survival mechanism signaling us of danger and preparing us to deal with it. However the Bible mentions two specific types of fear. The first type is beneficial and is to be encouraged: fear of the Lord. This type of fear is a reverential awe of God; a reverence for his power and glory. The second type is a detriment and is to be not only discouraged, but overcome. That fear, as one writer puts it, is a dark room where negatives are developed.

David H. Roper reminds us, while Jesus doesn't condemn it, he doesn't want us to be crippled by it. So when Jesus said to his disciples, "Do not be afraid," in each case he used a verb tense that suggests continuance. In other words, he told them, "Don't keep on fearing."

But the sad fact is fear plays a major role in people's lives. All of us have fears and some would say we have good reason to be afraid. Just when we thought it was safe to go back on an airplane, or down into the subways, or travel abroad, fear over terrorist attacks is back in America big-time.

But most of the fears we carry around aren't big societal fears. They are the personal fears that have to do with individual problems that we each face: rising mortgage pressures, increasing debt, the specter of job loss, health issues like cancer, heart attacks and strokes. It's a fear that is like "negative faith" and is based on doubt that God is still in control of things.

Well I believe that God wants us to exercise our faith in the face of every fear-filled circumstance we face in life. Evaluating every situation from the mind-set that he is Lord over all things in heaven and on Earth.

Yes it's been on my mind, but like David I have discovered that there's nothing like the promises of God to enable us to face our fears.

No, I can't recommend that headline hyped nasal spray for the part of the brain that controls fear. I can testify of a divine promise for the heart, mind and life.

A promise that says in Isaiah 41:10, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

And to that Divine promise I respond like David. In Psalms 56:11, "In God have I put my trust; I will not be afraid what man can do unto me." What the psalmist is saying is that regardless of what happens, he will trust in God. This is the key to facing fear, total and complete trust in God. A refusal to give into fear. Instead, turning to God even in the darkest times and trusting in God to make things right. This trust delivers from fear that freezes and panic that paralyzes. This trust takes comfort in God's words to us in Isaiah 41:10, of The Message Bible: "Don't panic. I'm with you. There's no need to fear for I'm your God. I'll give you strength. I'll help you. I'll hold you steady, keep a firm grip on you."

Pray with me: Precious Lord, thank you for holding my hand. Amen.

CONVERSATION

Daniel Pawlus: If you'd like a free printed or audio copy of the message you just heard from Dr. Benjamin Reaves, we'll tell you how to place an order at the end of the program. Or you can visit our website at 30goodminutes.org to watch the video or download the text anytime. Now, let's talk with Ben Reaves. Ben, thank you for being with us again today. We always enjoy you making the trip to journey with us.

Ben Reaves: It's always my pleasure.

Daniel Pawlus: I wanted to start by asking, you've been very willing to share some of your personal health struggles these last few years. I know last year you had another issue you were dealing with and I wondered if this has given you an opportunity to perhaps deepen your faith in facing the fear of what your body is throwing at you right now. It sounds like you've turned to your prayer life and used that as an opportunity in this instance.

Ben Reaves: Absolutely! It has moved me from the position of one who is seeking to guide others to find comfort in their times of stress and recognizing that I needed the comfort in my stress that is found in that time of midnight meditation, a special time for me.

Lydia Talbot: And what an amazing formula, an inspiring formula, you've given our viewers and all of us who have just heard you speak because I know it was difficult for you to speak, Ben. Wasn't it?

Ben Reaves: Yes, it was.

Lydia Talbot: And you really wondered if you should do this program?

Ben Reaves: I thought very seriously about calling and saying, well, I don't think so. But it dawned on me: this is part of the story, this is who I am at this point in time and God is holding me in his hand. And so I'm thankful for every opportunity to lift up his name.

Lydia Talbot: When you were so afraid, that moment when you learned the diagnosis and you made those visits to the land of midnight meditations, as you say, how did you learn that kind of trust in God? I mean, where was that on your journey? In your childhood, your parents? How did that evolve, that kind of solid, sustained by faith and ability to trust the journey?

Ben Reaves: It's a kind of a walk of a lifetime. Again and again, meeting different issues, different times, different difficulties. But then always renewing at each time that sense and reminder that God is with me. His hand is on me and underneath me are the everlasting arms. That is continual kind of journey that I have experienced again.

Daniel Pawlus: It's interesting to me when I hear you talk, Ben. It seems as though this fear provides an opportunity for you really to be in the moment and deal with this. It's almost a gift, a gift of struggle to be certain, but by having to face that, you're absolutely in the moment and in prayer with God, dealing with the reality of what is right now.

Ben Reaves: Absolutely. In fact, I think to myself that I have preached before about fear but I think that the next sermon on fear will have a different ring to it, a different tone, because this is fresh in my mind. And I was surprised at how I lost sight of the big picture and became threatened by the small part of it, which was the vocal cord.

Daniel Pawlus: Well, it's so important to what you do. I mean we could certainly understand your concern about that. But what I think is very neat is that it's an opportunity for us to stop and realize, in the moment, that God is handing us in a way a gift to stop and say, wait a second, this is what's important for you at this time.

Lydia Talbot: Life is not a dress rehearsal. That's what we're learning, isn't it? And when you said in your message that you realized that life as you know it may be changed forever, everybody has that fear from one time or another when they get a call, an unexpected call about a tragedy, the death of a loved one, their own medical problems. Name it. But I guess I want to ask you, Ben, what do you say to people who don't know the God you know, who may not be people of faith, people who struggle and don't understand the language of faith that you do? What help and advice could you offer for those who don't believe in God?

Ben Reaves: The only help that I could really offer is the understanding that I have a friend. Let me tell you about my friend. And if you will hear me, I think you might find that he'll be a friend to you as well. But I speak as one who has a friend that I want to share with you. And this opportunity, this crisis if you will, has given me the chance to be reminded of the big picture. If it hadn't been for the hoarseness, the dilation of the aorta would not have been noted. God was working on my behalf and still is.

Daniel Pawlus: That's the wonderful thing that I sense from you in all of this is there is almost a deeper gratitude for having to deal with this as difficult as it is.

Ben Reaves: Absolutely!

Daniel Pawlus: I think that's a lesson we can take away from this. Even when we're thrown a real curve ball with our health or whatever it may be, that there's a blessing in that.

Lydia Talbot: And hymns helped you when you had your heart attack in 2002. What hymn is your favorite, the one that helped you get through?

Ben Reaves: Well, this time I think that my mind went back to the hymn that says God has brought me thus far and he didn't bring me this far to leave me. It's been a journey and the journey continues by his grace and I am thankful.

Daniel Pawlus: Share with us briefly, we have to go in just a few moments, but how are you feeling now and what's the forward moving progress for you as far as taking care of this?

Ben Reaves: The medical proclamation is they have not resolved what caused this.

Daniel Pawlus: We're going to wish you great luck with that. We thank you again for being here.

Ben Reaves: And thank you.

INTRODUCTION TO REFLECTION

Daniel Pawlus: And now, Christine Chakoian, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest, has this "final thought" on fear.

REFLECTION

Christine Chakoian: Fear is something most of us try to avoid, but it's a natural feeling and sometimes it can bring an unexpected grace. Last year I was terribly afraid that I'd botched part of my job. I felt the weight of responsibility on my shoulders, and worse yet, the lurching dread that I might fail. I shared this with my walking buddy, a retired businesswoman who's a member of my church. She said, "Oh, Chris, our pews are filled with people who feel this way. In business we're up against intense pressure to perform, we're just one deal away from failure." Her words washed over me like a wave of relief. And with that wave came an incredible gift: I felt a deep compassion for my congregation, and understood at a heartfelt level the stress they endure. It changed my ministry. And while I still don't welcome fear—it feels terrible!—I know that God can work great things in us, even when our courage fails.

CLOSING REMARKS

Daniel Pawlus: Thank you, Chris, and our thanks again to Dr. Benjamin Reaves, Lisa Klare, and you for joining us today on *30 Good Minutes*. I'm Daniel Pawlus.

Lydia Talbot: And I'm Lydia Talbot. Before we go, I encourage you to visit our website at 30GoodMinutes.org for more information about today's program and a wonderful collection of messages, reflections, and stories to deepen your faith. Now, from all of us at *30 Good Minutes*, may your faith be strong in the week ahead and may your heart be open to God.