



How to be a Neighbor in a Culture Full of Fear

January 20, 2017—Vol. 11, No. 3

What do you fear? I think we all have fears. I'm not a big fan of snakes and the possibility of meeting a snake gives me a certain amount of fear. I also grew up in Tornado Alley, so tornado warnings also cause me to act like a frightened little boy. Of course there are more serious fears too; some that I'm willing to share while others I keep closer to the vest. There's the fear of not being a good husband, father or son. There's the fear of failure. Sometimes fear helps to move us forward and inspires us to do great things: the fear of dying young motivates someone to change their habits and get healthy. Fear can also paralyze us, whether figuratively or literally, leaving us unable to move, interact or function in healthy ways.

I interact with a lot of different people in a lot of different places and I haven't missed the fact that lots of people are struggling with fear. Fears about losing a job. Fears about financial security or having enough to make ends meet. Fears about children and grandchildren and the direction of their lives. Fears about a changing culture or a changing world. Fears about terrorism and violence. Fears about whether the church will survive all the changes and upheaval we're witnessing and experiencing in our culture. There is a lot of fear.

Today, the United States inaugurates a new president (that probably doesn't come as news to you). I've got a lot of friends, some whom follow Jesus, some of whom do not, who are fearful on this day. They are afraid of what the next four years will bring. If another candidate had been elected, I'd have another group of friends, some of whom follow Jesus, some of whom do not, who would be fearful on this day. They would be afraid of what the next four years would bring. Both groups of friends are afraid that the country is going to go in the wrong direction. Both groups of friends have fears about what will happen to them as a result of a political party getting its way.

Words like divided and polarized are used more and more to describe this moment that we're living in. How do we respond as God's people? How do we respond as citizens of the kingdom of God? It's not just that we're living in a culture filled with fear, it's the fact that many of us are filled with fear too. Is it any wonder why the Bible offers the words "fear not" and "don't be afraid" so often?

I was reminded this morning of Luke 10:25-37:

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”
Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

We know this as the Great Commandment: Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. I’m struck that Jesus asked “which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man”. The answer was “the one who had mercy on him”. How can we show mercy in these days filled with so much fear and distrust of one another? Are you willing to be a neighbor in the days and weeks ahead, especially with those whom fear you and what you stand for or for those whom you fear?

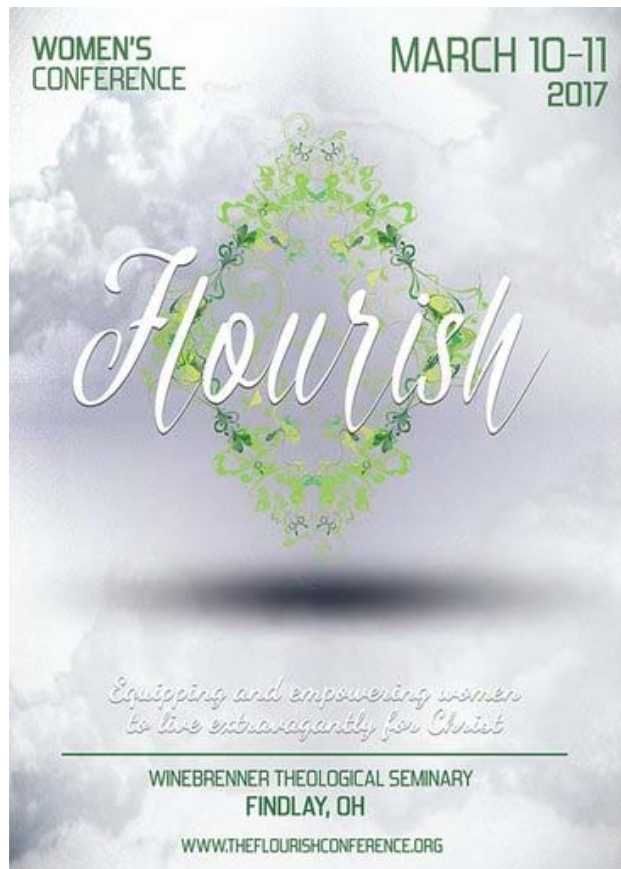
Let’s remember our first citizenship as citizens of the kingdom of God. We have a higher allegiance than to country alone.

Let’s live as good neighbors, loving others as ourselves and showing mercy to those whom may fear us or to those whom we may fear.

Let’s resist the urge to gloat, accuse or malign and remember Jesus’ command live as good neighbors, loving others as ourselves.

Christ’s Peace,

Lance



A Special Opportunity from Winebrenner Theological Seminary

The Barna Group is releasing a new report on the challenges facing pastors and other leaders in ministry. George Barna, the founder of The Barna Group, which is a market research firm specializing in studying the religious beliefs and behavior of Americans, and the intersection of faith and culture is offering a free live-stream event, "The State of Pastors Leading in Complexity." Winebrenner Theological Seminary will be broadcasting this live-stream on January 26, 2017 from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. (EST) in the TLB at our Findlay campus as well as at our Scotland location. This is a bring your own "Brown Bag" lunch event at both sites.



Please DO NOT individually register for this event, we have a group registration for the live-stream. However, RSVP to academicdept@winebrenner.edu if you are going to attend in Findlay or to sdunn@winebrenner.edu if you are going to attend at Scotland, no later than January 25, 2017, 5:00 p.m. Feel free to invite your spouse, a colleague, lay leader, and/or a friend. Just include the total number that will be attending.

The promotional brochure states, "In the broader culture today, Christian ministers are as likely to be ignored as they are to be admired. But despite the challenges they face, called and committed pastors are essential to lead and shepherd the Christian community through the wilderness ahead. But how are these leaders doing? Join Barna and Pepperdine University for this FREE event! Hear from Barna

president David Kinnaman, Barna experts, and special guest speakers as they explore the mental, physical, financial, emotional, and spiritual well-being of today's pastors. Based on Barna's groundbreaking research and the words of pastors themselves, learn how pastors handle challenges in their personal lives, their churches, and their communities. Listen in and come away with best practices for staying resilient in the face of a complex and changing culture. If you are interested in the role and well-being of faith leaders today, this event is for you! From pastors to spouses, elders and deacons to the leaders of ministries that support pastors and the church, the information and strategies are valuable for everyone."

The following is the link for more information. Remember, do not individually register, simply RSVP to academicdept@winebrenner.edu

https://www.barna.com/pastors2017/?utm_source=Barna+Update+List&utm_campaign=d5b1c80142-Religious_Beliefs_Greatest_Influence_on_Voting&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8560a0e52e-d5b1c80142-172078169&mc_cid=d5b1c80142&mc_eid=20ba3cc67c

This is a great opportunity offered by a reputable and respected research team and a host of noted presenters. Hope to see you at this event.