

Practicing The Practice

What is Do Not Fear about?

It's been said that the phrase **do not fear** appears **365 times in Scripture**, one for each day of the year. The reminder not to be afraid is one of the pivotal threads in the Bible, along with the commandment to love and the promise that God is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Whatever each day brings, whatever trials befall us, we can remember that we are created for faith, not fear. Living entirely without fear is an impossible task, but encouraged by angels and prophets not to fear, we can learn to trust in God's promises. Frightening things and difficult situations are a part of life, but seeing God's faithfulness and resting in God's presence in all things helps us decrease the fear and not be paralyzed by it. Along with our faith, which assures us of God's love and presence, we can learn practical and faithful strategies to help us deal with those things that overwhelm and intimidate us. **Each time we are courageous and recognize God's faithfulness to us, we are able to loosen fear's hold on us and replace it with feelings of confidence and resilience.**



* Help One Another

Supplies: small slips of paper, pencils, bag

Give everyone 2 or 3 small slips of paper. Have each person write a word or phrase about or draw a picture of something that overwhelms, scares, or intimidates them without others seeing their papers. Put the papers into a bag and shake it up. Take turns drawing a paper from the bag. Share ideas and strategies about how to deal with that particular fear. Children may feel reassured with the suggestions from parents/caregivers/adults and siblings without feeling ashamed or silly for having that fear. Parents/caregivers may be surprised at the insight their children can give. After each paper, say a prayer thanking God that you have one another to depend on, such as “Thank you, God. With you and with each other, we are stronger than our fears.”

* Deliver Cookies

Supplies: cookies, disposable plates

Make or purchase some cookies, ideally festive Christmas ones! Prepare several plates of cookies. In case of any food allergies recipients may have, include a list of ingredients from the recipe or packaging label. As a household or group of friends, go to a home where you do not know the inhabitants and offer the plate of cookies to whomever answers. Repeat. As an option, go to an area where unhoused people are and deliver cookies. After your deliveries, talk together about concerns anyone might have had about meeting someone new and offering them a gift. Wonder how the magi felt when they visited the baby Jesus. Share how delivering the cookies to strangers, and not just to people you were familiar and comfortable with, made you feel.

Grounding in the 5 Senses

When we're afraid, it can be hard to listen; the still small voice is drowned out by the objections and anxieties thundering in our ears. Prayer can help, as can tending to our breathing or focusing on our physical senses. Try this embodied practice daily: pay attention to

- five things you can see
- four things you can hear
- three things you can touch
- two things you can smell
- one thing you can taste

(If one of these senses is unavailable to you, you may omit it and/or double up on one of the others.) This practice helps us tune into what's around us, which is a form of spiritual listening.

Advent Memory Verse

God's promises of comfort and presence are scattered throughout scripture. As an Advent practice, pick one of the following verses (or another of your choosing!). Memorize it and repeat it aloud every day along with any other prayers as an Advent prayer practice.

- Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.
—Joshua 1:9
- Do not fear, for I am with you.
—Isaiah 43:5a
- And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.
—Matthew 28:20b
- God's Spirit dwells in you.
—1 Corinthians 3:16b
- Draw near to God, and [God] will draw near to you.
—James 4:8a
- Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.
—Luke 2:10-11

Psalm 34

Supplies: Bible, paper, pencil/pen, crayons and/or markers

Have someone read aloud Psalm 34:4–10 slowly while everyone listens. Then take turns reading aloud the passage again, verse by verse, but after each verse pause and rewrite the verse, working together to put it in your own words. Have someone read aloud your adapted psalm. Add decorative touches to the paper and hang your psalm somewhere that everyone in the household will see it each day.

Conversation Starters

- What are some times, places, and situations in which you feel afraid? How can we support one another when we feel afraid? How can we trust God's promises when we feel afraid?
- What is your earliest memory of being afraid? Are you still afraid of that same thing? How does growing older affect what we are afraid of?
- What is something you have always been curious about or a place you have always wanted to go but you have not because there is something a little bit scary about it?
- In what situations and with what people do you feel absolutely safe? What does it take for you to feel safe and secure?
- What Advent or Christmas traditions did you grow up with? What traditions do you still enact every year? What about these traditions makes them special, and worth returning to year after year?

Prayer

Holy God, as we await the birth of Jesus, help us remember that we belong to you when we feel confident and secure, and when we feel overwhelmed and afraid. Thank you for loving us at all times and in all places. Help us to celebrate your comfort and compassion each day of our lives, and to share the good news of your birth with all. Amen.

For daily devotions, Advent practices, & more about [Do Not Fear](https://www.fpclexformation.org/advent), visit [FPCLexFormation.org/advent](https://www.fpclexformation.org/advent)