

September



Fear, Faith & Superstition

BY Judy Lytle

Break a mirror and you will have seven years of bad luck. Step on a crack and you will break your mother's back. If you walk under a ladder, you will have bad luck. Throw salt over your shoulder for good luck. What about all the weird superstitions of many sports players—lucky socks, lucky underwear, a ritual before a game? We've heard them all. Most of us don't believe there is any truth in these superstitions, but we might be surprised by the number of people who believe some of these or something similar. I've even caught myself saying, "Deaths come in threes. If you go to one funeral, you will go to three." Do you have a lucky number? Is 13 unlucky? What about Zodiac signs? Truth or superstition? What exactly is superstition?

From the Britannica Dictionary:

1. A belief or way of behaving that is based on fear of the unknown and faith in magic or luck. 2. A belief that certain events or things will bring good or bad luck.

<https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/superstition>

Notice the interesting use of "fear" and "faith" in that definition. These words were part of the working title for this article. But in the title, we refer to genuine "faith" in God versus "faith" in magic or luck. This dictionary's definition does tell us that superstition is

based on fear.

Virtually every country or culture, including the United States, has its own superstitions. Some of our IM missionaries shared a few from other countries with me.

Japan – The number four is bad luck because it sounds like the word for death. Most hotels and apartment buildings do not have a fourth floor; they go from the third to the fifth.

Spain – On New Year's Eve eating grapes when the clock strikes 12 will bring good luck and ward off evil.

Côte d'Ivoire – If you ride the bicycle of someone who has AIDS, you will contract that disease. One missionary said that superstitions consume much of life in Africa.

Uruguay – If you step outside on a very cold day without being bundled up, you will die instantly.

Panama – Don't drink ice in a drink if you are hot or have a cold. Place matches (not lit) on top of a baby's ears to cure hiccups. Don't shower or go outside after ironing clothes. A baby should be baptized in the Catholic church soon after birth to protect it from evil spirits. In years past, children could not play outside on Good Friday. It was believed the evil spirits would

get them. Many people buy lottery tickets twice a week and have a lucky number they rush to purchase before other people can get it.

Every culture has its superstitions. Some overlap and others are peculiar to that culture. The point is that a certain amount of fear manifests itself in the superstitions of each culture, even those of the United States.

Some of these ideas have roots in ancient civilizations, which were very superstitious. For instance, the Egyptian Pharaohs were buried with everything they thought they would need in the afterlife—food, clothes, transportation, jewelry, games, and sometimes pets and servants.

In India, widows were sometimes, willingly or unwillingly, burned along with their deceased husbands.

In Rwanda, eating goat's meat supposedly makes women hairy. They are thought to grow hair on their face and become stubborn.

Turkish chewing gum was believed to turn into human flesh if chewed at night.

Left-handed things and people were considered untrustworthy or unlucky. (My husband Steve, two of our sons, and I are all left-handed. Yikes!) This superstition existed in ancient Rome; even today, the left hand is considered unclean in some cultures.

These and others can be found in the following link. <https://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends-europe/superstitions-0017734>

Whether ancient or modern-day superstition, it is founded on fear. As Christians, we don't want our lives to be controlled by fear and superstitions.

The Bible is our rule of faith and practice. We weigh what we believe and do according to God's Word. This even applies to old wives' tales and superstitions. We've reviewed some common and not-so-common superstitions. Now, let's look at the Word. Here are a few of the many Scripture passages dealing with mediums and spiritists.

Isaiah 8:19-20 (NKJV), "And when they say to you, 'Seek those who are **mediums** and **wizards**, who

whisper and mutter,' should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

Leviticus 19:31 (NIV), "Do not turn to **mediums** or seek out **spiritists**, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God."

Leviticus 20:6 (NKJV), "And the person who turns to **mediums and familiar spirits**, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people."

1 Timothy 4:7 (NKJV), "But reject profane and **old wives' fables**, and exercise yourself toward godliness."

Galatians 5:19-21 (NKJV), "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, **sorcery**, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

1 Chronicles 10:13-14 (NKJV), "So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the LORD, because he did not keep the word of the LORD, and also because he consulted a **medium** for guidance. But he did not inquire of the LORD; therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse."

According to Scripture, God does not agree with consulting mediums and fortune tellers. His Word speaks out loud and clear against these practices, including planning our lives around our Zodiac signs. Instead, we are to seek God and what He tells us through His Word.

Saul was killed and the kingdom taken away from him and his descendants because he was unfaithful and because he consulted a medium for guidance. God considered this very serious when Saul replaced

Him as God and put an idol in His place. You may say, “What idol?” Anything or anyone we hold as more important than God is an idol. This includes any superstitions we might believe. They may seem small and insignificant, but they are idols if we put our faith in them and not in God. God hates this.

Since superstitions are founded on fear, let’s look at God’s Word for clarity.

Fear should not control us. God’s Word repeats this truth often, and gives us the things to replace fear in our lives—love, faith, power, the ability to reason, etc.

I John 4:18 (NKJV), “There is no fear in **love**; but perfect **love** casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in **love**.”

Psalms 56:3 (NKJV), “Whenever I am afraid, I will **trust** in You.”

2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV), “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of **power** and **love** and of a **sound mind**.”

Psalms 34:4 (NKJV), “I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears.”

Psalms 118:6 (NKJV), “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

Proverbs 29:25 (NKJV), “The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever **trusts** in the LORD shall be safe.”

Hebrews 13:6 (NKJV), “So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear.

What can man do to me?”

God’s Word reminds us repeatedly that we should not fear but trust in Him. But how do we turn that fear into trust or help someone struggling with this?

Filling our minds with good things, not fearful or mystical things, is essential. When our minds enter that room of fright or mysticism, reflect on God’s Word. A favorite passage comes to mind and is an excellent Scripture to memorize. The Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:8 (NKJV), “Finally, brethren, whatever things are **true**, whatever things are **noble**, whatever things are **just**, whatever things are **pure**, whatever things are **lovely**, whatever things are of **good report**,

if there is any **virtue** and if there is anything **praiseworthy**—meditate on these things.”

Our minds should be focused on these things and not concerned about what our horoscope says, or the black cat crossing our path, or any other superstition. God’s Word is true, and our faith is grounded there and not in the ideas and inventions of man.

When the temptation comes to believe in one of the thousands of superstitions or a fortune teller, ask yourself if you are leaning into this experience because you fear there may be a little truth in it? Remind yourself of the above-mentioned scriptural warnings. Reassure yourself that fear should not be part of your life. God can replace our spirit of fear with love, faith, and sound thinking (2 Timothy 1:7). Yes, reason it out. God has given us the ability to think clearly and not be taken in by every falsehood.

Superstitions will always be with us, but we don’t have to fall prey to their influence. God has given us the power to be victorious over any fear threatening to control us. Reflect upon His Word. There, we find the answers.

***About the Writer:** Judy Lytle served as a missionary in Panama with her husband Steve for 30 years. Her main ministry was with women and children. Working alongside several other women, Judy helped organize the first national FWB women’s retreat in 1989, which continues yearly.*

Judy now helps her husband with his ministry to Cofer’s Chapel seniors and in the Hispanic ministry in Nashville, Tennessee. Judy and Steve are proud of their three sons, three daughters-in-law, 10 (in October 11) grandchildren, and a granddaughter-in-law.