

Dealing with Fear

Leaders Notes



Fear is like Goldilocks' porridge:

Too hot:

- Your health will start to suffer.
- Fear can limit your ability to assess risks, meaning you don't venture outside your house.
- It can literally paralyse you with panic attacks.
"High pressure situations can deplete your working memory and reduce your performance. This is commonly called 'choking' and it's common to all types of high pressure situations. ¹

Too cold:

- Without any stress we would be apathetic.
- We would fail to meet important deadlines.
- We would take unnecessary risks.
- Panic helps you move quickly to escape from danger.

Just the right balance

A small amount of fear or stress can be helpful. It heightens our senses and brings out our best.

"The best speakers know enough to be scared... the only difference between the pros and the novices, is that the pros have trained the butterflies to fly in formation." Radio broadcaster:
Edward R. Murrow

"Living fearlessly is not the same thing as never being afraid. It's good to be afraid occasionally. Fear is a great teacher. What's not good is living in fear, allowing fear to dictate your choices, allowing fear to define who you are. Living fearlessly means standing up to fear, taking its measure, refusing to let it shape and define your life." Michael Ignatieff

Fear is like a snowball rolling down a hill.

It gets bigger, faster, harder to stop and increasingly destructive.

Everyone suffers from fear. Left unchecked, it can develop into a serious problem, either physical, mental or both.

We know that worrying can give us a headache. With some people it affects their stomach. Anxiety has also been linked to asthma and allergies as well as high blood pressure and other health problems. If we are feeling stressed and anxious it will affect our bodies in one way or another.

In 2009 The Mental Health Foundation reported that 7 million adults in UK were suffering from diagnosable anxiety problems. This does not include many more who feel burdened by fear but who do not go to the doctor. It also does not include the rapidly increasing number of children and teenagers who are battling with fear, anxiety, and stress.

Jesus understands fear. He had to battle with it intensely the night before he went to the cross. One of God's main goals is to help us to conquer fear. He has given us a whole set of stories about people who have struggled with fear in the past that can encourage us.

The Overall Root of Fear

Fear is such an integral part of our lives that it is not surprising that it can be found some degree in almost every story in the Bible.

Where did it come from?

God created man with a capacity to respect both God and others. We sometimes talk about the 'fear of God' meaning such respect.

Were there certain dangers even in paradise, where man needed a certain degree of healthy fear in order to be safe?

But crippling fear that reduces us to a quivering wreck; where did that come from?

Fear first appeared in Genesis chapter 3.

Adam deliberately disobeyed God, and it changed his life forever.

But not in the good way he had anticipated.

Man became self-conscious / self-aware in a new way.

Strong new emotions suddenly appeared on the scene: Guilt, Shame and Fear

They had done something terribly wrong and they were afraid of the consequences.

The instant reaction of man and his wife was to hide: behind make-shift clothes, behind trees, behind the sofa – oh they didn't have one of those yet!

They discovered what it was like to fear both God and each other.

Fear is the root cause behind many of our unwanted behaviours and habits.

It is behind shyness, bullying, lying, and many relationship problems.

What do we fear?

Some common tangible fears amongst 10-14's include:

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. Dogs or other animals | 6. Heights |
| 2. Injections | 7. Clowns |
| 3. Being stung by a wasp etc. | 8. Certain films |
| 4. Travelling by plane or boat | 9. Claustrophobia |
| 5. Thunder & lightening or certain noises | 10. Other... |

NB. This list reflects the fears of just one group of 12 year olds so it is not comprehensive. It is interesting that they named tangible fears and left out abstract and everyday ones such as school or exams.

Other fears include:

- Fear of failure / not coping
- Fear of new situations / the unknown
- Fear of other people and their opinions
- Fear of ridicule / not wanting to look silly
- Fear of rejection

People react to fear in different ways:

Some become shy and hide away.

Some act over-confident as though they would never be afraid of anything.

Others become angry and aggressive.

How can we deal with fear?

1. Face it. Admit to yourself that you are worrying and may have forgotten to give it to God. Don't just run away from it.

2. Pray – and praise.

Don't let praying be a last resort. As soon as you feel yourself becoming anxious or fearful, take it to God. Thank him that he is bigger than any problem or mistake. Perhaps imagine it as a snowball. Scoop it up, give it to him and let him melt it. (Hebrews 12:29) Say the name of 'Jesus' to yourself over and over if you feel you are going to be overwhelmed or panic.

3. Look for the roots.

Identify the underlying cause of the fear

Why are you afraid of those things?

Is it based on:

- Past experience e.g. being attacked by a dog or bullied at school
- Imagined fear e.g. stories told by others
- Uncertain goals e.g. fear of the future/unknown.

If it is based on past experience, you could ask God to heal your memory of that event.

If you are afraid of failing, commit your future to God once again and remember how great he is.

4. Re-size the fear.

Fear turns molehills into mountains, especially at night. It may be mountain size to you but it is only a sandcastle to Jesus. Read the calming of the storm, Luke 8:24-26

In the same way that a room can appear to have shrunk when you have not seen it since you were small, so something you may have had a reason to be scared of when you were young may no longer be a threat to you.

5. Talk to someone.

Sharing a fear and bringing it into the 'light of day' can help it to fade. Our imaginations can go into overdrive, especially at night. Talking about it can restore a sense of reality.

If friends or family are unavailable there are some phone help lines.

6. Fill your mind with something positive.

Read Bible verses and other things that will feed your mind and spirit in a positive way.

Collect some of the helpful posters on Facebook where you can look at them often.

Keep a gratitude diary to remind yourself of all that is good in your life.

There is an old song called 'Count Your Blessings'. It's very good advice!

7. Ridiculize² it

Think up a silly fantasy about it as in the story of 'Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban', chapter 7. Neville was terrified of Professor Snape but when he imagined him wearing his grandmother's clothes, it helped a lot.

8. Eat & sleep.

Luke, aged 16, was having an amazing time with his dad in Africa on a 'missionary style' trip. One day his dad texted Luke's Mum asking her to pray because Luke had become terrified of the mosquitoes, even though he was taking anti-Malaria tablets. But his mum simply said "When did he last eat properly? When did he last sleep properly? When did he last have a drink? Sure enough, once they got those things sorted, the fear vanished. The following morning, he was fine.

Simply getting enough food and sleep can make a huge difference. We are always more emotionally vulnerable when we are tired and hungry.

9. Do something fun/relaxing/calming.

A few breathing and stretching exercises can help when fear starts to well up

Take some exercise; play some calming or encouraging music.

Imagine you are lying on a beach.

Tune into God's presence.

10. Be careful with your use of media / don't believe everything you hear or read

The media loves to hype things up – sensation seeking, negative stories and worst case scenarios

The way in which news is reported has changed – everything is now a drama. Why? We like excitement, the rush of adrenaline. We dislike boredom but too much hype can overload us. We need balance – ways to recharge physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We can feed off hype but in a negative way. Ten of the Israelite spies brought a bad report, hyping up the problems and wound everyone up.

"The problem with the news is that it is sensation seeking. They won't report good news, only the bad.

The reporters look for the exception to the rule which only feeds the contagion. Don't focus on this or it could become self-fulfilling." Dr Felix Economakis

11. Prayer: ask someone else to pray with you/ for you.

Again – don't leave this as a last resort. There are prayer lines available if you can't find someone near you.

12. Ongoing

We all struggle with fear at times. Make a habit of asking God to deal with the fears in you.

Bible focus: Stories and Other Verses

God understands how easily we get fearful so he has put encouragements and stories in many places in the Bible. Here are a few:

When facing a new challenge or situation

When the Israelites arrived at the border of Canaan the first time, they sent out 12 spies of whom only Joshua and Caleb were able to trust God to help them with the daunting challenge ahead. They said "Do not be afraid of the people of the land... Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us." The people did not listen. Numbers 14:9 NIV; Full story in Numbers 13-14 & Deuteronomy 1:19-31, Forty year later Joshua became the leader of Israel after the death of Moses and was facing the same challenge again with the next generation. Joshua 1: 6-9

Fear of people

Matthew 10:28: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. NIV

"Don't be bluffed into silence by the threats of bullies. There's nothing they can do to your soul, your core being. Save your fear for God, who holds your entire life—body and soul—in his hands." The Message

Proverbs 29:25: Fear of man will prove to be a snare (trap), but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.

Fear of failure / not coping / lacking confidence:

You will not be able to succeed at everything you'd like. I'd like to be good at sport but on this earth I'm not. But go with God's idea of what you need to be good at and he'll make up any shortfall in your abilities. And don't underestimate what he has given you already.

2 Timothy 1:7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline. NIV

2 Corinthians 12:9: But he said to me, "My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you." NCV

1 Corinthians 1:26-29: [God chose the foolish, the weak, the unimportant...]

Joshua 1:6-9 Be strong and courageous, for you are the one who will... NLT

Fear of rejection

Jeremiah 33:25: But this is what the Lord says: I would no more reject my people than I would change my laws that govern night and day, earth and sky. NTL

Psalms 27:10: Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close. NLT

Isaiah 49:15-16: Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you... NLT

Romans 8:35-39: Nothing can separate us from the love of God...

Worrying about family members

Exodus 2:1-4 - What fears may Moses family have had about him?

Difficult situations

Jesus calms a storm Luke 8:22-25

At first perhaps the disciples relied on themselves, on their knowledge and experience of sailing rather than praying. Then they were too busy to pray; trying to cope with a situation that was getting worse and worse. When they finally woke Jesus, it was to tell him that they were all about to drown. Were they expecting him to rescue them or help to bail out the water or did just think they should give him a chance to say a last prayer before dying?!

Isaiah 43:1-2 uses picture language to say that when we go through difficult times, God is there with us “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you cross rivers, you will not drown.”

For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, “Do not fear; I will help you.” Isaiah 41:13 NIV or check The Message

Other Stories

1 Kings 19:1-18, Elijah runs away

2 Kings 6:8-23, Elisha besieged at Dothan

2 Chronicles 20:1-30, Jehoshaphat is afraid of the 3 approaching armies but trusts God when he tells him to go into battle in a most unusual way.

Other verses to check out

1 John 4:18, no fear in love

Micah 4:4, one day - there will be nothing to fear

Psalms 25:14, Lord, a friend to those who fear him

Acts 4:29-31 disciples given boldness

Proverbs 12:25, anxiety weighs you down; encouragement helps. Check out different translations.

Matthew 6:25-31, practical needs

Philippians 4:19, practical needs

Psalms 27

Deuteronomy 31:6-8, The Lord will be with you... not leave / forget you. Don't be afraid / worried

Psalms 91

Quotes

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

F D Roosevelt became president of the USA in 1933 at a time of economic crisis.

His inaugural speech is famous for his comments about fear:

“So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is... fear itself; nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance...”

“The more you come to know yourself – spirit, mind and body – as loved, the less fearful you will become.” Based on a quote by Henri Nouwen, similar to 1 John 4:18

Researchers say that our emotional responses don't know the difference between real and imagined threats. Someone who's perfectly safe, but has a fear of being robbed, suffers just as much as someone living in a situation with a high risk of robbery, or someone actually in the act of being robbed. Because our brains don't discriminate between emotions that are real or imagined, fear can dominate our lives, and it's just as devastating as physical injury. UCB Word for Today

The Night the Angels Came: Chrissie Chapman

Midwife, Chrissie Chapman went to Burundi in the eighties to run a maternity clinic. God directed her to work with the orphans and widows so she started a centre for abandoned babies and traumatised children. She saw the Lord performing remarkable miracles in the lives of people who had lost everything.

One night, she and David Ndarahutse, the mission director, were sitting praying amid the fighting, when David said, "Chrissie, look up." There were dozens of angels standing on top of the walls of the healing centre.

"From that moment on," Chrissie records, "I have never experienced or felt fear for my life."

Songs

Every little thing: Delirious (worshipful)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-zkCSmq5w>

Ben Cantelon - Guardian (King of love and grace, my guardian)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiRH8Hc8VQI>

The Almost: "I'm Down but I'm not out": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAfxkOMCMac>

Christian rock band

I once was frightened of spiders: Ishmael (fun for all age groups)

Words & download <http://www.ishmael.org.uk/news.php?nid=2296>

Sources and further reading

Fear – your friend or your foe? CARE article

Word 4U 2DAY & UCB Word for Today; available online www.ucb.co.uk

<http://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/other/recognise-your-negative-thinking-patterns/ar-AAmEJT>

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk>

www.thinktwiceinfo.org

Insight into Anxiety: Clare Blake and Chris Ledger

The Worry Book: Will van der Hart & Rob Waller

Wonder, Fear and Longing: Mark Yaconelli

The Night the Angels Came: Chrissie Chapman

¹ <http://anxietyinteens.org/how-to-overcome-test-anxiety-with-tom-frankly>

<http://dontpokethisbear.com/17-illustrations-that-perfectly-capture-anxiety>

² <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/ridiculize>

Writer: Brenda Lord; last updated 4-Feb-2016

Image: Fotolia.com: Hand with marker writing: Fear/Fearless © gustavofraza0



"You can contact **ChildLine** about anything. No problem is too big or too small. Whatever your worry it's better out than in. There are several different ways you can get in touch with us, which you can find out more about below."

Childline <https://www.childline.org.uk/talk/Pages/Talk.aspx>

You can call ChildLine at any time on 0800 1111 (UK) to speak to a counsellor. Calls are free and confidential.

Online chat: Chat to a **ChildLine counsellor** online in a 1-2-1 session any time you want.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/Talk/Chat/Pages/OnlineChat.aspx>

Other countries have similar help lines – use a search engine to find details.

Adults can talk to **The Samaritans** about **any** emotional problems.

UK: 08457 90 90 90

Premier Lifeline is open 9am to midnight every day of the year. **0300 111 0101**

<http://www.ucb.co.uk/prayerline> open Mon-Fri 9am - 10pm Sat 9am - 8pm **0845 456 7729**

<http://christianhelplines.co.uk/services.html>