

Part 56: Fear

Begin the session with a few moments' stillness with God. Share any further insights you may have had about last week's session.

Fear

Fear is the most common and pervasive of human emotions. As a dynamic feeling, it can paralyse one to a numb rigidity or impel one to extremes of frantic activity. Fear, more than most other feelings, will show you what you really believe in the depths of your being and won't easily let you pretend or play games.

Some experiences of fear are normal, immediate and direct, as may happen when a fierce dog is coming towards you. In this case, the reaction is appropriate to the particular threat.

Fear becomes neurotic, however, when there is a radical imbalance between the fear-response and the threatening object. In most cases the threat of danger, pain or rejection is indirect or anticipated. As such, one 'imagines' what causes the fearful situation, and often it is the **worst possible scenario** that comes to mind.

Most fear originates in the imagination or the mind and can easily be unfounded or not relate to fact or present reality. When we accept the scenario presented by our imagination, we react accordingly with fight or flee responses. We can thus get into a stressed state as a result of a totally unreal threat.

Fear has the effect of a cumulative poison within us in that, if it is not faced and the fearful object exposed, the fear energy is stored in our unconscious as valid and real. This is so even if it is not real, but we have avoided facing or exposing it. The next occasion that we experience this fear, it builds on the previous store and so increases. Like a gas, fear will grow and fill all the available space, if we let it.

How does this discussion on fear relate to a Christian?

Fear acts like a gauge which tells us who we really KNOW God to be, in our belly and our bones. If our knowledge of God is superficial, second-hand or theoretical, we will find it hard not to be fearful in situations we cannot control. If on the other hand we have a keen sense and experience of who God really is for us, we may well find we have a strange peace in situations which we would previously have found disturbing.

Jesus, asleep in the boat, was able to respond physically to his real trust in his Father and sleep through the tossing storm. The disciples had far less experience of and thus trust in God and, as a result, feared they had been abandoned. Jesus highlights this by saying: 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?'

As a child will run into her parents' arms in the face of danger, our faith in God develops from an intimate and trusting relationship. We need to know God as a child has a loving experience with its parent and not only as head knowledge.

Take 15 minutes to reflect on a particular fear you are aware of. As you get in touch with it, imagine the worst possible situation that could develop in relation to that fear. As you imagine this, become aware of Jesus being present in the fearful situation and try to sense what he is feeling about you and about the fear you are experiencing. Is he saying anything about the fearful situation itself?



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Do you notice any difference in your fear reaction when you imagine Jesus to be on the scene?
OR

Reflect on the passage of the storm mentioned above. (Mark 4:35–41)

Imagine being out there in the squall and work through the whole scene. What does Jesus say to you about your reaction?

Journal and share as may be appropriate.

At home this week

In your daily experience, reflect on your fear responses and see how you tend to react to them. Are the fears normal or neurotic? Try to describe what your faith in God is like in terms of fearful situations.



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