

## How to Win the Battle With Fear

1. Warm-up: Sunday's sermon was about the power of fear to disrupt and distort our lives. Jeff began with a story about a time he was terrified to ask someone out on a date. Do you have any "fear-of-dating" stories to share? Come on, confession is good for the soul.
2. Almost 200 different times the Bible says, "Fear not!" or variations thereon. That's probably because we are surrounded by threats of all types. Our Adversary, the devil, likes nothing better than to poison our thinking with the most diabolical, debilitating question of all: "What if . . . ? What if I'm not good enough? What if I lose my job? What if something horrible happens to someone I love? What if I say something the wrong way? What is a really big "what if?" that you're facing right now?
3. Fear is actually a gift from God meant to help keep us safe. But every good gift can be distorted or abused. As the editor of *Medical News Today* noted, "It's when this lifesaving mechanism [called fear] is triggered at inappropriate times or gets stuck in the 'on' position that it becomes a problem."
  - a. Tell us about a time when fear was rational and turned out to be a good thing that saved you from possible harm?
  - b. What we need to avoid, Jennie Allen says, is "the type of anxiety that sends our thoughts spiraling – when our emotional reaction to scary things goes beyond rational to illogical because our brains' fear networks are in overdrive." Sometimes the line between rational and irrational fear can be blurry. For example, fear of poor health might cause us to avoid risky behaviors (like smoking, sugary foods, alcohol) or embrace positive behaviors (like exercise, or yoga, or meditation). How do we tell when our response to fear is healthy versus excessive?
  - c. Jennie Allen reminds us that every time we think or react a certain way to circumstances in our life, that thought passes through our brain on the same neural pathway. Neural pathways are like walking paths in the woods. The more often we walk down a certain path, the deeper, wider, and easier it is to walk down that same path the next time, then the next, and the next. So, the more I get in the habit of letting fear be my go-to emotion, the easier it becomes for fear to dominate my life. Some of us are more prone to fear than others. Would you describe yourself as someone who is much affected by fear, or only moderately affected by fear, or only lightly affected by fear? If you're much affected by fear, why do you think that is? If you're only lightly affected by fear, why do you think that is?

4. Although some of us may be more prone to fear than others, all of us often find ourselves struggling with fear and anxiety – preoccupied with diabolical “what ifs?” Even rational fears can end up becoming extreme or excessive. So how can we best manage fear? The words of Jesus in Matthew 18:3 offer a big clue: “I tell you the truth, you must change and become like little children. Otherwise, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Children manage fear by embracing certain core truths which, when applied to us as children of God, can also help us enormously. Take a look at those core truths, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Can you think of a time when you were a kid and a loving parent (grandparent or caregiver) helped you sort through that fear in a liberating way? Was one or more of the core concepts listed on p. 3 at work for you in that situation?
  - b. Do the core concepts resonate with you as being true? Which of the core concepts do you most struggle to fully embrace – and why?
  - c. Why is it so hard to surrender control and the need to know?
  - d. When in your life have you been inspired by someone who displayed genuine childlike faith? Tell us about what you witnessed.
5. Jeff suggested that Philippians 4:4-9 – the Bible passage most frequently looked up online – offers us a practical four-step process for better managing our fear and anxiety. Those steps are also listed on p. 4, along with the scripture passage. Read through both.
  - a. What thought, word, or phrase in this passage most speaks to you?
  - b. Do you routinely articulate your deepest fears to God in prayer? Does that seem to help? Why or why not?
  - c. Name a significant fear in your life right now. What is the countervailing truth that you sense God wants you to latch onto to tame that fear?
  - d. What is something you can be thankful for even in your situation of fear or in spite of your situation of fear?
  - e. In your situation of greatest fear right now, are you prepared to commit in the days ahead to practicing interrupting your fear-based thought with the countervailing faith-based thought in an attempt to create a new neural super-pathway in that area of your life?
  - f. Picasso once said, “It took me four years to [learn to] paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to [learn to] paint like a child.” What are the implications of Picasso’s statement for our efforts to learn to have childlike faith?

## **Philippians 1:12-13, 19-24, and 4:4-9**

12 I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, <sup>13</sup>so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; <sup>19</sup>for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will result in my deliverance. <sup>20</sup>It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup>For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. <sup>22</sup>If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. <sup>23</sup>I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; <sup>24</sup>but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup>Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

### **Core Concepts That Characterize Childlike Faith**

1. I am not in control, but God is.
2. God loves me completely like the best possible parent.
3. God knows far more than I do and can make all things work for good.
4. I can trust God even when things make no sense.
5. Therefore, I choose to surrender my need for control and my need to know, and instead to simply trust God.

### **Four Steps For Taming Our Fear – Philippians 4:4-9**

1. Tell God about your worries in prayer. Bring your fear out of the shadows into the open, name it before God and yourself, and describe in detail.
2. Identify the countervailing truth that God wants you to latch onto in response to your fear. Name that truth; speak it aloud to yourself; write it down if that's helpful.
3. Give God thanks for what you're facing and what you'll learn from it and how you're going to triumph through it, and all the blessings you have beyond it.
4. Practice interrupting your fear-based thought with the opposing truth-based thought. This is the part where you're practicing focusing on "whatever is true, honorable, and commendable" and, in the process, reconfiguring your neural pathways.