

HOW TO BREAK FREE FROM FEAR

"I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears."
Psalm 34:4 (NIV)

Good morning! We're on the second part of our series called "Conquering Your Fears". Today, I'd like to talk about "How to Break Free from Fear".

There is so much fear going around. Things are going crazy right now. Infections are rising. And there's an uprising. You know what I'm talking about. Fear is lingering especially as we get near Jan. 20th.

This is the age of anxiety. It is the age of everybody being afraid of something. In 1933, FDR said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." That sounds nice but it's just not true. There are a lot of things you ought to be afraid of besides fear itself. Years ago, a study was made of 500 people and they found 7000 different fears, which averaged 14 fears per person. There are a lot of things to be afraid of.

Fifty years ago, these were the top five greatest fears of school children: animals, dark rooms, strangers, high places, and loud noises. Today, children are afraid of: humiliation, nuclear war, car accidents, bullying, cyberbullying. That is a sad commentary on our state of affairs. So, the person who has no fears is not in touch with reality.

The Bible has got a lot to say about fear. In fact, the Bible says more about fear than it does about heaven. The Bible says more about fear than it does about hell. There's a lot about it in the Scriptures. We're going to look at it for the next few weeks.

You know, God wants you to be set free from your fears. Psalm 34:4 *"I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears."* That verse says you can break free from your fears.

The message today has two parts. First, I want to go over the damage that fear does and then second, I want us to look at how God overcomes them for us.

THE DAMAGE THAT FEAR DOES

1. IT PARALYZES POTENTIAL.

In other words, it limits our effectiveness. It causes us to miss opportunities. When we become afraid, it keeps us from doing more with our lives. What have you always dreamed of doing but were afraid to try? You see, fear paralyzes potential.

Paul Tournier, Christian physician and author, says, "All of us have reservoirs of full potential, vast areas of great satisfaction. But the roads that lead to those reservoirs are guarded by the dragon of fear."

Fear is kind of like that; it's like a dragon that keeps you from becoming all God wants you to be. It limits your potential. It harms your effectiveness. It keeps you from doing what God wants you to do.

Fear was what kept the children of Israel out of the Promised Land. They were afraid and they spent forty years wandering around in the wilderness.

John 20:19 *"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders..."*. This was right after Jesus had been crucified. They're locked in a room because of fear.

Question: Were the doors locked from the inside or the outside? The inside. That's what fear does. Fear is always a self-imposed prison. The doors weren't locked from the outside, but from the inside. It's a choice. It paralyzes your potential.

The second thing that fear does is

2. IT RUINS RELATIONSHIPS.

Man's oldest problem is fear -- all the way back to the very first situation, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3:10, Adam says to God, *"I was afraid...so I hid."* He's hiding in fear. Fear causes us to cover up.

Fear causes us to not say what we're really thinking, to pretend that we're somebody that we're not. It causes us to lie. The greatest block to intimacy in a marriage, a friendship or in any relationship is fear. Why am I afraid to tell you who I am? Because if I tell you who I am, you may not like who I really am. So fear causes us to hide and it ruins relationships. Fearful people cannot give love and fearful people cannot receive love. Fearful people cannot make commitments to others. Fear cannot allow me to let my hair down and be real.

How many times have you heard, "I'm afraid I might get hurt again."? Fear paralyzes potential and it ruins relationships.

You may not realize it, but your fears affect everybody else around you. Your fears influence everybody you relate to. Have you ever seen parents ruin kids' lives because of their own fears? Yes. Have you ever seen bosses limit the creativity of their employees because of their own hang-ups? Yes. Most people never reach their potential because they're under leaders who are fearful and afraid of letting those people become what God wants them to be.

The third thing that fear does is

3. IT HINDERS HAPPINESS.

Proverbs 12:25 (NIV) *"Anxiety weighs down the heart"*. Anxiety in the original Hebrew can also be translated as "fear" or "worry". That's why another version of the Bible says, *"Worry can rob you of happiness."* (GNT) Isn't that true? Are you happy when you worry? "I'm worried that my husband is seeing another woman. It makes me happy." That's ridiculous, isn't it? Unless you don't want to see your husband anymore. But you won't be worried at all!

Alfred Hitchcock once said, "The only way to get rid of my fears is to make films about them." In the process, he scared the rest of us! Fears are really like that. They are bad movies that we replay over and over.

We rewind them and replay them. It makes us miserable! That's why we're going to spend four weeks looking at this. It paralyzes potential, it ruins relationships, it hinders happiness....

And

4. IT SABOTAGES SUCCESS.

In Job 3:25, Job says, "*What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.*" He's saying that fears can be self-fulfilling prophecies. You can set yourself up. Have you ever said, "I was afraid this would happen!"?

There was a sitcom called *Taxi* in the 1980s? In one episode, Alex Regal, one of the taxicab drivers was mugged and shot but it wasn't serious so a few days later he returns to work and he's scared to death to go back on the streets of New York City. (I don't blame him!) His friends convince him that the only way to overcome this fear is get out there, start picking up passengers, delivering them to their destinations.

So after much encouragement he finally says, "I'm going to face my fear." He gets in his taxicab and goes out and starts driving past all kinds of people looking for a taxi ride, trying to find one person who looks safe. Finally he sees this guy dressed as a priest. He pulls over, picks up the priest. The guy gets in and says, "Please, take me to the pier."

The pier is not exactly the safest place in New York City especially at night. Alex's anxiety level is going up. He starts looking at him in the mirror and he says, "You look pretty young to be a priest. You don't look like you're old enough to have been to seminary. Are you sure you're a priest?" His mind starts thinking

wild and his imagination goes into overdrive. The guy says, "Of course I'm a priest!" He's getting more and more afraid until finally he says (just making it up), "Some friends and I were talking the other day about the names of the twelve apostles. We couldn't come up with all the names.

I guess if you're really a priest you'd know all the names, wouldn't you?" You see the terror in his eyes. The guy says, "Yeah. There's Peter, James, John, Matthew, Judas, Andrew, Nathaniel... ah..." Alex pulls over quickly and says, "Get out, you're not a priest!" He set himself up!

Let me quote Tournier again from his book *The Strong and the Weak*: "Fear creates what it fears." For example, the fear of becoming just like your father or mothers causes you to focus on them and become more and more like them. The fear that you can't keep a commitment or resolution keeps you from making them wholeheartedly so that failure is inevitable and you can't keep them. Fear of illness makes you feel bad. The fear of disappointing someone prevents you from acting naturally so you end up disappointing them anyway. The fear of not being pretty enough causes some women to use a ridiculous amount of make up and they look worse. The fear of growing old causes us to grow old prematurely. The fear of losing your spouse causes you to act in a way that drives them away. The fear of poverty causes many to make risky investments that cause them to lose the little that they have.

Fear sabotages our success.

Folks, if fear does all these things I think it's worth looking at. Today we don't have time to get into all of the details but I want to give you the three spiritual antidotes to fear. We're going to go over these in detail in the weeks ahead. I'm just giving you an overview and then we're going to look at how to apply them specifically to specific fears.

Now, let me share with you the **antidote to your fears.** There are three of them. These are three things that have the power to drive fear out of your life on a spiritual level: truth, love, faith. So first, let's talk about

1. TRUTH

In **Proverbs 1:33**, God says, "*Whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.*" How does God speak to you? Through his Word primarily, the Bible. **Psalm 119:160** says, "**The entirety of your word is truth**". Therefore, if you read his word and you make it part of your life and apply God's principles in your life, then the truth of his word will set you free from your fear of harm.

Do you know that you only have two inborn fears? All of us, when we are born, have two inborn fears: the fear of falling from high place and the fear of loud noises. What that means is that every other fear you have, you learned. You acquired it. The good news is, listen closely, if you learned it you can unlearn it. If you took it on board during your lifetime, then it is possible to cast it back overboard. The fears that you learned can be unlearned.

Hopefully, if you'll stick with us through this series, we're going to help you through some of these. Much of what you learned in life simply wasn't true. You were given incorrect information. You based your life on some faulty assumptions. They were things that you parents said or your friends said or you picked up in a novel or movie or an experience. You interpreted wrongly. Those beliefs must be challenged. What do we challenge them with? We challenge them with God's truth. Because when you know the truth, it will set you free from your fears.

We're going to look at what God says about some of these basic fears. Fear always distorts our perceptions. It helps us to see things not in a true way.

Definition of fear, **F-E-A-R -- Fear is *False Evidence Appearing Real*.** It looks like it's true but it's not. In this series we're going to talk about how to use God's truth to manage your fears. Most fears never really happen in the first place.

One study discovered that forty percent of all fears are about the future and never happen.

Thirty percent of the fears you have are about the past and can't be changed. Twelve percent are needless fears about your health that you don't need to have. Ten percent are petty fears that are not worth worrying about. Which means that there are only eight percent of your fears that are legitimate fears and those can be dealt with by taking the appropriate steps of action. But you've got to base your life on the truth, not on what you feel, what you think, what have you learned -- but what God says.

When you were a kid, were you ever afraid of shadows in your bedroom at night? Thank God, when I was a kid, they didn't have Stephen Spielberg movies! That would have fed my imagination. We didn't even have a TV. The only solution is to get up, go over and flip on the light. When you flip on the light you see what's making the shadow, it's no big deal. There's nothing to be afraid of. We turn the light on.

In this series, we're going to turn the light of God's truth on your fears. When you live in the light of God's truth, it illuminates and many of those things that you have been worried about -- like financial failure and many other things -- when you realize the promises God has made and you start claiming those promises your fears will dramatically be reduced. In this series we're going to try to get the fears out in the open, examine them in the light of truth, understand what you fear.

2. The second antidote we're going to look at in this series is LOVE.

1 John 4:18, *“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”*

No fear in love. Love expels fear. Fear and love don't exist together. Isn't that a beautiful verse?

I read the story of this pastor who wrote a note to his girlfriend who is now his wife. And at the end he wrote underneath his name "1 John 4:18". *“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.”*

After that, she wouldn't talk to him for two weeks! She was so mad at him, but he couldn't figure out what was wrong. Finally, he realized, he had left out the "1" in 1 John and so what he had written was actually "John 4:18". In John 4:18, Jesus is talking to the woman at the well. He says, *“The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.”* If you're wondering who the pastor was, that wasn't me.

Now, there are two ways that love neutralizes fear.

1) Receive God's love for me. I need to be aware of God's love. I need to accept it. I need to receive it. I need to bask in God's unconditional love for me. The fact is, God knows the fears I have. He cares about the fears I have and He has the power to help me over those fears that I have. When I trust in God's love, my fears fade because there's no fear in love. Because God is love and his love is perfect, he can drive out my fears.

2) Give love to others. There are three ways that you can move in life: you can move against something in anger; you can move away from something in fear; you can move toward something in love. Those are really the only three expressions of movement in life. When you fill your life with love it eliminates many of those other things. You see a woman run into a burning building to grab a baby and she comes back out. You say, "How in the world did she have the

courage to overcome that fear?" Simple! It was her child. The fear was overcome by a greater power which was love. The love gave her the power to overcome the fear.

Why is love an antidote to fear? Because the root of a lot of fear is simply self-centeredness. It is a pre-occupation with ourselves. I don't want to get hurt. I don't want to be a failure. I don't want to look bad. I don't want to get messed up in this situation. I don't want to...whatever.

You see, love gets the focus off yourself onto others. The more that I'm filled with love, the less I will be filled with fear.

Floyd Oogleby heard a guy one time in a bus stop working on a crossword puzzle and he said, "I need a four letter word that expresses a response to difficulty." A guy setting next to him said, "Fear". Another guy said, "Love". The answer was love.

There's a third antidote.

3. The third antidote to fear is FAITH.

Ephesians 6:16, *"In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."* Satan loves to suggest fearful thoughts. Have you found that to be true? Satan can only work in the life of a Christian by offering suggestions. When God gives us an idea, we call it inspiration. When the devil gives us an idea, we call it temptation. What we do with those is our choice. He makes suggestions all the time. Many of them are fearful thoughts. The Bible says, "Take faith as your shield."

What's the difference between fear and faith? Fear expects the worst in a situation; faith expects the best. That's the difference.

You see, faith is more than believing. Faith is taking action. It is moving ahead in spite of your fears. Faith is facing your fear. Faith is doing the thing you

fear most. Faith is doing the thing you fear most in spite of how you feel. Faith does not always remove the fearful feelings, but it gives you the strength to move ahead in spite of those feelings.

When the children of Israel came up to the Jordan River, God said, "I'm going to part the Jordan River just like I did the Red Sea but this time it's not going to part until you have stepped into it." These guys started walking into it. It went up to their ankles, then their waist, then their shoulders -- "How much farther do we have to go?" It was a test of faith.

You act as if you can't fail and you trust God, that's what it means to have faith. It means moving ahead in spite of your fears, doing the thing you fear most. Sometimes that's in small bite-size steps and we'll talk about that.

Psalm 56:3-4 says, "*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you...in God I trust and am not afraid.*" The psalmist says, "*I put my trust...*" in a formula? "*... in God.*" He says that the answer to our fears is a person, not a formula. He even repeated it twice. He emphasizes the fact that to dispel fear, you need to trust God.

I believe God brought some of you here today and you had no idea why you were coming. There may be many different reasons. But God brought you here for one reason -- so He could say to you, "Don't be afraid!" Don't be afraid. God is with you.

In the weeks ahead, we're going to look at how to deal with specific fears in your life. Next week, Bro. Brandon is going to talk about "Overcoming Financial Fears". Despite the stimulus, we still have fears, right? The stimulus is not enough. Then in the last two parts of these series, we'll talk about overcoming the fear of rejection and the fear of failure.

This is a series we need in this age of anxiety. But the starting point is to open your life up to Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the

Father except through him. When self is at the center of my life, I will be filled with fears. When Christ is at the center of my life, I'm going to be filled with faith. It's that simple.

What is it that you're afraid of? Are you concerned or worried about your health, your finances, your relationships, your children, your spouse, your career, your studies? Maybe you're even afraid of death. Or afraid of going to hell when you die. Whatever it is, let God's love fill your life. You can do that by having a relationship with Jesus.

If you've been watching this service and every Sunday you hear about the good news of salvation of Jesus, about how he can forgive your sins and change your life but you haven't made a commitment yet to Jesus. Today is the day. God may be speaking to your heart and telling you to open your heart to Jesus. You can do that today. Jesus died for you, he was buried for you, he rose again for you. He loves you so much. Don't be afraid of making a commitment. Put your faith in him and when you do, he'll take your fears away. And he will give you the gift of eternal life.