

Fear Series

Contributed by Greg Lindsey on Mar 15, 2020

Scripture: Exodus 14:10-31

Summary: What do I do with my fear? What is our response to the growing pandemic of fear in the world around us?

So, we are in a series called Inside Out and the title actually comes from the Disney movie that came out a few years back, a movie that gave us an inside look at all of the emotions going on inside of an 11 year old girl named Riley who is trying her best to adapt to all the change in her life that is happening as a result of moving from Minnesota to San Francisco with her mom and dad. The bottom line is this. What happens on the outside, her behavior, is being driven by what is happening on the inside. That is true in each of our lives and stories too. That's why we are doing this series.

So in week 1 we dealt with our anger and then last week our good friend Cherie Snyder took on this beast called anxiety. Didn't she do great? She said something last week that I thought was profound. When it comes to anxiety or any of the things that we are taking on in this series the question is never "what's wrong with you?" The question is what's going on with you, what's going on inside of you?". Finding the life we are all looking for requires us to approach this stuff from the inside out. So we have talked about anger and anxiety and today we are shifting gears once again to talk about this thing called fear. When we planned this series a few months back we had no idea that the Corona Virus, also known as COVID-19 would be the issue that it is in our world today. I was reading a few articles from a couple of doctors this past week that I think bring a much needed perspective. Listen to this, one said this...

ILLUST> "I am a doctor and Infectious Disease Specialist. I have been at this for 20 years seeing sick patients on a daily basis. I am not scared of Covid-19. I am rightly concerned for the welfare of those who are elderly, in frail health, or disenfranchised who stand to suffer most. What I am scared about is the loss of reason and wave of fear that has induced the masses of society into a spellbinding spiral of panic. But mostly, I'm scared about what message we are telling our kids when faced with a threat. Instead of reason, rationality, open mindedness and altruism, we are telling them to panic, be fearful, suspicious, reactionary and self-interested. The fact is the virus itself will not likely do much harm when it arrives. But our own behaviors and "fight for yourself above all else" attitude could prove disastrous. I implore you all. Temper fear with reason, panic

with patience and uncertainty with education. Facts not fear. Clean hands. Open hearts. Our children will thank us for it.” The other doc was a psychiatrist on staff at Johns Hopkins Medical School. She recommends addressing our fear by putting the virus in perspective specifically in relation to flu statistics in the recent past, do what you can to prepare, don’t overdo preparation, limit your exposure to the news, be wary of where you get information, and don’t isolate.

So we are calling this virus a pandemic. In other words it’s a disease that is spreading over a large part of the world. That’s true, but it seems to me that there is an even greater pandemic that is actually spreading faster than the corona virus can or ever will. All of our care, caution, concern, and preparation is good. We are taking steps to do all of that here at DCC too. BUT...care, caution, concern, preparation and isolation doesn’t really address the greater pandemic...our fear. So what is the real antidote for all of this fear that seems to be alive and well, living just below the surface in most of us. I want us to spend the rest of our time together today talking about that.

If you have a Bible in front of you we are going to be in Exodus chapter 14 today. If not, no sweat, everything I read will show up at the bottom of the screen. Let’s grab a little bit of context so that we are all on the same page with this story that we are jumping into together today. God’s people Israel had been slaves in Egypt, God brings plagues, Pharaoh finally decides to let God’s people go, shortly after that they leave Egypt Pharaoh gets angry, changes his mind, and comes after them. So, here we go, Exodus chapter 14 beginning with verse 10...

10 As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. 11 They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!” 13 Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” 15 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. 16 Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.

Okay. So let’s make sure we get this. God’s people have made it to the Red Sea. So there is the sea on one side and Pharaoh’s Army closing in quickly on the other side. In other words, they’re trapped. There is no way out. How do they respond? One

word...fear...they are terrified and they start ripping on Moses their leader. Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Now, it's interesting here that their minds so quickly return to Egypt but not to the very last thing that happened before they were released as slaves in Egypt. What was that? God showed up. This little thing called Passover. God killed the firstborn son of every household in Egypt, saved them and their families, and released them from slavery. Here it is again. I mentioned it about a month ago. All God has done often gets lost in what he is not currently doing. So in the midst of the fear that you are battling today, whatever it is, whatever the source of that fear I think it would serve each of us really well to start with this question...

WHOSE POWER AND STRENGTH AM I REALLY LEANING INTO? I don't know how you answer that so let me go ahead and answer for me. My own. I've come a long way in my journey with God on this but if I am honest more often than not that is my initial response and default position. I've learned so much of this stuff the hard way.

ILLUST> When I arrived here 12 years ago God was holding this little church plant called Discovery Church together through the strength, commitment, tireless effort and dedication of less than 100 people that continued to weather the storm with a belief that God was not finished yet with Discovery Church. I'll be honest. I agreed with my wife Stacy that God wanted us to come here, but I was afraid of this. I remember lying in the bed at the Hilton Garden Inn on that Sunday night in June 2008 after we committed to coming here thinking that I had just signed a death warrant for my family. While that is true deep down there was also this belief that if we got out here and I threw all I had at this all my talent, gifting, leadership, work ethic, and ability everything would be fine. So that's what I did. I tried everything I knew to do, I threw everything that I had at this vision. I did that and about 18 months later found myself on my face losing it with God and promising Him that I would quit ministry for the rest of my life and never look back if he would just get my family out of this city. It didn't work. There I was doing what I do, leaning into my own strength.

My default position has been to lean into my own strength. How about you? Moses here tells the people to be still, do nothing, and God will fight for them. That seems to contradict what the Bible says doesn't it? The Bible says that God helps those who help themselves. Actually, it doesn't say that. So, what's the takeaway here? When we are facing fear do we just kick back, sit still, do nothing and let God deal with it? Am I telling you that in light of our recent scare you shouldn't be buying toilet paper? No. I am telling you leave some for someone else for goodness sake. More importantly, I am telling you

that in moments of fear like this, when you find yourself between a rock and a hard place, nowhere to turn, to pause and ask yourself the question. Whose power and strength am I really leaning into right now? Let's jump back into the story at verse 21...

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, 22 and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. 23 The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea.

So question. Aren't there easier and quicker ways for God to deal with the problem here? I mean God could just drop a fireball from the sky and vaporize Pharaoh and his entire army. In just one second, the entire problem goes away. While God's way of walking through the sea with the water raised on each side would be a scenic spectacular view. I don't think it is what any one of them or any of us would choose. What they really want is what we want too. We want whatever it is that is scaring us to be totally and completely gone. Here's the thing. God is after something deeper here. So, second question as we stare down fear in our lives. Ask yourself this question...

AM I THINKING SHORT TERM AND SMALL STORY? If I really think about it all I am really able to think about in the midst of my fear is what? That mountain, challenge, or problem right in front of me as I live in a story that really revolves around who...around me.

ILLUST> So, what are you most afraid of as you sit here today? Could be Corona most likely it's something else. Something that hits closer to home for you today. Some of us are afraid of where our marriage is headed, other relationships, our jobs, our incomes, our futures, the path our kids are traveling, the diagnosis, being this lonely feeling so alone for the rest of our lives. All kinds of answers to that question aren't there? Yes there are. When I blew my life up 15 years ago a huge wave of fear overwhelmed me. I was terrified that my marriage, my family, my life, my ministry was all over forever. I had an inability to think long term, there was no larger story. All I could see was the tragedy right in front of me. In that season I would have never believed, I was incapable of believing that where we are today is a family would ever be possible for us. That's not uncommon. In the midst of the fear, the enemy is the master of keeping the story small and keeping us thinking short term. It happened to me again on Friday. We had a call scheduled on Friday afternoon with the governor to see what the weekend was going to bring for us. My mind was racing. What will we do if they shut us down? If people don't show up they don't give either. We don't really have reserves to rely on like other

churches. What are we going to do? Panic and fear jumped all over in me in that moment. The story got so small. In that moment I felt like God tapped me on the shoulder. Hey buddy, whose strength are you leaning into here. I'm still on the throne.

So, let's go back to this moment with the people of Israel, as they walk through the sea with the water raised high on both sides. Question. What does God's way of dealing with the challenge they are facing and the fear that comes with that require that their way wouldn't have? Answer. It requires them to trust God every step of the way. God's response doesn't eliminate the source of their fear. Instead he requires them to walk into it and through it. What do they have to lean into as they do that? Answer. Him. Are you seeing this? It points to the tagline for this entire series and the ultimate answer for every one of these things that we are wrestling with that is going on inside of us. God is there and he cares. You are not alone. Here is where we often get hung up. Our focus tends to be on what God is doing for us. His focus is always on what he is doing in us.

God, by allowing this to be harder in the short term now, is building a resiliency and strength in the face of fear that will serve them for the long term, from now on. Let's go back to the story. So God opens up a way for his people but the truth is that Pharaoh's Army, the source of their fear is still there, still bearing down and gaining ground on them. Let's pick it up there and finish this verse 26...

26 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." 27 Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the Lord swept them into the sea. 28 The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. 29 But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. 30 That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. 31 And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

So finally when the source of all their fear is gone they what? They put their trust in God. That's great. Sound familiar? It does to me. Think about this story. These people have been carrying this escalating fear since the very first time they spotted Pharaoh and his army pursuing them way off in the distance. They are absolutely terrified about something that never really touches them, affects them, never even becomes reality at all for them. Isn't it true? Isn't that really the story of so many moments in our lives too.

We say that courage is not the absence of fear, but action in the midst of fear. Courage is I refuse to allow my fear to paralyze me and courage is a good thing, it's a great thing. While that is true, as we stare down our fears, here's what we most need to walk away from this with today...

THE ANSWER IS NOT MORE COURAGE, IT'S MORE FAITH.

See, here's our challenge. Muscles that never get exercised, worked out, and broken down never get stronger. Let's just be honest. Faith day is a lot like leg day at the gym. Most of us would prefer to skip it. I've said it before what most of us are really looking for and prefer is a faith that doesn't require much faith. God tells us without faith it is impossible to please him. Think about that. If that's true the kindest thing that he could actually do for us is walk with us through things that actually help us exercise it and build it.

I want to go back to that song we sang a little bit earlier today, that song called Do it Again. God, I've seen you move, you move the mountains, and I believe I'll see you do it again. It isn't it great when that happens? Yeah it is. I pray and this thing that has me totally and completely freaked out and scared is just gone. That's awesome. Here's my question. What about when that doesn't happen? That's where faith comes in doesn't it? See, faith is not the removal of or the absence of mountains in my life. Faith is my response when this thing that makes me anxious, that makes me angry, that scares the living _____ out of me, that I want and need to move in my life to go away doesn't move or change at all. What do we do with that? It's why I love the next lyric to that song. You made a way when there was no way and I believe I'll see you do it again. That's the lyric that I think we need to lean most into today. See, removing it is not the only way that God makes a way. The truth in all of our lives is that sometimes God doesn't remove it, but he always provides a way to get me around it, over it, and through it.

ILLUST> My wife Stacy and I have 4 daughters. A few of our daughters wrestle some with some real anxiety and fear. Whenever they are fighting that Stacy and I often find ourselves reminding them of who they are, who they have been created to be, how smart, beautiful, talented, and capable they are. After all, they are Lindsey girls. In those moments I have heard Stacy say it and I myself have often said it too...hey babe, you've got this. When you don't have boys you can't really say man up. Actually, you still can, and I have but it's not near as effective. I'm just saying. Here's the thing...reminding

them that they've got it is helpful. There's something that is more helpful. See, courage is whatever life throws at you you've got this, faith is whatever life throws at you God's got you. That's so much better.

We see it up close and personal in the life of Jesus. He knew that life on this earth would lead him to the cross, but as he sits there on the eve of that happening in the Garden of Gethsemane fear comes over him. He has walked past many people dying on Roman crosses alongside the road during his life. It is a brutal and terrifying way to die. In his fear he cries out to his Father. Father can we change the plan but he doesn't stop there. What does he say next...even if you don't Father...I'm good...Your will not my will be done. Either way, I'm all in. In the midst of my fear I'm leaning into you. I trust you. I'm okay, it is well with me. Psalm 46 says this...

1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear.

Before we shut this down I think we need to spend a little time leaning into that. So, stay with us, everything that we are doing together today has been building to this last 10 minutes. The band is coming back out, I'm going to pray, and then they are going to softly sing a verse and chorus of a song. You can sing along or just soak in the words whatever you choose to do. Then we are going to give you a few minutes to pause, slow down, and spend a few minutes thinking about the fear that exists in our lives and what God has to say to us about that. Then we are going to stand together and finish out with a song. In the midst of our fear, whatever we are afraid of, the goal today is not for any of us to tell ourselves that we are not afraid, the goal is for all of us to remember that we are never alone and walk in that. A.W. Tozer said "a scared world needs a fearless church". Let's lock arms and continue to work on being just that. Let's leave this message and go out and love, help, care for, take care, and encourage all the vulnerable and scared people out there in the world around us. Let's be a fearless church. Let me pray for us.