



DISMANTLED

NO FEAR

the surprising
answer to fear

DISMANTLED: NO FEAR

day one

Psalms
34:1-8

hidden truth about fear

Have you ever awakened in the middle of the night afraid? Most of us have. For some, it happens every once in a while. For others, it is a nightly ritual.

Little boys and girls often have trouble sleeping through the night. They think the boogeyman is out to get them. Or they believe a monster lives under their bed. Or they're convinced someone is staring through their window. And every now and then, when the nightmares are a little too real and the night is a little too long, they can't stay in their own beds any longer. What do they do? They get out of bed and run to the safety of their parents' bedroom.

When I was young, the scariest person in the world to me was Jack Nicholson. I saw *The Shining* at a very young age, and it scarred me for life. There were many nights when I was sure he knew exactly where I lived and was coming to get me. Unfortunately for me, the scariest night came at an age when I was trying to keep my fears under control. After all, there is a point when it is no longer acceptable to run to your parents' bedroom (like age 27 or so). That night, I was caught between my fear of Jack Nicholson and my pride that I was grown up enough to handle my fears myself. As I paced nervously around the house, I tried to talk myself out of the cowardly act of fleeing to my parents' room.

But as I gave myself a go-get-'em pep talk that would make a football coach jealous, the floor beneath my feet began to creak. Just as I noticed that I was making a lot of noise, my dad heard it and got up to see what was going on. I was in an awkward situation. How could I explain pacing around the house at 2:30 in the morning without looking like a scared little kid? As my dad came out of his room, I ducked beside his door to hide. I decided to act cool, calm and collected, like nothing was going on. My dad opened the door to his room, and I stepped out and said, "Hey, how's it going?"

My dad was so startled he nearly jumped through the roof. For more than a few minutes after that, there were two scared guys nervously pacing the floor.

- Describe the time in your life when you felt the most afraid.

- How did you handle that fear?

We live in a terrorized society. Reminders of the September 11 attacks and their aftermath surround us. A color-coded terror alert system is now part of our everyday existence, and the threat of war is more of a reality than ever in many of our lives. When you combine this environment with the commonplace fears of things such as rejection, failure, and insignificance, it is no wonder we often live on the defensive.

Many of us don't realize how living in fear paralyzes, constricts and enslaves us. More importantly, living this way becomes a barrier to embracing the purpose of God in our lives. Plus, the isolation fear creates give it even more power over us.

The hidden truth about fear is that everyone's afraid of something. I was afraid of Jack Nicholson. My dad was afraid of my middle-of-the-night surprise. As we begin our journey into *Dismantled*, we must start with the truth that we are not alone in our fear. While we wear masks that cover fear well, a minor crisis reveals how fearful we really are. Thankfully, the Bible does not leave us to face our fears alone. God invites us, by studying the lives of countless characters with cowardly tendencies, to come into his bedroom and find the peace our souls long for.

Read Psalm 34:1-8

Fill in the blanks:

Psalm 34:4 says, "I sought the LORD, and he _____ me; he _____ me from all my _____."

- Do you seek the Lord when you are confronted with fear? If so, how so?
-
-

- How do you feel when you think about fear? (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> paralyzed | <input type="checkbox"/> scared |
| <input type="checkbox"/> in control | <input type="checkbox"/> surrendered |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hopeless | <input type="checkbox"/> alone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> calm | <input type="checkbox"/> trapped |

Psalm 34 is David's prayer from a time when he had to run for his life, first from Saul and then from the Philistines. The only way David escaped was by pretending to be insane. In this psalm, David tells of God's work in his life. God freed David from the stranglehold of fear, and David's prayer invites us to a similar encounter with God. As he says in verse 8, "Taste and see that the LORD is good." This week, we begin to journey toward being freed from fear as David was. We pray that by the end of this study we will be able to testify to the same truth David did. The Lord is good.

prayer exercise:

Talk honestly with God about your fears today. Ask God to show you what specific fears have the greatest stranglehold on your life.

when fear keeps us from God's best

Those of us who play sports know there is no day like game day. We wake up easily, anxious for the opportunity to play. We treat our bodies differently. We drink lots of water. We eat pasta for added energy. When we see our teammates, we slap hands and make sure everyone's focused. If we see our opponents, we pop off a little trash talk to stoke the emotional fires. Throughout the day, we try to concentrate on other tasks, but the game has our full attention. No matter how much we try to distract ourselves, the game comes racing to the front of our mind.

Finally, the time comes to go to the locker room to prepare for the game. We meet our teammates and put on our uniforms and equipment. As we run onto the field or court, the smells of freshly cut grass or industrial floor cleaner remind us that other people have been preparing for the game as well. As we warm up, look at the lights and see the crowd filing in, we know our moment is coming. The butterflies in our stomachs flutter faster and faster. Finally, the time comes, the whistle sounds and the game begins.

You never know how people will play come game time. You may have seen them in practice, but playing in a game is different. As a coach, I've noticed that there are two types of players on game day: gamers and non-gamers.

Gamers turn their level of play up a notch when the game begins. They practice well, but they are at their best on game day. They may not be perfect, but when they make mistakes, they recover twice as quickly. At the end of the game, they all but have to be carried off the field because they've given their all. A gamer is someone who wants the ball when the game hangs in the balance. They see the opportunity to win, and they go for it.

Non-gamers are just the opposite. No matter how well they practice, a non-gamer's level of play goes down once the game begins. Non-gamers go into a shell because they are so afraid of making a mistake. When they do make mistakes, they hang their heads and sulk as the game passes them by. After the game, non-gamers have plenty of energy. And don't even think about giving non-gamers the ball when the game is on the line. They don't want the responsibility. In fact, they're praying the ball doesn't come their way.

Read Numbers 13

- After reading this chapter, how would you characterize the children of Israel?
 - gamers
 - non-gamers

What kept Israel from God's best?

The difference between gamers and non-gamers is that when everything is on the line, the gamer chooses to risk, while the non-gamer is paralyzed by fear. Numbers 13 is the story of game day for the children of Israel. God promised to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land and give them possession of it. In this story, Israel stood teetering on the edge of the promise as they heard what the twelve spies had seen. Two spies, the gamers, said the land was just like God said it would be, that with his help they could take possession of it. The other ten spies, the non-gamers, talked about the giants in the land and were paralyzed by their fear. The Israelites accepted the word of the ten non-gamers, and, as a result, an entire generation perished in the desert outside of the land of milk and honey God had for them.

- How should Israel have acted?
 - believe the ten spies and gone away in fear
 - believe Caleb and Joshua but not act accordingly
 - believe the ten spies but trust God anyway
 - believe Caleb and Joshua and follow God as they did

- Has there ever been a time when fear kept you from God's best in your life? Explain.

Sadly, the story of Numbers 13 often recurs in the lives of God's children today. How many times in our spiritual lives do we settle for the comfort of staying where we are instead of following where God is leading us? We act like spiritual non-gamers and miss many God-sized opportunities in our lives. One of fear's great strangleholds is that it keeps us from doing anything, making us satisfied to stay in the comfort or pain we know instead of venturing into the seeming unknown with God.

prayer exercise:

Use today's prayer time to ask God to reveal to you how you have been living your life. Have you been a spiritual gamer, or has fear kept you from pursuing God's best? Take some time to reflect on your past and ask the Holy Spirit to help you evaluate yourself honestly. Check the box that applies with you. Then talk to God about the answer to the question on the next page.

- I'm a gamer
- I'm a non-gamer

If you are a gamer, what has motivated you to overcome fear in your life?

If you are a non-gamer, what do you think the answer to overcoming fear and becoming an impact player in God's kingdom is? How can you move toward that?

knowing what to do with fear

Some people love to bear their own burdens. Dr. George McCauslin was one of these people. George was an outstanding YMCA director. But at one time, as he led a YMCA near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, things were not going well at all. Membership was down, money was scarce and staff problems were rampant. George was so depressed, anxious and worried over the situation that it took over his life. Before he knew it, he found himself working eighty-five hours a week. Even when he was at home, he worried about the troubles at the YMCA. It got so bad he could hardly sleep at night.

George went to a therapist, who told him he was on the edge of a nervous breakdown. On the therapist's advice, George took an afternoon off and went to the woods to think and pray. After a short walk, he sat down under a tree and started to relax and reflect for the first time in months. He decided to let go of the burdens he had been carrying. He took out a notepad and wrote God a letter. It read, "Dear God, today I hereby resign as general manager of the universe. Love, George." After months of trying, George discovered he couldn't be God. He could only be George. (from Thomas Tewell, "The Weight of the World," *Preaching Today* [1995].)

■ Do you have the tendency to carry your own burdens?

yes

no

If so, how?

■ What truth about life did George McCauslin discover?

Read 1 Peter 5:7

What fears do you think the people Peter wrote to faced?

What did Peter tell these people to do with their fears, cares, and anxieties?

What does this tell us about what we should do with these things?

Everyone goes through difficult periods and rough seasons in the Christian journey. When we are overwhelmed by stress and anxiety and fear, we have to remember we are not alone. Christians throughout the centuries have faced difficult situations and have overcome them through the power and provision of God. The people to whom Peter wrote this letter were some of these overcomers. They faced brutal condemnation from their government for proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ. Many even lost their lives for what they believed in. They knew what fear was! Peter wrote to tell them they did not have to carry their own burdens. They could give them to God.

This verse contains a simple but powerful truth: we were not created to carry our own burdens. God wants his people to cast their cares onto him. He wants to lighten our loads if we will only give our baggage to him.

Many people agree with the command to “cast all your anxiety on him.” But many of us don’t know how to do that. How does a person overcome by fear, anxiety, depression and stress give it over to God? George McCauslin gives us a great picture. He wrote a letter of resignation. He decided he could no longer handle his worries on his own. This is a form of confession we need to emulate. God is waiting for us to admit we can’t handle our own cares. God loves it when his people are desperate for him. Are you? Do you need to confess that you can’t manage your fears on your own? Go to God and tell him how you feel.

What are some burdens you need to give to the Lord?

prayer exercise:

Say the following prayer out loud:
"Father, I need you right now. I confess to you that I can't bear my burdens anymore. I want to give you these to you. I want to let you be God in my life. Right now I give you my fears of _____. (It may be one or many. God wants to take them all.) Lord, I thank you for promising never to leave me. I surrender all of my burdens to you. Teach me how to walk in this way. I love you. In the strong name of Jesus I pray, Amen."

why fearing God is good

So far this week, we have talked about how everyone's afraid, how fear can keep us from God's best in our lives and how we need to learn to cast our anxieties on God. Today we take a timeout to talk about how fear can be good.

I have a miniature schnauzer named Otis who has an unlimited amount of energy and feistiness. When I bought Otis as a Valentine's Day gift for my wife, I had visions of a sweet, precious, submissive, gentle, caring, cuddly, obedient dog. But that vision was pretty distorted. Over the past year, God has taught me a lot about patience through Otis. It has taken a lot of time and effort to get Otis to be obedient and submissive. Trying to houstrain him was brutal. He had no idea why he had to stay in his kennel all day, and he hated every second of it. He barked, howled, and cried in an effort to persuade us to let him out. However, we didn't let him out, because we knew we had to break him and show him who was in control.

As time goes on, Otis is gradually becoming the dog I knew he could be and is growing into a pretty obedient and submissive canine companion. I think he realizes that my wife and I are always going to take care of him. We are not going to leave him. He has learned to trust us. Now he goes into his kennel and sleeps all the way through the night.

Read Psalm 111:10

Fill in the blanks:

Psalm 111:10 says, "The _____ of the LORD is the beginning of _____; all who follow his precepts have good _____. To him belongs eternal _____."

The New Living Translation has a great take on this verse: "Reverence for the LORD is the foundation of true wisdom. The rewards of wisdom come to all who obey him. Praise his name forever!" The key words we should focus on here are reverence and obey. This verse makes it very clear that we are supposed to fear one entity: The Lord.

The fear or reverence the Bible speaks of is by no means the same as being scared. Not at all. We are to be a group of people who honor and respect the Lord with our lives. This reverence should lead to obedience. The Bible is very clear that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

■ What do you think it means to fear the Lord?

Do you fear the Lord?

yes

no

Why or why not?

To give God reverence is to abandon your own pride and honor God as he deserves. It means acknowledging what you are not and what God is. Reverence for the Lord says, "Father, you are absolutely worthy of my surrender to you. I exalt and glorify you above all others. You are God, and I am not. I give my life to you."

If we want to reverently fear the Lord and be obedient to him, we must be people who take seriously what it means to submit to his authority. We all have fears we need to address. The first step in dealing with those fears is living with appropriate fear or reverence of the Lord. Let us obey him by surrendering our lives. He will never leave us or forsake us. Through our fears, he will draw us to himself.

- Why do you think God places such a large emphasis on people submitting to Him?

- What are some ways in which you need to be more obedient to Him?

prayer exercise:

Spend some time being quiet before the Lord. You may want to ask God what areas of your life you need to hand over to him. Ask yourself some tough questions. Do you fear the Lord? Are you living in obedience to him? Are you holding some things from him that he wants you to release? Take your time and be honest with the Father.

a surprising answer to fear

- What do you think is the answer to fear?
- courage
 - love
 - both courage and love

Have you ever watched a child jump off a diving board for the first time? The child's reaction is almost always the same. Fear constricts tightly around his small, floatie-framed body. The youngster walks to the edge only to stand there frozen between the possibility of fun and the risk of the unknown. Many times, the child stands at the end of the board for twenty to thirty minutes debating in his mind just what move to make next. Parents standing on the side of the pool watch him struggle with this seemingly insurmountable challenge. They encourage their child to jump and reassure him that everything will be OK. Still, the child is held fast by fear, because courage alone is not enough to conquer this powerful fear.

More often than not, something happens that changes everything for the child. Just when you think he will never leap from the diving board, his father jumps into the water, opens his arms and calls, "Jump! I'll catch you!" Delight and peace race to the child's face. A few short moments later, the child has jumped in the water and waddled back to diving board, where he stands and pleads, "Let's do it again, Daddy!" What courage alone could not overcome, love did.

Read 1 John 4:16-18

Fill in the blanks:

1 John 4:18a says, "There is no _____ in _____ . But perfect _____ out _____"

Most of the time, when we think about the answer to fear in our lives, we think of courage. Courage is "the state or quality of mind or spirit that

enables one to face danger with self-possession, confidence and resolution." Courage enables us to overcome fear by disregarding it, thus allowing us to live in spite of fear. Many times throughout the Bible, courage is shown doing just that. But the message of 1 John 4:18 is that we have another help in our battle against fear. John says that love is the answer to fear. While courage merely helps us overcome fear, love drives fear out.

It is surprising to think of love as an answer to fear. In fact, at first the two seem only distantly connected. But it's love that spurs a child to jump off the diving board. It's love that gives a scared child peace in his parents' bedroom. John reminds us that love helps drive fear out of our lives as well. What courage many times cannot do, love can.

■ Does it surprise you to think about love as an answer to fear in your life?

yes

no

■ What are some situations in your life where God has demonstrated love's power to drive out fear?

Over the next few weeks, we will journey through some of the fears many of us face everyday. Many times these fears keep us from following God. This is not a new problem. Thankfully, the Bible is honest about its God-followers. Throughout its pages, many of the people we consider heroes of the faith struggled through their own fears just like we do. The truth is that the Bible is full of cowards who were transformed by the power of the love of God. Through the lives of Esther, Jeremiah, Moses, Elijah, Hagar and Joshua, we will identify the fears that affect our lives and experience together the way God loved these people through their fears.

prayer exercise:

Get quiet before God. Ask him to show you someone in your circle of influence who needs to know that he or she is loved. Ask God for ways you can show that person that you love him or her and that God loves him or her. Pray and thank God for his great love that allows us to love each other and follow him regardless of the fears we face.

