

Fear can hit us at random times.

For example, I am not normally afraid of heights, but when I was working on our prior church, twice I was overcome with fear when I was done working up high. I thought, 'where is this fear coming from?'

- Fear **hits us suddenly**, like a wave.
- Fear **makes us to question** our abilities, our purpose, our influence, and even our relationship with God.
- Fear can define us or limit us.

We **all face fear**, but it **does not have to stay** – God will help us and lead us through 'all our fears.'

God **doesn't want us to be dominated** by fear or anxiety.

- He **promises to be with us** throughout life's challenges.
- **As I go through today's story, I am going to interject some great passages for us to read out loud to confront our fears.**

Let's read these passages together:

- 'I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Phil 4:13 NASB).'
- 'For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline (2Ti 1:7 NLT).'

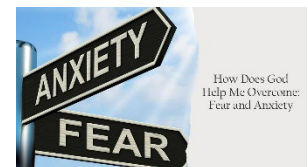
Fear blinds us to God's bigger plan, but faith opens the door to the blessing He's already prepared.

Where has fear narrowed your vision lately?

Welcome to CIC!

Today, we **finish up** the series, *How Does God Help Me Overcome*. Today's subject is Fear & Anxiety.

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If anyone witnessed the power of God firsthand, **it was Jacob**.

- He had vivid dreams and visions from God (Genesis 28:10–17).

- He physically wrestled with God (Genesis 32:28).
- He **heard God say** He would protect and bless him throughout his life (Genesis 35:11–12).

And yet, **fear was a close friend** of Jacob. We can understand his fear of Essau. After all Essau wanted to kill Jacob for taking his blessing and birthright.

But there was a **lot of *other* fear in Jacob's life**. His fear caused him to doubt God's plan.

1. Life's Challenges Can Expose Our Fear and Insecurities

When Joseph was **sold into Egyptian** slavery, his brothers told their father, Jacob, that Joseph was dead. Killed by a wild animal.

- Joseph's **grief** was so deep that he wanted to die.
- He **forgot or doubted** God's promise to 'bless all peoples on earth through you and your offspring (Ge 28:14).'

Years later, **famine threatened that promise**.

From our behind-the-scenes perspective, we see that God had strategically placed Joseph in charge of food supply operations.

'When Jacob heard that grain was available in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why are you standing around looking at one another? ²I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there, and buy enough grain to keep us alive. Otherwise we'll die." ³So Joseph's ten older brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain. ⁴But Jacob wouldn't let Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin, go with them, for fear some harm might come to him (Ge 42:1-4 NLT).'

Fear **scrambles our ability to think** straight. For example, Jacob reasoned out of fear...

- Joseph is dead.
- My family might die – so go to Egypt.
- Oh, Benjamin cannot go?

Jacob's fear of losing Benjamin was rational to him alone. **It was based on his fear**.

- Jacob didn't want to experience **the heartache of losing another son**: 'If anything should happen to him on your journey, you would send this grieving, white-haired man to his grave (Ge 42:38 NLT).'
- **While that made sense to him, don't forget that** 'God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose (Ro 8:28 NASB).'

The pain of Jacob's past became a **foundational fear** for his future.

If we aren't careful, **we will allow our** insecurities, experiences, and failures to *overshadow God's ultimate plan* for our life.

- Like Jacob, we **can be tempted** to let *fear influence our* actions and our decisions.

In those times, **we must stand on** the truth of God's Word and His character. **We must choose faith over fear; we must seek God.**

- For example, **David** was afraid he might never be king. In fact, he stooped so low that he pretended to be insane. **Looking back**, he said, 'I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears (Ps 34:4 NIV).'

Jacob's sons **travel to Egypt** and buy food. **Joseph wants to see** his brother Benjamin and tells them they must leave one of the brothers in prison until they bring Benjamin back. They return to Canaan and ...

- **Jacob's fear** is *holding back* Benjamin, but **Joseph's love** is *calling Benjamin*.
- *What if Jacob had let Benjamin go to Egypt the first time?* I would imagine years of pain could have been avoided by Jacob.

2. God's Solution Requires Action

Eventually, they **run out of food again** and must make a second trip to Egypt.

Judah tells his father, 'Remember, the man said, 'You won't see my face again unless your brother is with you.'''⁶ "Why were you so cruel to me?" Jacob moaned. "Why did you tell him you had another brother (Ge 43:5-6 NLT)?"

Often, **the point of our fear is where God works for His greater purposes**. **Joseph's love** for Benjamin is the key to restoration (and survival) – but **Jacob's fear** is *fighting against* it.

'So their father, Jacob, finally said to them, "If it can't be avoided, then at least do this. Pack your bags with the best products of this land. Take them down to the man as gifts ...¹³ Then take your brother, and go back to the man.

¹⁴ May God Almighty give you mercy as you go before the man, so that he will release Simeon and let Benjamin return. But if I must lose my children, so be it (Ge 43:11-14 NLT).'

Fear blinds; faith opens.

We know that God had positioned Joseph in Egypt to provide blessing and protection for their family.

- 'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way (Ps 46:1-2 NIV).'

- ‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me (Ps 23:4 NASB).’

God’s solution usually requires action.

- We may need to **move into a new or uncomfortable** place or position.
- *Jacob* was **squeezed between** the threat of starvation and his fear of losing his youngest son.
- *If he had given into his fears* totally, he may **have hindered God’s plan** of provision for himself and future generations.
- **Fear can be paralyzing, but we must choose through the doors God opens.**

When they arrived, ‘The brothers were terrified when they saw that they were being taken into Joseph’s house (Ge 43:18 NLT).’

- Joseph’s servants spoke kindly to them (43:23).
- Joseph gave them water to wash their feet and had their donkeys fed.
- But **when he saw Benjamin**, he broke down and wept. After so many years as a slave, as a prisoner, and now a ruler it was too much for his emotions.
- When he composed himself he **sat them in their birth order** – shocking them.

In the end, **Joseph wanted to keep Benjamin close** to himself in Egypt *and send the other brothers back home*. But **Judah pleaded** with Joseph, saying, ‘Joseph - ‘His full brother is dead (Ge 44:20 NLT)’ - keep me here instead otherwise my father will die.’

At that point, **Joseph can no longer contain** his emotions. He dismisses his Egyptian servants and addresses them in Hebrew: “‘I am Joseph!’” he said to his brothers. “‘Is my father still alive?’” But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them (Ge 45:3 NLT).’

- After they get over their shock **they develop a new fear** – Joseph’s revenge.

But *instead of taking revenge*, Joseph tells them **he sees God’s hand in all of this**: ‘God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. ⁸ So it was God who sent me here, not you (Ge 45:7-8 NLT)!’

3. You Can Trust God with Both Your Fears and Your Future

When the brothers realized that **they had Pharaoh’s favor** *because of Joseph* they returned to Canaan and told their father **the truth**: Joseph is alive and is ‘ruler of all Egypt (Ge 45:26).’

I love **Jacob’s response**: ‘Jacob was stunned at the news—he couldn’t believe it (Ge 45:26 NLT).’

- His *fear* had been such a **close companion** all these years, **he could not believe the source of his suffering was really God's blessing.**
- **He had forgotten** the promised blessing.

Jacob had so much to **celebrate**. Benjamin was safe. Joseph was alive. Their family had been rescued from famine. As Jacob made his final journey to Egypt, God once again met with **him in a vision**. 'Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make your family into a great nation. ⁴I will go with you down to Egypt, and I will bring you back again. You will die in Egypt, but Joseph will be with you to close your eyes (Ge 46:3-4 NLT).'

- 'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (Jn 16:33 NIV).'
- 'The Lord is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid (Ps 27:1 NIV)?'

All this time Jacob had been **so focused on not losing Benjamin** that he had *failed to see* that God had a bigger plan.

- Fear caused **Jacob to guard his pain** and only saw his immediate situation.
- But **God sees the bigger picture**.
- When **we give God our fear and worry**, we can see His purpose and plan for our life much more clearly.

4. God Helps Me with Fear and Anxiety

I have to monitor my anxiety-level when it comes to being your pastor. I sense it in my heart when the sheep are not content. When the sheep fight or are discontented, I do not sleep well. Often, there is nothing I can do.

- I cannot make people get along with each other.
- I cannot magically become a Jimmy Swaggart or a Timothy Keller type of preacher.
- I cannot change a critical spirit from a distance – especially, if they are not in God's word.

Sometimes I am anxious because there is a spiritual attack against God's people. All I can do is pray hard and remind God that this is His church; His bride.

Fear and anxiety can keep us from acting or thinking clearly. These **emotions** *can* prevent the incredible future God has planned for us if we let them rule our actions.

Fear and worry have **the power to weigh you down** mentally, physically, and spiritually.

- Fearful thoughts can weigh heavily on your mind. Stress and anxiety can add **wear and tear to your body**.
- Worry can **weaken your faith** in God and others.

We must deal with fear and anxiety.

- *Choose* **today to believe** the promises of God over the lies of fear and anxiety.
- **Trust Him** for your future.
- **Know the truth** of God's Word. Stand on His promises.

Fear may seem loud, but God's promises are louder:

- 'So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand ... ¹³ For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you (Is 41:10, 13 NIV).' As Paul said 'I press onto to take hold of – that's our part, holding on by faith – that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me' – that's God's part, holding us.
- 'You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you (Is 26:3 NIV).'

Fear blinds us to God's bigger plan, but faith opens the door to the blessing He's already prepared.

Today is the day to **let it go and give it to God**. He can handle it.

When you release fear, you are making room for the blessing He's already prepared.

Pray.