



SESSION #1
WHY ARE YOU AFRAID?
Matthew 8:23-27

Introduction: *Before we enter this series on Fear let's be clear that this will explore an area that tends to be a personal, secret part of us that we have a hard time admitting, much less talking about. So let's start by giving you permission to gain trust in your group as you respond to these questions. We allow you to pass on a question, and we won't push you or judge you! We're in this together, so you are in a safe place.*

Discussion Starter: Fear is a normal part of life, it keeps us safe from harm. But, fear can also control our lives and keep us from taking risks or trying new things. A life controlled by fear, rather than faith, becomes a self-destructive power. **What are some areas that cause fear in your life?** (Job stability, Depleted Savings, Relationships, Major expense)? **How do you normally respond to these issues? Is it a productive response that addresses the circumstance, or a paralyzing response?**

Passage Discussion: Read Matthew 23-27

What is the contrasting response of Jesus and the disciples to the same storm? (vv. 24-25 Jesus was asleep, the disciples were fearful)

What attitude allowed Jesus to sleep, and what attitude caused the disciples to be afraid? (Read verse 26 Jesus had faith, trust, that nothing in life would ultimately happen that God didn't have ultimate control over, **Disciples** didn't understand God's control over their lives)

From Max Lucado's book, *Fearless, Imagine Your Life Without Fear*.

"Fear has touched every one of us in some way—whether it has entangled us or completely enchained us. But how we respond to fear, and whom we turn to for a way out, is what matters more than anything. Will your fear leave you embittered or awestruck?"

From George's sermon: The cause of the disciples' fear – Matthew chose his words carefully when he described this storm. He used the Greek term *seismos*, which means "a trembling eruption of sea and sky." He uses this word only two other times – at **Jesus' death** and at his **resurrection**. These three events shook up the world, first the disciples' world in this storm, and then the solution to our storms in the death and resurrection of Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ provides the solution to our fears.

We all face fearful situations, we can't solve our fears by devaluing them. **What do we learn about God in each of the three stories about turbulent situations** (the storm, Christ's death, Christ's resurrection)?

Why is life filled with trouble for Christians? What makes pain and anguish different for Christians?

FEAR OR COURAGE

“Fear never wrote a symphony or poem, negotiated a peace treaty, or cured a disease. Fear never pulled a family out of poverty or a country out of bigotry. Fear never saved a marriage or a business. Courage did that. Faith did that. People who refused to consult with or cower to their timidities did that.” (Max Lucado)

When has courage overcome fear to accomplish something good in your experience?

LEADERS’ NOTE: This conversation can flow naturally from the last question—people may have stories of setting aside their fears to accomplish something. If no one has a personal story, look to current events or history to share stories of people who have stared fear in the face and chosen courage instead. For example, Google the stories of Paul Rusesabagina, Rosa Parks, Aron Ralston, or Susan B. Anthony.

Have you ever felt that Jesus was sleeping through the storms in your life? How did you respond—in anger, in frustration, in hurt, or with understanding?

LEADERS’ NOTE: The disciples saw Jesus’ reaction and felt abandoned—they were hurt and angry and felt very alone. If anyone is currently in that place as he or she shares, be gentle. Remind the group of Jesus’ track record and let the person get there at his or her own pace.

Does it bring you comfort to know that this reaction is intentional on his part, not accidental or ignorant? If not, how does it make you feel?

LEADERS’ NOTE: As you discuss this question, maintain a welcoming spirit. Are they free to express anger at God? Are they free to show they sometimes don’t like the way things are? Or are they expected to recite the answers everyone expects? Some people *will* find comfort in this reaction of Jesus’, but others will be angered by it.

To what extent is it okay to pay attention to concerns of safety? Describe the point at which sensible caution becomes worship of a risk-free life.

LEADERS’ NOTE: A certain amount of fear is healthy—it is the canary in the coal mine, warning of potential danger. Fear is the appropriate reaction to a burning building or growling dog. Fear itself is not a sin. But it can lead to sin. When does that happen, and what does it look like in a real person’s experience?

In what ways have your encounters with fear increased your awe of God?

LEADERS’ NOTE: When we’re walking through the valley of the shadow of death, we can face not only personal anguish but also a crisis of faith—do we choose to trust God’s ability to calm the storm (in whatever way he chooses) or do we abandon him and try to fix the problem ourselves? When we see God’s power at work, we can’t help but grow in awe of him. Allow your group to explore this topic, giving testimony to God’s holiness.

As we think about fear, read Matthew 8:23-27 this week, think about the stories around this story in Matthew’s Gospel as well. Look for fear-causing situations in your life and ask God for His answer to your fears.

A Verse to Memorize:

The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!” Matthew 8:27