



Faith Over Fear Bible Study Leader's Guide

[Please provide: Bibles, hymnals, and copies of the Bible study for attendees.]

Putting Our Fears Before Us

There are many things which can cause us to be afraid while we live in this sin-filled world. When Jesus taught His disciples to recognize the signs of the end, He counseled them, *And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars* (Matthew 24:6). That signpost is as large as ever today. But there are many other causes of fear in our lives which may loom as large or perhaps larger because of their proximity. Criticism, conflict, divorce, growing old, poverty, as well as a diagnosis of cancer or other serious disease can all introduce fear. Spend some time in your group (or divide into smaller groups) and list fears that invade your thoughts or the lives of those you know. (We will take a second look at them toward the end of our study.)

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, we praise and thank You for being with us always. We know that we can count on You to help us at all times, especially at times when we are afraid. Be with us as we study Your Word today. Open our hearts and our minds to the truths You want us to know as we explore how faith in You conquers all fear. In Your saving name we pray. Amen.

The Face Of Fear In Scripture

Fear is as old as the Garden of Eden. Read Genesis 3:8-10. What was the basis of Adam's fear? His nakedness because he could not hide his disobedience from God.

Why was his fear an understandable fear? Fear of God's judgement is certainly a reasonable fear.

Read 2 Kings 6:8-23. Two people in this narrative express fear. List the fears of:

The King of Syria (v. 11). The king was afraid because there was a spy in their midst.

Elisha's servant (v. 15). Elisha's servant was afraid because the Israelites were surrounded by the Syrian army.

What was Elisha's antidote to his servant's fear (v. 17)? Elisha prayed that the servant's eyes would be opened to see the armies of God who were there to protect them.

Because Elisha trusted God, rather than listen to the voice of fear, he was able to be the ultimate diplomat, as God worked through him to save both the Syrians and the Israelites from the consequences of war. If both the King of Syria and Elisha's servant had been able to see the bigger picture, would they have been afraid? If both men saw the bigger picture, it is likely the conflict would not have become as heated so the fear would not have been as great.

Read Isaiah 6:1-5, Luke 1:11-12, and Luke 2:8-9. What is often the first response of someone when they see God or His angel(s)? They express fear.

Read Isaiah 6:6–7, Luke 1:13, and Luke 2:10. What is God's Word to those overwhelmed with fear of Him or His angel? They are told to “Fear not.”

No Fear

In the children's story of *The Three Little Pigs*, the pigs dance while they sing, “Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?” They lived without fear – until it came knocking at their door. Read Genesis 6:11–12 and Luke 17:26–27. What was the attitude of people in Noah's day? They went about their everyday lives ignorant of what was about to happen.

Read Genesis 19:1–9 and Luke 17:28–29. When Lot was living in Sodom, what was the attitude of his neighbors? They lived without fear of the consequences of their sin. They likely did not even know their actions were sinful as they did not know God.

Unable to see what the future will bring, people often live free from fear. They cannot see the danger just ahead.

So we see that sometimes we humans are justified in our fear, sometimes our fear is based on inadequate knowledge, or sometimes we are ignorant of coming events and are unafraid even when there is reason to fear.

Jesus' Thoughts On Fear

Read Matthew 10:28. Who does Jesus say we are not to fear? We are not to fear those who can kill our bodies.

Who are those who can kill our bodies? Those who can kill our bodies are other people and Satan.

Who does Jesus say we should fear? Jesus says we are to fear the one who can send both body and soul to hell.

Who is the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell? Only God is able to condemn an individual to hell.

Like Adam, when we are aware of our sin and come face to face with God our Judge, we have reason to be afraid. The reality is that we cannot keep God's Law perfectly as He demands. Because of the sin we have inherited from Adam as well as our own sins, we deserve to die eternally. Such a realization makes us quake with fear. But this, by the grace of God, is not where we, as believers in Christ, make our home.

Read Matthew 10:29–31. What comfort does Jesus give His disciples after telling them that they should fear the one who can condemn them to hell? Jesus tells His disciples they don't need to be afraid for God values us much more than the birds to which He also gives care.

With these words, Jesus moves his disciples and into the Gospel home of His love for us.

Read Romans 5:10 and John 11:25–26. What do these verses say Jesus has done for us? Romans 5:10 reminds us that even when we were God's enemies because of our sin, His Son, Jesus, reconciled us with God through His death on the cross. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus saved our lives from eternal death in hell. In John 11:25–26 Jesus Himself assures us that *everyone who lives and believes in me will never die* (v.26).

Knowing that Jesus is your Savior, why do you no longer have to fear sin, death, and the devil? Because of the faith which God has given us through His Word and the water of Holy Baptism, we trust that through His death and resurrection, Jesus has conquered sin, death, and the devil. As His baptized children, we know that we belong to God. Through Holy Communion, our faith is strengthened in Jesus' saving power. Through faith, we believe God's promise that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38–39).

Almighty Jesus

Fear of death is a universal fear. Matthew 8:23–27, Mark 4:35–41, and Luke 8:22–25 are three accounts of the same miraculous event. Read each account. Why were the disciples afraid? They feared they would lose their lives in the storm.

The disciples interpreted Jesus' lack of fear as indifference. Why could Jesus sleep through the storm? Jesus knew His ministry was not over. As true God, Jesus also knew that He had the power to keep the disciples safe.

To what did Jesus attribute the disciples' fear? Jesus attributed their fear to their lack of faith.

Jesus knows that until He returns to earth, we will face physical death. But our Lord also assures us that when we die, it is not the end. He told His disciples, *...an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment* (John 5:28–29). This statement has potential to produce terrible fear in our hearts. We may wonder, “What if I haven't done enough good to merit this resurrection of life?”

What assurance does Ephesians 2:8–9 give us when we fear that we have not done enough good to merit eternal life? It is not our good works that saves us. Salvation and eternal life are God's gifts through faith.

What additional assurance do we read in 1 John 3:19–20? Our hearts (thoughts) may condemn us, but God is greater than our hearts (v.20).

Read 1 John 4:18. What can we do when fear invades our thoughts? Pray that God's perfect love will cast out our fear of punishment.

What To Do About Fear

Now return to the fears you listed at the beginning of this study. How does knowing that nothing can happen to you that is not known to God change the character of any of those fears?

Knowing that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus can help us to ignore those fears. When we remember that Jesus has done it all for us through His death and resurrection, we are comforted. As we recall that God's power is stronger than anything, we know that we can trust in Him to help us.

How can viewing physical death, not as the worst thing that can happen, but as the transition to our eternal heavenly home make a difference concerning our fears? Jesus promises to be with us always (Matthew 28:20b). We can do all things, even face physical death, through Him who strengthens us.

Jesus does not deny that we will have trouble in this world. What does He say about those troubles and how we can view them in John 16:33? We can have peace because Jesus has overcome the world.

Those who do not know Jesus as their Savior do not have this same comfort. They may, in fact, be like the people living in the time of Noah or Lot, blissfully unaware of what is coming. How does this shape your attitude toward them? We are called by our Lord Himself to tell others about His saving love. Through always loving, Gospel-led language, out of concern for an individual's spiritual health, the Holy Spirit helps us to humbly speak to another concerning her sin (Matthew 18:15). Jesus' parable of the lost sheep also reminds us that we are to seek out those who are away from God and to share His Word with them (Matthew 18:10–14).

Fear is a human emotion. We have looked at various types of fear and lack of fear based on ignorance. We have learned that the gift of faith in God's love for us is the great antidote to fear. It brings us the peace of God which guards our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:7). If we trust in our own ability to keep God's Law perfectly as He demands, there is reason to be afraid. But when we live in the house of God's love in Christ Jesus, fear loses its power over us.

Together, read out loud this reminder from our loving, merciful, forgiving God: *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior”* (Isaiah 43:1b–3a).

Closing Prayer: Lord, when our fears focus our eyes on **our** circumstances instead of on **You**, remind us that You have overcome the world. Because You have given us faith through Your means of grace: Your Word, Holy Baptism, and Your Supper, help us to know that we are secure in You. Help us also to share the good news of Your salvation with those who have everything to fear but don't know it. Give us Your patience toward them as we pray that they will be led to faith in You and to repent of their sins so that they will not perish but will have eternal life. Amen.

Sing: “Have No Fear, Little Flock” LSB 735, LW 410

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