# Fear & Anxiety

First preached by Hannah Montgomery at Central, Edinburgh, on Sunday 24 March 2013

[www.jesusattheheart.org](http://www.jesusattheheart.org)

Intro

Part of a series – BOUND. There is stuff in our nation that is not what God would have in our nation. Patterns and systems of thinking and acting that are not honouring to God and not honouring to his people.

This morning – fear & anxiety. Don’t know what you think of when you hear those words.

* Fear of God – reality is that there is NO fear of God and plenty of fear of nearly everything else.
* Fear - an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that something unwelcome is likely to happen.

Reality is that pretty much everybody in this room at some point if not this week has been fearful, or worried. We all worry. We all fear. We all get anxious. These are normal human emotions. Most of our fears are quite rational. We fear lack because we don’t have a lot. We worry about our children because we love them and want them to be safe, and we can see that the world isn’t’ always a safe place. These are normal human emotions.

Fear can also be a healthy thing! Fear prevents us jumping off cliffs, makes us take care when climbing up tall ladders. Fear stops the child reaching out to touch the open fire. Fear stops us doing stupid.

*But reality in our nation is that fear has spiraled out of control.*

On the back of our natural inclination to fear as a protective mechanism to stop us doing stupid, Satan rides roughshod. He uses our fear to keep us bound. Fear tells us that we will never be good enough, that we are not in control and therefore need to grab at whatever control is easiest in reach – our eating patterns, our relationships, our material possessions. Fear makes us limit ourselves, stops us taking risks, binds us to the same old same old. Fear isolates us, leaves us unable to trust other people, and unable to live to in the moment, knowing joy in the everyday. Fear paralyses us.

Sound familiar? That’s because there is a stronghold of fear in our nation. Fear is at the root of addictions, of eating disorders, of manipulative relationships, of struggles for power.

Martin Niemoller – German pastor, first met Hitler in 1933, stood at back of room and listened. Later, when his wife asked him what he’d learned, he said ‘I discovered that Herr Hitler is a terribly frightened man.’

The media doesn’t make this any easier. Personal fear and individual worry gets amplified in stories of economic recession, Middle East unrest, Global warming meltdown, threat of nuclear war, emergence of swine flu… Fear makes us create sophisticated investment plans, elaborate security systems, legislate strong military, and yet as a nation we depend on more mood-altering drugs than any other generation in history.

*If you weren’t’ worried when you came in here this morning… you are now!*

Truth is – God’s good intentions to us this morning – is that Jesus wants us to live in freedom, not fear. It is actually that simple. We have a God whose will for us is not for us to walk in bondage to anxiety and dread, but in power, love and self-discipline. We as a church are called to model being a people of courage to a nation bound by fear. This is the only way that we are going to deal with the stronghold of fear Satan has established in our nation – if we model and walk in a different way, a different light. If in the face of the shaking and moving of our nation and it’s economic policies and events we stand firm trusting in our God.

Because this is what He calls us to. Did you know that the most common command in scripture – most often uttered directive by Jesus in the gospels – is ‘Do not be afraid!’

We’re told in Luke 4.18 Jesus came to ‘proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.’

Matthew 6 – infamous passage on worry, Jesus calls us to the Father, to rely on him, to know that He cares for us, to submit our worries to him for tomorrow because today has enough trouble of it’s own.

*So don’t worry! Be happy!! Right? If only it were that easy.*

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Don’t be afraid – one of the hardest instructions in scripture! Perhaps that’s why He had to say it so much.

Truth is, that in the church, the way we have taught on worry and fear and anxiety has often contributed most unhelpfully to the issue. The culture of fear that exists in our nation is often deeply connected to a culture of shame and silence in our churches.

Reality is that we’re not very honest about our fear and worry. Because we hear things like ‘Don’t’ be anxious – just trust that God loves you!’ and therefore think we should be able to just get on with not being anxious or fearful. We should just stop it.

I need to pray harder. I must be failing on something if I’m not able to turn off the worry when I want to. I don’t have enough faith. I’m disobeying God. I’m letting everybody down but I can’t tell anybody about it! I can’t be honest about my fears and anxieties because to do so would mean admitting that I’m a failure. I’m not a real Christian. And I’m ashamed.

Don’t’ let worry kill you… let the church help! Said one church sign…



Sense that God wants to dismantle some of that stuff in us this morning – for the sake of the nation. Shame – knocking it down. Anxiety and fear – shine a light on it for what it truly is. Worry – show us that it doesn’t worry Him. How? God wants to show us that in our fear – right in the middle of our anxiety – He is present. He never leaves us.

Scripture doesn’t’ promises us a hunky dory happy clappy rainbow cloud experience. But does promise us a Saviour who still – in all simplicity – truly does want us to walk in freedom not fear. But I think it’s a bit deeper than a simple command to ‘just stop it’.

*Read together – Mark 14.32-42 Passage where Jesus has to face and walk through fear.*

This passage surprises me. Easy to think of Jesus as this perfect person who never got scared, always on form, probably never used bad words and definitely didn’t have too much wine at parties.

But here, we see a very real Jesus approach a very real fear with very real human emotions.

*Deeply distressed and troubled* NIV

*He plunged into a sinkhole of dreadful agony.* MSG

*Ch.22 v. 39 – 46*

*39 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. 40 On reaching the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you will not fall into temptation.’ 41 He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.’ 43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.[c]*

*45 When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 46 ‘Why are you sleeping?’ he asked them. ‘Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.’*

What did Jesus do in the face of fear? How did he remain boundless?

**Faces the Father**

Facing the certainty of suffering that He *knew* was going to happen, Jesus approached his Father in prayer. Creates space to literally *fall* on the floor before his father, got desperate. Jesus faced the Father.

*Abba, Father*  - Daddy. Intimate language. This is a child’s prayer. Not full of long expressive sentences. This is the prayer of a kid coming to their parent in distress.

Like any kid facing bad stuff, Jesus asks his Dad to take away the bad stuff. Take away this cup – this suffering that I must face.

When we face fear continually, perhaps because we’re walking through a particular difficulty, or there is trauma currently in our lives – it can seem very difficult to face the Father. Fear corrodes our confidence in Gods’ goodness. When he doesn’t’ answer these kinds of prayers, we begin to wonder if He truly loves us.

This is why it is important we learn from Jesus here. It is ok to come to God with our questions and with our doubts – with our fears. He is there.

Jesus doesn’t’ just face the Father. He faces the father honestly.

**Get Honest.**

Stop pretending to God that everything is fine! He’s big enough and good enough to hear you out. It’s like nearly impossible to offend God in prayer. He’s got tough boots on. Get honest.

Jesus - *My soul is overwhelmed with trouble to the point of death* NIV

I feel like I’m going to die. If that’s not honesty, I don’t know what is.

Major part of dismantling fear and worry is refusing to run away from them. Getting honest is the first step of this.

**Get specific.**

Identify your ‘cup’ and talk to God about it. Expose your fears - call them out in fear. This is the first step in victory and freedom. Make them stand before God. Expose them for what they are. This is the model that Jesus offers us.

It is when we face our fears, and expose them for what they, making them stand before our Father, that we learn what it is to receive *his perspective* on them.

In a nation bound by fear, we are called to be a people of courage. People of courage have incredible eyesight.

When we live according to our own human sight, we calculate everything from our perspective. We are always discouraged. When we live by faith (God’s eyesight) the equation always changes.

That’s why with David and Goliath – the army and King Saul looked at Goliath and let fear bind their nation, but when David turns up, he looks with eyes of faith and sees the victory that belongs to the Lord. He saw the situation for what it truly was. How? He’d spent time training his eyes. Time in the sheep fields, tuning his harp, protecting his sheep, learning what it meant to be one who walked with God. Who faced fear with his God, not without him.

Likewise Jesus had a lifetime of learning to be honest, facing His Father, training his eyes to bank upon in this moment of soul anguish.

*Heb 5.7 During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.*

People of courage get honest but they also look for God’s eyesight – God’s perspective. Feed their faith with good things, as well as getting honest about the bad things.

Wonderful exercise – in the middle of panic and fear. Five fingers on one hand… count the truths of scripture over yourself.

Jeremiah in Lamentations 3.21-24 moves from sliding into feeding his fears, to feeding his faith. Choose SIGHT – choose perspective. Blamed God. Shifted gaze…

* The steadfast love of the lord never ceases
* His mercies never come to an end
* They are new every morning
* Great is your faithfulness
* The lord is my portion

People of courage recognize the PRESENCE and LOVE of God with them IN THE MIDDLE OF their fear, and they choose HIS perspective.

*Not my will but yours – what do you want Lord?*

‘All God’s giants have been weak men, who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them.’ James Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission.

**Look for community**

People of courage also know that they can’t do this Facing the Father and Getting Honest on their own. They look for community.

Jesus comes to Gethsamane in fear and distress, but just a few verses previously he’s been sipping wine in an upper room in peace and worship. Love is here demonstrated and initiated – not just for them but for every God-seeker that would follow generation after generation on. It is the worship and love in this community that Satan opposes with the fear soaked on Jesus in Gethsamane. It is what Jesus is initiating – a way to the Father, a way to relationship with others – an end to isolation – that Satan opposes. Jesus knows this, so he goes to Peter, James and John to get honest about his fear, and to ask for their help.

We are called to the same. So verbalize your fear! This dissipates them. Talk about it to people you trust who follow God and hope they stay awake a bit longer than Peter, James and John.

We are not to be alone with our fears. They would happily paralyze us to isolation. Do not let them. This is Unconditional Love

**Walk forward**

Lastly, Jesus walks forward. We don’t see any big resolution to Jesus’ experience of fear and anxiety. What we see is Jesus choosing the will of the Father, and walking forward into the reality of his fear.

Jesus is given strength by the Holy Spirit – not to escape, but to stand in the storm.

v.41-42 Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

Becoming a people of courage in a nation of fear does not mean that we will escape fearless or anxiety-less. Trusting God does not always mean that our emotions and feelings will be rock sure. It means that in our weakness we are trusting God to be God.

Courage may panic, but it chooses to pray. Courage may moan, but chooses to believe. Courage may sweat and dither, but moves forward with faith. The storm might not cease, but our discouragement will certainly decrease.

Truth is that Jesus faced the greatest fear battle of all time in this passage. He was about to take on the sickness, sinfulness and anxieties of all of history on himself, bearing the justice of God upon his own human pain-fearing body.

So today, in our fear, we can choose to walk forward because Jesus choose us – and is WITH us and FOR us. Message of Easter – God came down TO us and WITH us and IN us. We are not alone. His presence is here – right now – We are not alone.

Whether we are someone who worries occasionally, worries a lot or lives day in day out with severe fear and debilitating anxiety – this is true. He is here. He is present. We are not alone.

Walking out of fear into freedom can be a second-long event – God breaks in – and it can also can be the journey of a lifetime. Pray.

*Note to mental health.* If what I’ve talked about this morning has particularly resonated with you, and you know that you grapple with worry and anxiety in a more severe way / issues in the BOUND series – strongholds in a nation - have resonated more personally with you and you’d like opportunity beyond your current community to talk this through, perhaps with someone more trained in these issues.

The Worry Book by Dr Rob Waller & Will Van Der Hart of Mind & Soul – based on techniques of cognitive-behavioural therapy, approach for severe worry recommended by NHS. [www.mindandsoul.info/worry](http://www.mindandsoul.info/worry)

Counseling Ministry / Prayer Ministry from this church