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Facing Life's Fears With Faith:

Welcome to TRVC...it's good to be able to share with you all again. You know, one of the most rewarding things about being able to share the message on a Sunday is that whatever I am scheduled to preach about...it never fails...That week, God always preaches to me about it before I get up here. Whatever the topic is, it's like God orchestrates nearly everything in my life to bring up that topic in my life...to speak to me. Which is great! I mean, I really love hearing from Him. Whenever God speaks to me through other people, through the Bible, or just in my heart, I can feel life entering my soul in this very tangible way. Guys...God is so good. And a relationship with Him is the only hope we have. As Jesus said, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God's mouth." Jesus comes to bring us life in this very abundant, very real and genuine experiential way. He did that for me this week in some totally unexpected ways, and it's my prayer that he will do that for all of us here this morning. Would you pray with me?

So here we are in the middle of a sermon series we're calling "Facing Life's Fears With Faith." If you missed either of the last 2 weeks, I would encourage you to get on the website and download or

stream the messages, because in talking with many of you, I know that fears seem to be cropping up all over the place for a lot of us. It might encourage you to know that God takes our spiritual health, he takes your spiritual health and vitality very seriously. Brian usually plans out sermon series a while in advance and he had something else entirely planned for this fall. But mid-summer God started showing him that He wanted us to talk about choosing faith and not fear. And here we are in September with lots of reasons to be tempted to fear...between the financial upheaval in the banking and housing sectors of our country and the fear that is causing in our country and the very personal fears I know many of us are dealing with within relationships. In the midst of all that, doesn't it comfort you to know that this did not catch God by surprise? He was already making provision for us...making provision for you! He was making provision for me! I love that about God! It reminds me over and over again that He is so worthy of my trust. Why do I lose sight of that sometimes?

Last week, Brian shared a message from a book of the Bible called 1 John. I'm going to read part of that passage again this morning because, honestly, I think it's worth dwelling on a little

longer. We'll start in **1 John 4:16**

16 We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. **17** And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

18 Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. **19** We love each other because he loved us first.

My topic for this week under the grand umbrella of facing life's fears with faith is this...how can we let God set us free from the fears that we have in real relationships with other people. How do we learn to make what some have called the "supernatural exchange?" How do we, when we are faced with things that seem to stab at the very core of our sense of safety, of our sense of well being...when we are faced with those things that make us want to run away or get defensive or wallow in self-pity, or get angry, or control...How do we learn to exchange the fear we have and the sinful things we do with that fear for the healing that I believe God wants to offer us? How do we practically let God take this room that is our soul...remember that

picture from last week?...that room that right now is filled with fear and anger and hopelessness and anger and all kinds of things that ultimately bring death to us....and let Him fill us with His love so that the fear has nowhere to land and it's sent flying out the windows and doors? How do we do that?

I am going to give you a little spoiler alert that this particular message may be a little bit on the challenging side. It may meddle a bit, and may feel a bit uncomfortable. But I can assure you that when Jesus shines his light on something that maybe we would like to ignore, it's only for our good. It is to bring us that real life...that "every word that comes from God's mouth" kind of life.

So I told you that God has been preaching to me this week, so we'd better start there. As many of you know, Brian and I have been married for a while. 13 years, now...and they have been very good. I can honestly say I can't imagine life without him and I love him very much. But I should probably let you in on a little secret...(we fight sometimes). I know, shocking, isn't it! In fact, we were having such a fight just last Sunday. Let me tell you about it....Wow! Everybody just sat up. I feel like I just opened the National Enquirer and everybody wants the juicy details.

All right, here you go... I'm going to start with this past Monday morning and fill you in on some of the history as we go along. Since the happy event of Brian being able to work full time for the church last November, Brian and I have enjoyed the wonderful blessing of being able to have a date every Monday morning while the kids are at school. We both take Monday mornings off, so we can spend time together. We go out to breakfast or make a nice breakfast at home, play cards, and talk about life. And the kids are at school! We are so happy that school is back in session! We both missed that tremendously over the summer. There's just something about remembering who you are as a couple without your kids around that is so helpful...you know what I mean? Some of you are wondering if that will EVER happen again because your kids are younger...take heart! Your children will grow!

This particular Monday, Brian had decided to meet his dad for a round of golf, so he had asked me if we could just plan on doing breakfast from 8-9 and then he'd take off to meet his dad. So all was fine and dandy until around 9:00 last Sunday night, when things got decidedly un-fine. Brian had been working on balancing the checkbook and doing some business stuff at the church and I

overheard him talking to one of our council members arranging to meet at 8:15 Monday morning to get some checks signed. In vain, I tried to catch him before he got off the phone, and then it got ugly.

I brought up in what I thought was a perfectly reasonable way that I would prefer if Brian did not meet him at 8:15, since I thought we were planning to have breakfast. And Brian looked at me like I was insane and totally unreasonable. In his mind, we could still have breakfast. And in his mind, he was trying to take care of our family by making sure we got our paychecks and didn't overdraft our checking account. What this felt like to me...and what I was afraid of and ready to accuse him of...was that getting church business done was more important to him than our date. Beyond that, he didn't really want to spend time with me because clearly church financial business was higher on his priority list, and we were obviously going to just let this whole date idea be usurped by anything else that came along. Like he would spend time with me if there wasn't anything better that came along. Clearly he didn't love me. That look on his face of how he couldn't believe how unreasonable I was being was not helping at all to convince me that any of these things I was afraid of were not true.

I'm going to stop there and ask you all a question...Have you been there? Have you run into situations over and over again, where you have an interaction or a particular situation that comes up over and over, and you can't seem to escape it or get past it? Maybe it's a group of friends who seem to leave you out just like you always got left out in the past. Maybe it's somebody in church leadership who lets you down and you once again realize that churches are always going to fail you. Maybe it's a financial crisis that comes up and convinces you that you're never going to get ahead and it's hopeless because God doesn't care. Maybe your spouse does that thing they do for the umpteenth time. I don't know what those situations are for you, but whenever we feel like no matter how much we try, nothing ever changes, that when the rubber meets the road neither God nor people care about us and we are ultimately alone, at the core of that is a fear that God wants to address, and a lie that you or I have believed which has caused us to choose sin rather than surrender and rest.

The Jewish people felt fear hundreds of years ago, as they faced some real dangers with an invading army. They were surrounded and they couldn't see any way out. But instead of talking to God honestly

about their fear and asking him for his help, they were trying to scheme their way out of the situation. They were racking their brains and decided to look to Pharaoh the King of Egypt for their salvation. Let's read about what God had to say to them through the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 30

12 This is the reply of the Holy One of Israel: "Because you despise what I tell you and trust instead in oppression and lies, 13 calamity will come upon you suddenly—like a bulging wall that bursts and falls. In an instant it will collapse and come crashing down. 14 You will be smashed like a piece of pottery—shattered so completely that there won't be a piece big enough to carry coals from a fireplace or a little water from the well."

15 This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength. But you would have none of it. 16 You said, 'No, we will get our help from Egypt. They will give us swift horses for riding into battle.' But the only swiftness you are going to see is the swiftness of your enemies chasing you! 17 One of them will chase a thousand of you. Five of them will make all of you flee. You will be left like a lonely flagpole on a hill or a tattered banner on a distant mountaintop."

18 So the LORD must wait for you to come to him so he can show you his love and compassion. For the LORD is a faithful God. Blessed are those who wait for his help. 19 O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. He will be gracious if you ask for help. He will surely respond to the sound of your cries.

I think God is saying that to all of us sometimes. He wants to show us love and compassion. He wants to show us how much he cares for us. He wants that relationship with us. But instead of honestly admitting our fear and asking him to save us, we adamantly and frantically run around trying to protect ourselves. Remember the disciples in Mark 4? They are crossing the lake in a boat and this storm comes up that puts them in real danger of drowning. And Jesus is sleeping in the front of the boat. When they finally wake him up and ask if he cares if they drown (pretty sure at this point that he doesn't care), he commands the storm to stop. When all is calm, he asks them, "Where is your faith?" Like, "Why did you wait until you were up in your eyeballs in water before you came to me?" Another translation of that verse says, He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" In the face of the real danger,

they lost sight of all of the evidence of Jesus' love and care for them as well as his power and they believed a lie.

You see it's easy to say we believe that God loves us, that He cares for us, but when we are faced with very real danger, when we are confronted with fear, what do we do? In the book, *Experiencing God*, the authors call this place "The Crisis of Belief." They say when we confront a situation where we reach the end of our ability and we are no longer in control, the very next thing we do will show what we really believe about God. Do we really trust him, or do we give in to fear? When we get controlling or manipulative or angry, or just give up hope and shut down, or when we run away, or when we become accusatory of everybody else while justifying ourselves, it's because we're afraid.

God wants us to come to him with all of our fears and all of our needs, he wants to care for us, he wants us to know in an experiential way, in a tangible way, that we are profoundly loved. He wants His love for us to chase all the fear out of the doorways and windows of our soul. But instead of coming to him in vulnerability and trust, we try to protect ourselves or get our needs met in other ways. Jeremiah 2:13 puts it this way, "For my people have done two evil things: They

have abandoned me—the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!”

The problem with scheming and looking to other people or to our own ability to control the situation, is ultimately two-fold. We are created to be loved by God, and nothing else works. God is not just a well of water...a place we can go to get a drink when our spirit is thirsty...he is a fountain of living water...a never-ending source who has more to provide for us than we will even need. He is more than we could hope for. And He wants that intimacy with us. Jesus said he came so we could have life. And when we don't go to God, we build ourselves cracked wells. They don't hold water. We are not enough for ourselves. We are not God, and we cannot calm the wind and the waves. We don't have the power. Money/financial security will not ultimately calm our fear. It is unreliable, as our current banking and housing crises have shown us. By the way, Brian is going to spend the next couple of weeks talking about our fears about money, so if money is something that is scaring you right now, you should make sure to catch those messages. And other people will never love us to the extent that we desire to be loved. Though made in the image of God, people are broken and incomplete. We do not love

unconditionally. Though amazingly, as we take God our real needs for love and ask him to calm our storms, he often chooses to love us through other people, who love us like that verse in John says, "We love because he first loved us." But if we go to others first to try and alleviate our fears, if we ask them to be what only God can ultimately be to us, we will always be hurt and disappointed.

- What does fear cause us to do? What are some of the sinful ways we can respond to fear?

Assume – you know what they say about assume? That it makes an ass out of you and me. Back to Brian's and my fight on Sunday. Both Brian and I reacted in some sinful ways during that interaction, but here's one of the main things God revealed to me through asking him for help this week. Because I was afraid of Brian not caring about me, I denied all of the evidence to the contrary and assumed the worst about him. Just like the disciples in the boat, I assumed he didn't care. We can do that with people, and we can do that with God. You see, like the disciples, we all have plenty of evidence in our lives that God loves us. If nothing else, the sun shines warmly on our skin, we can feel the lovely breeze on our face, the leaves turn beautiful colors in the fall. It goes past that, though. God has

brought blessings into every one of our lives like friends, laughter, I could go on and on...But our fear in the present situation causes us to deny that evidence of God's love or of other people's love and believe the worst. And I think I'm going to call that a sin. I mean, have you ever been around somebody that always believed the worst about you no matter what you did to try to convince them otherwise? Don't you think we must try God's patience sometimes? When we assume He doesn't care, in the light of everything He's done to prove His love, don't you think that might be hurtful?

Second, we can choose the broken well of Control/Manipulation.

I have another confession to make...Brian and I have different standards about housekeeping. I know this is likely to be familiar to many of you who are married. Most of our disagreements have been about housework. Here's why...I have a genuine fear of being left alone to be responsible for doing everything. So lots of times when Brian doesn't notice that the dishwasher needs emptying, it immediately translates for me into this anxiety that I am going to be abandoned to be responsible for everything. So here's how control/manipulation plays in. My natural bent, against which I have to fight, is to either do everything myself and try not to wish Brian

would help...I try and control myself so I have no needs and I am not, therefore, disappointed and hurt. That never works. Or I try to control Brian. I make very clear demands about what he must do RIGHT NOW if he cares about me at all. We can use control to try and get other people to alleviate our sense of panic, but here's the problem...if another person is only responding to my demands, it doesn't do a whole lot to convince me that I am not alone and that person is going to choose to love me. What it does convince me of is that I am ultimately alone, because that other person never gets the chance to choose to love me. He's too busy trying to avoid my nagging. So there's one example of what it might look like to try and manage our fear through control and manipulation. We can also go to a manipulative needy place, constantly making ourselves the victim, whining loudly so that others will pity us. But somehow, the knowledge that we had to manipulate people into pitying us doesn't satisfy us that we are really loved, either. If they only care about us because they feel guilty, it's not really love.

We can Shut Down – give up hope, get depressed. Some of us are so hurt by circumstances that we are convinced that there is no hope. We just shut down and try to survive, or even try not to

survive. Some people in this place commit suicide. We need to go to God and tell him we are afraid and ask for his help. Unconditional love is the only antidote to fear that is so pervasive we have despaired.

Get Angry/Accuse-Sometimes when we are afraid, it gets masked as anger. You see anger is a lot easier to feel in some senses than fear. Anger makes us feel like we have some control over the situation. Honestly talking about our fear requires a lot of vulnerability. It feels safer somehow to be angry. I was listening to a Sarah Groves song this week that she wrote about relating to her husband. The lyrics go..."There's a lot of pain in reachin' out and trying. It's a vulnerable place to be. Love and pride can occupy the same spaces, Baby. But only one makes you free. Hold on to me, and I'll hold on to you. Let's find out the beauty of seeing things through."

For me, that lyric speaks such truth. There is pain in reaching out and trying. We are forced to feel the fear. We are forced to feel the reality that we really long to be loved, but we might not be. As long as we stay angry and bitter, we have this illusion that we are not vulnerable, that that person can't hurt us any more. We are also not

experiencing love. But somehow the anger feels less threatening. The disciples went there when they said, "Jesus, don't you care that we're drowning!?!". Accusations and anger keep us in control, but they do little to solve our fears.

Run Away – Sometimes we think that if we just hide ourselves away in our own little universe and don't let anybody else in, that we'll be safe. This happens a lot to people who get hurt in churches, they just disengage and avoid the pain. The problem with that is that running away doesn't really address our very real need for love and support from other followers of Jesus, and it doesn't allow God to deal with the fears in our own heart that made us run away. Because God allows fears to rise up in our lives so he can set us free, not so we can run away. Jonah tried that and it didn't work out so well for him.

This isn't really meant to be an exhaustive list, but now that we've talked about some of the ways we might respond to fear in sinful ways, what do we do about fear? How do we navigate those situations and relationship dynamics that make us shake in our boots? How do we deal with fear in a way that brings honor to God, in a way that brings us closer to God and to other people...in a way that helps us experience the love that casts out the fear?

Repent – If you have looked to any broken well to keep you safe, to solve your situation, to make you feel loved or cared for this week and God is convicting you as I am speaking, repent. Ask God to forgive you for forsaking Him, the fountain of living waters, and for building your own well that's broken. Admit that it doesn't hold water, and abandon that broken well. You may also need to ask a person or people to forgive you. There is no downside to repentance...it always brings life. God sent his son Jesus, to suffer the alienation that resulted from your sin. Because he was rejected, God is ready to accept you. He wants you back and paid a high price to make a way for you.

Embrace honesty and vulnerability – A really good question to ask might be...what am I really afraid of? In my own fear of being abandoned to be responsible for all the housework, I find freedom when I give up on the control and manipulation and I just humbly admit to God and to Brian that I'm afraid. Then he can choose to care for me not because I nagged him into it, but because he really does care about me. And I am able to believe him because I didn't just force him into it.

Third, go to God and ask for His help. Surrender. Let me tell

you what happened to me this week. After Brian and I had worked through the argument Sunday night and had a great breakfast together the next day, I sat down with my Bible and started talking to God. I admitted to him that I was discouraged about having had the argument last night and I asked for His help. I asked him to forgive me and to remove whatever it was in me that caused these conflicts to keep arising. Let me tell you, God has so taken me up on that offer. Not only did he show me how my fears had been bringing a tone of accusation to my interactions with Brian and help me repent, but he brought up this whole other fear I had been totally blind to that had been weighing me down for months and started setting me free from that. Then he brought me all of these other situations in which I could help other people deal with their fears. Guys, God is a fountain of living water! He is so much better than the broken wells I build to try and deal with life and keep me safe.

Last, if you have been overwhelmed by fears this week, recognize that there is a spiritual component to your mental/emotional battle. The Bible teaches us that this world is a battle-ground. There are 2 opposing spiritual forces and they are fighting over human souls. We have a very real spiritual enemy who

according to the Bible prowls around like a roaring lion seeking somebody to devour. Jesus calls Satan the thief in John 10 and says he comes to steal, kill and destroy. He would like nothing better than to separate you from God and from other people so that he can pick you off. But God doesn't leave us defenseless in the battle. He sent Jesus to destroy the works of the evil one so that we could have abundant life. In Ephesians 6, we learn that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual powers. And God has given us weapons to use in that battle. If you are struggling with hopelessness that you can't overcome, read Ephesians 6 this week and ask God to show you how to use the spiritual weapons he has given all of us.

As we prepare to worship God together again, let's take a moment to be silent before God together...Will you stand with me while the worship team comes back up? Turn your heart toward God and ask him...

God, what am I afraid of? Have I dealt with this fear in a sinful way for which you are asking me to repent? Prayer ministry....