

Recovery from Fear

6 studies for groups or individuals

by

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Fear is a very uncomfortable emotion. But fear is also a very important emotion. It is a built-in alarm system that warns us of danger. Our bodies respond to perceived danger with a surge of adrenaline which is designed to help us protect ourselves either by fleeing from the danger or by fighting it. As uncomfortable as it is to be afraid, in times of danger, we need the protective alarm of fear.

The problem for many of us is that our emotional alarm system either gives off false alarms or fails to work when we really need it. We may perceive danger when there is none, we may perceive more danger than actually exists or we may not recognize genuinely dangerous situations when we are in them.

Cindy experienced fear's false alarm one afternoon when her boss yawned and stretched. He was standing a few feet away. Their conversation had been friendly. But when he stretched, Cindy experienced a moment of intense fear and panic. Instinctively she ducked and covered her head. Cindy was embarrassed by her response. She recognized that this incident was only the latest in a long series of fear reactions that were becoming increasingly destructive in her life. She was not, for example, free to be close to males in any way or to be assertive in any of her relationships. The fear alarm that was intended to make it possible for Cindy to protect herself, was instead gradually paralyzing her.

It is important to remember that there is always a reason for our strong emotional reactions, even when they do not seem to match our current situation. The fear is real even if its source is unclear. In Cindy's case, she eventually recognized that she had learned her duck-and-cover response from her physically abusive father. Cindy was responding to fears related to past trauma.

Recovery from paralyzing fear requires us to bring our fears out in the open. Unfortunately, like Cindy, many of us are embarrassed by our fears. We try to dismiss them as irrational overreactions. We may have been laughed at when we shared our fears ('scardy cat') or victimized in other ways for our fears. As a result, we often hide our fears from ourselves and from others. Acknowledging our fears to ourselves and to a few trustworthy people, however, is a key step in finding

freedom from their bondage.

Because fear has a protective purpose, the goal of recovery cannot be simply the absence of fear. We do not 'recover' from our emotions. The goal is, rather, to pay attention to them, to learn from them and to seek to recover from any trauma to which they are connected. The goal of recovery from fear is to become people who are free to act in ways which are consistent with our highest values and in ways that are respectful of others and ourselves even when we experience fear. What we seek is the courage to pay attention to our fears and the freedom not to be ruled by them.

Facing fear is not easy. We will need resources that often seem to be in scarce supply - courage, understanding, hope. The studies in this guide are intended to help you to receive from God the resources which make courage possible. Most paralyzing fears grow out of experiences (past, present or anticipated) of feeling alone, unprotected, inadequate or overwhelmed in the presence of danger. In the texts which we will study, God reveals himself as a God who is with us in the danger, protecting us, affirming us, empowering us and providing for us. Our prayer is that these studies will help you to experience God as someone who is with you when you are afraid.

May your roots sink deeply in the soil of God's love.

OUTLINE

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1. Abram's Fear and God's Faithfulness

"I can't do it. I just can't take the risk. I'm convinced that it would be the best thing, but I'm too afraid."

Few of us have escaped the confusing emotions that come when we are too afraid to move forward. From getting into an airplane, to pursuing career opportunities, to taking risks in relationships, life is full of situations that can become entangled by fear.

One of the most entangling fears, of course, is the fear of fear. We don't often say it aloud but many of us find ourselves thinking: "Good Christians simply trust God and are not afraid. But I am afraid. So, I must be a failure as a Christian." We think that God expects us to perform fear-defying feats of courage without experiencing fear. We shame ourselves for anything short of fearlessness. As a result, we are afraid that when we are afraid God will reject us.

Fortunately the Bible contains many stories that illustrate how God responds to people who experience fear. Abram, for example, was called by God to go on a great adventure. Abram had the courage to begin the journey but his fears were never far off. Often they led him into destructive dead ends. God nevertheless was faithful to his promises to Abram. As the text for this study shows, our fear-based choices do not alter God's care or his faithfulness.

Personal Reflection

1. Think of a time when you were able to act courageously even though you were afraid. What was the experience like?

2. What things would you like to do which have not been possible because of fear?

3. What specifically do you fear might happen if you were to do these things?

4. What resources would help you proceed even though you are afraid?

Bible Study

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." . . . Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you." When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that she was a very beautiful woman. And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants and camels. But the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" . . . After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Genesis 12:1-3,10-19, 15:1

1. What insights did you gain from your time of personal reflection?

2. What are the specific purposes God desired for Abram?

7. How does what you expect from God compare to God's response to Abram?

3. What were Abram's fears?

8. How might seeing God as faithful to his promises and purposes for you help you to take risks?

4) What fear-based decisions which seem to threaten God's purposes does Abram make?

9. Choose one of the following promises that God has made. Mediate on it for a few minutes and write a brief response.

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you, he will never leave you nor forsake you. Deut 31:8

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you. Isaiah 49:15

You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. John 16:20

5. How does God respond to Abram's fear based choices?

Prayer

What do you want to say to the God who is faithful to people who are afraid?

6. When you make fear based choices how do you expect God to respond to you?

2. Gideon's Fears and God's Encouragement

Jim sat nervously fingering his tie, waiting for the job interview to begin. "This must be my one hundredth interview," Jim thought. "Why am I so afraid? Maybe it's because I want this job so badly. But why would they hire me when I was fired from my last job? What is any employer ever going to see in me?"

Sometimes life events and changes can pose a threat to our self esteem. We lose a job, or experience rejection in a relationship, or we must do something that we believe we are incapable of doing. If our self esteem is already low, these events will seem especially threatening.

Self esteem grows out of experiences in life that allow us to see ourselves as loveable, valuable and capable. When we do not see ourselves in these ways our vulnerability to fear increases.

In Gideon's culture, value and identity were based in large part on the status of your clan, your family name and your birth order. As a result, Gideon did not see himself as a candidate for leadership. This complicated Gideon's struggle when God invited him to serve as a leader. As this study makes clear, however, God is prepared to encourage us when our low self esteem increases our fear.

Personal Reflection

1. Which of the following is most difficult for you to believe about yourself? Explain.

a. I am valuable

b. I am loveable

c. I am capable

2. Think of a time when you felt immobilized by fear. How do you think your difficulty in seeing yourself as valuable, loveable or capable contributed to your fear?

Bible Study

When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian." The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together. . . . Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die." . . . So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime. Judges 6:12-16, 23,27

1. What insights did you gain from your time of personal reflection?

2. What can you tell from the text about Gideon's perspective about himself?

3. Gideon also felt that God had abandoned him and his people. How might experiences of abandonment increase a person's vulnerability to fear?

7 What impact did these affirmations have on Gideon?

4. Gideon felt that he was not capable of doing what God asked him to do. How might seeing yourself as incapable increase your vulnerability to fear?

8. Imagine God encouraging you by calling you "a mighty warrior" and by telling you "I will be with you." What thoughts and feelings did you have in response to these affirmations?

Prayer

5. What encouragement does God give to Gideon in response to his feelings of abandonment?

What do you want to say to the God who encourages people who are afraid?

6. What encouragement does God give to Gideon in response to his perception of himself as incapable?

3. Peter's Fear and God's Empowerment

Bible Study

"I chickened out. I knew what I wanted to say to him. But I was terrified and I just could not get the words out. I feel like such a hopeless failure when that happens."

Fear can lead to feelings of failure because fear can prevent us from taking the risks which success demands. We feel bound and hopeless because we cannot find the will or the courage to do what we really want to do. As a result we find ourselves violating commitments that are important to us, avoiding things that need to be faced and trying to accommodate ourselves to situations that are intolerable.

When fear transforms itself into failure, we are at high risk for hopelessness and depression. Recovering from this kind of paralyzing fear requires us to find some way to break the link between fear and failure.

Peter's fear led him to lie about his relationship with Jesus just a few hours after he had bravely and sincerely proclaimed his loyalty. Peter's failure, however, was not the end of the story. As we will see in the text for this study, God understands that fear can lead to failure and is prepared to be helpful to people who struggle in this way.

Personal Reflection

1. Think of a time when your fears prevented you from behaving in ways that were consistent with your values. What happened? How did you feel at the time about the situation?

2. What helped you to recover from this experience?

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said and went out into the entryway. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Mark 14:66-72

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. . . . The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. . . . They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them. . . . "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead." . . . When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. Acts 4:1-4, 5, 7-8, 10, 13

1. What insights did you gain from your time of personal reflection?

2. Compare and contrast what Peter might have been feeling in these two situations and how this effected his behavior.

3. Peter wept after his failure in the courtyard. He probably felt that he would never be able to overcome his fears. As powerful as these feelings of hopelessness may have been, however, this was not the end of Peter's story.

a) What is it about fear-induced failures that leads so easily to hopelessness?

b) What has been helpful to you when you have felt hopeless because of your fears?

4. Peter met with Jesus several times between his experience in the courtyard and his experience in the courtroom. Jesus' response to Peter was compassionate in both their private and public encounters. What effect might this have had on Peter?

5. What did God empower Peter to do?

6. What else seems to be responsible for the freedom Peter had in the court room?

7. How might these stories from Peter's life give you hope that fear will not always have a strong hold on you?

8. God's power was greater than the power of either Peter's fear or his failure. How have you experienced God's empowering in the past?

9. How do you need God to empower you today?

Prayer

What do you want to say to the God who empowers people who are afraid?

4. Esther's Fear and God's People

"I had to go alone into the radiation treatment room. No one else could go in and be exposed. I was the one who needed treatments. And I had to undergo those treatments alone." Sharon continued talking to the cancer support group after drying her eyes, "But in a sense I was not alone. I know that many of you were with me. I know you were praying for me because I had asked you to. And knowing that helped me feel God's presence and love. And because I did not feel so alone, I did not feel so afraid."

When we are faced with a significant threat to our life or our well being we often feel very alone. Our sense of weakness and vulnerability increases with our loneliness. And often, as a result, our fear escalates.

Esther's story is a powerful drama about our need for a supportive community in times of fear. She was a young woman who was placed in a king's household as a concubine. Suddenly, because of the plot of one angry man (Haman), her people were faced with extinction. Esther was the only one with any hope of appealing to the king, but to do so was to risk her life.

Personal Reflection

1. Think of a time when you felt alone when faced with a significant threat to your well being . Describe the experience.

2. How did feeling alone in this situation effect the intensity of your fear?

3. Think of a time when you faced a threat but had the active support of others. Describe the experience.

4. How did the support of others impact your fear?

5. Make a list of people you could ask to support you in times of fear.

Bible Study

Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king." . . .

Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you." Esther 4:5-11, 4:15-5:3

1. What insights did you gain from your time of personal reflection?

6. How might following Esther's example in asking for support help you cope with your fears?

2. What was the situation Mordecai describes to Esther?

7. What barriers keep you from asking for support in times of fear?

3. What risks was Esther facing in this situation?

8. God was also with Esther, as he promises to be with us. What images of God help you picture his presence with you in times of danger?

4. How did Esther prepare to go before the king?.

9. What support would you like to ask for at this time?

5. Esther was afraid. What actions did she take in spite of her fear?

Prayer

What do you want to say to the God who provides community for people who are afraid?

5. Moses' Fear and God's Provision

Mark was trying to remember why he had agreed to speak to this group of people. "I don't have anything to say to these people. They will think I'm a fool. Who do I think I am?"

Sometimes feelings of inadequacy grow out of experiences of failure. More commonly, such feelings are the result of shame - the conviction that we are somehow 'not good enough' or that something is fundamentally wrong with us.

The fear that our inadequacy will be exposed and that we will experience more shame can be an immobilizing fear. The fear of being exposed as weak or inadequate can be triggered by a variety of challenges in our lives. This fear may keep us from wanting to make changes or to take risks.

As the text for this study shows, God seems to delight in using us, sometimes in the very ways that we perceive ourselves as most inadequate. God came to Moses while he was hiding in the desert. Moses had escaped to the desert after an experience of failure in leadership. God was now calling him to an enormously challenging leadership position. Moses reacted to God's call with fear. "I can't do it," he said, "I am inadequate for the job."

Personal Reflection

1. What feelings of inadequacy do you struggle with?

2. How do these feelings of inadequacy increase your vulnerability to fear?

3. Think of a time when you felt you were being asked to do something you felt inadequate to do.

a. What did you do?

b. What was helpful to you in the situation?

Bible Study

"And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you" . . . Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do.

Exodus 3:9-12, 4:10-15

1. What insights did you gain from your time of personal reflection?

2. Moses had escaped to the desert after killing an Egyptian. He may have feared returning to Egypt thinking his life would be endangered. What other fears does Moses seem to have?

6. What does this passage teach us about God?

7. What help do you need from God in order to take risks even when you feel inadequate?

3. How does God respond to each of Moses' concerns?

8. How might it help you to know that God can provide you with the resources you need when you are afraid?

4. God became angry after Moses' final protest.

a. How did God act toward Moses in his anger?

b. What about Moses' reluctance might have angered God?

Prayer

What do you want to say to the God who provides resources to people who are afraid?

5. What reaction do you have to God's anger?

6. David's Fear and God's Protection

Our first earthquake was not a pleasant experience. The earth beneath our feet seemed to turn suddenly to liquid. It moved in violent waves. The building over our heads responded with loud creaks and groans. It sounded as if it might come apart. Adrenaline shot through our bodies as we ducked for cover. We were suddenly and dramatically aware of our vulnerability and of the fragility of life.

Danger triggers fear. Fear signals that we need to take action to protect ourselves. But sometimes the danger feels so great that we realize we may be unable to keep ourselves safe. We are forced to realize our human limits and to rely on God for help and protection.

In the text for this study we will see that God can provide protection in times of danger. David had been anointed by God's prophet to succeed Saul as the king of Israel. Enraged, Saul sought to kill David. David fled for his life and in this poem we hear him calling on God for protection.

Personal Reflection

1. List several threatening experiences you have faced in your life.

2. What was your immediate reaction to these dangers?

3. What long term effects did these experiences have on you?

Bible Study

*Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me,
for in you my soul takes refuge.*

*I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings
until the disaster has passed.*

*I cry out to God Most High,
to God, who fulfills his purpose for me.*

*He sends from heaven and saves me,
rebuking those who hotly pursue me;
God sends his love and his faithfulness.*

*I am in the midst of lions;
I lie among ravenous beasts -
men whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.*

*Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory be over all the earth.*

*They spread a net for my feet -
I was bowed down in distress.
They dug a pit in my path -
but they have fallen into it themselves.*

*My heart is steadfast; O God,
My heart is steadfast;
I will sing and make music.
Awake, my soul!
Awake, harp and lyre!
I will awaken the dawn.*

*I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations;
I will sing of you among the peoples.
For great is your love, reaching to the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches to the skies.*

*Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory be over all the earth.*

Psalm 57

1. What insights did you gain from your time of personal reflection?

2. How does David describe the danger he faces?

3. How does David respond to this danger?

7. What help or protection do you need from God at the present time?

4. What did David ask from God?

8. Choose one of the metaphors of danger and one of the descriptions of God used in this psalm. Meditate on the metaphor and the description for a few minutes. Write a brief response in the form of a prayer.

5. How does David describe God and God's protection?

Prayer

What do you want to say to the God who provides protection to people who are afraid?

6. David cried to God for help when he was in danger.

a. What might make it difficult for you to cry out to God for help in this way?

b. What experiences have you had with calling to God for help when you have been in danger?

Leader's Notes

Study 1 Abram's Fear and God's Faithfulness.

Genesis 12:1-3,10-19, 15:1

Purpose: to see God as faithful to people who are afraid

Question 2. Encourage members of your group to see at least three key elements to God's purposes: a) Abram was to go to 'the land'. Concern for 'the land' is one of the central themes of the Old Testament. It is the place of blessing and worship. b) God wants to bless Abram. Fertility is a key element of this blessing. God wants Abram to have lots of children. c) God wants Abram to live a life that results in blessing for all people.

Question 3. Abram did not experience 'the land' God had promised as a place of blessing. It was a place of famine. His fears made it difficult to imagine that God would sustain him in the land. Abram did not see his wife as a blessing. His fears made it difficult for him to imagine that God could protect him. In an attempt to protect himself he gives away the woman who was his partner in God's promises.

Question 4. This story illustrates several qualities of Abram's character which we find repugnant (e.g. Abram's treatment of Sarai). The focus of the text, however, is on the ways in which Abram's decisions threaten God's larger purposes. Instead of going to 'the land', Abram goes to Egypt. Instead of being blessed(having children), Abram gives away his wife. Instead of being a blessing, Abram brings a curse on Pharaoh. The issue raised by the text is whether or not God will be faithful to his promises even when the person to whom these promises have been entrusted turns out to be unfaithful.

Question 5. God responds in two ways. First, God uses Pharaoh as his instrument to bring his purposes back on track. Abram may choose to be in Egypt but God's purposes are for him to be in 'the land.' Abram may give away his wife, but God will see that she is returned. Secondly, God pays attention to Abram's fears and reaffirms his promises. The point is not whether or not Abram has been faithful and trustworthy but whether or not God is faithful and trustworthy. God reaffirms his love and commitment to Abram.

Question 6. People will identify a variety of expectations of God. Some may expect God to punish them or shame them for their fears. Others will expect God to abandon or reject them. These expectations come either from past experiences of shame, punishment, abandonment and rejection or from false teaching about God. They stand in sharp contrast to God's faithfulness and love.

Study 2. Gideon's Fears and God's Encouragement.

Judges 6:12-16, 23,27

Purpose: to see God as encouraging to people who are afraid

Question 2. The text focuses on two things. First, Gideon feels abandoned by God. The oppressive rule of the Midians led Gideon to feel that God had forgotten his people. Feelings of abandonment can effect our self concept, making us feel unlovable and unvalued. Secondly, Gideon does not think he is capable of doing what God is asking him to do. In part this is due to his perception that he has low stature within his family and that his clan has low prestige.

Question 3. If we have experienced abandonment, we may anticipate that we will be abandoned again. If we have been abandoned or if we anticipate that we will be abandoned, then we will expect to have to face life's dangers alone. And it is far more frightening to face a dangerous situation alone than with others. For example, if you are in a dark alley alone, it is far more frightening that being in a dark alley with a trusted and powerful friend.

Question 4. When we feel incompetent or incapable we find it easy to anticipate failure. We expect the worst. And that expectation feeds our fears.

Question 5. God encourages Gideon by emphasizing that their relationship will continue ("Am I not sending you"). God affirms his commitment to Gideon ("I will be with you").

Question 6. God calls Gideon a "mighty warrior." God encourages Gideon to "go in the strength you have" - it will be enough. God also pictures a successful outcome for Gideon. The future will not be full of disaster("You are not going to die") or failure ("you will strike down all the Midianites").

Question 7. Gideon was still afraid and took precautions but he was able to do what God had called him to do, in spite of his fears.

Study 3. Peter's Fear and God's Empowerment

Mark 14:66-72, Acts 4:1-4, 5, 7-8, 10, 13

Purpose: to see God as a source of power for people who are afraid

Question 2. Peter was probably afraid in both situations. His life was potentially at risk in both situations. In the first story his fear causes him to lie and to deny the person he deeply loved. But in the second story he is able to act in spite of his fear. He was able to speak clearly and courageously.

Question 3. When fears keep us from acting in a way that is consistent with our values we will often see the fear as a character flaw which we will never be able to overcome. It may seem that we will always be paralyzed by fear, never able

to act and speak with freedom and courage. Fear always presents itself as a extremely powerful force. It feels as if nothing could ever have any effect on it. But God is greater than our fears.

Question 4. Jesus' compassionate, non-shaming response helped to heal the link between Peter's fear and his expectation that fear would always cause him to fail. Jesus did not treat Peter's fear or his failure as a hopeless character flaw. He did not treat Peter as a coward or a failure.

Question 5. Peter taught openly and people responded. He spoke powerfully to the religious rulers even though he knew their response was likely to be quite hostile.

Question 6. The texts says the the people who seized John and Peter were astonished and took note that they had been with Jesus. Peter not only experienced Jesus' healing compassion, he also experienced the reality of the power of his resurrection. It must have been a transforming experience to interact with the resurrected Jesus. In addition, the promised Spirit had come and now empowered Peter.

Study 4. Esther's Fear and God's People

Esther 4:5-11, 4:15-5:3

Purpose: to see God as a source of community for those who are afraid

Question 3. Esther was faced with the threat of death. - her own death and the death of all her people. She was also faced with the threat of having to break the rules and go to see the king when he had not called for her. She had no idea what the outcome of this daring behavior might be. She had to face the unknown alone.

Question 4. Esther identified both the threat and her fear. She listened to counsel. She asked for prayer support from her community of faith. And she acted in spite of her fear.

Question 5. Threatening situations are always more frightening when we have to face them alone and less frightening when we feel supported by people who know us and love us.

Question 7. It can be difficult to admit our fears because we are often ashamed of our fears. It can be difficult to trust other people to be interested or concerned if we have experienced abuse or abandonment in the past. We may not have had the opportunity to experience how helpful supportive friends can be in giving us courage - so we may not believe asking for this kind of support will be helpful.

Question 8. The Bible is full of images that might be helpful in times of fear. Here are a few: God is our hiding

place(Psalm 18:2), God with us(Matt 1:23), God the shepherd(Isaiah 40:11), God our light (Psalm 27:1).

Study 5. Moses' Fear and God's Provision

Exodus 3:9-12, 4:10-15

Purpose: to see God as present with and a resource for those who are afraid

Question 2. Moses expresses fears that he will be inadequate for the task, that he won't be able to speak eloquently, that he is not a significant enough person for a task so enormous.

Question 3. The central focus of the text is the promise of God's presence. But God also makes practical arrangements including calling Aaron to accompany Moses and promising to help Moses to speak.

Question 4. God is not out of touch with his anger, he does not hide his anger, he is not passive aggressive, nor is he abusive with his anger. God continues to be responsive to Moses' concerns. Moses did not want to do something he felt inadequate to do. God continues to work with him and to provide him with additional resources to help with his fears.

God's calling is a gift. And Moses was refusing this gift. Moses was refusing to see himself as God was seeing him - a person who could be a great leader. Moses was also refusing to acknowledge God's power. He seemed to think that the success of the mission would depend entirely on his personal giftedness rather than on God's powerful presence.

Question 5. Some people will be terrified at the thought that God gets angry because they have experienced first hand how anger can turn to abuse. Some people, however, may appreciate how much simpler life can be when anger is recognized and acknowledged. Anger does not end relationships. It is unacknowledged anger that is expressed passively or abusively that poisons relationship. God was angry and yet he continued to hear and respond creatively and compassionately to Moses' fear.

Question 6. There is a lot of information in this text about God. God responds to injustice and oppression. God uses people to achieve his goals. God listens to and cares about our fears. God experiences anger but does not abuse or abandon when angry. When God commissions someone for a task, he also provides the resources needed to accomplish the task.

Study 6. David's Fear and God's Protection.

Psalms 57

Purpose: to see God as a protector of those who are afraid

Question 2. David describes his situation as a disaster. He

writes that he is being “hotly pursued.” David then uses two metaphors to describe his sense of great danger, saying, “I am in the midst of lions. I lie among ravenous beasts.” He goes on to describe the men who are pursuing him as having “teeth like spears and arrows and tongues like sharp swords.” He also uses the metaphor of feeling in danger of being trapped because “they spread a net for my feet and dug a pit in my path.”

Question 3. David “was bowed down in distress.” But he “cried out to the God Most High” and took “refuge in the shadow of God’s wings.” Later, after the danger had passed, he sang and made music, praising God for protecting and loving him.

Question 4. David asks God for mercy, that is, he asks God to help him not based on whether or not David merits this help, but based on David’s need and on God’s love. He also asks God to provide a refuge for him during this disaster.

Question 5. David describes God as powerful. He is God Most High who fulfills his purposes for us. He is a God who loves us, who is faithful to us and who saves us. He is a God to be praised, who fills us with gratitude and joy and hope.

Making the Most of These Studies

About This Series of Bible Studies

This series of Bible studies is rooted in four basic convictions.

First, we are in need of recovery. The word ‘recovery’ implies that something has gone wrong. Christians firmly believe this. Something has gone very wrong. Things are not as they should be. We have sinned. We have been sinned against. We are entangled, stuck, bogged down, bound and broken. We need to recover.

Second, recovery is a demanding process, and often a lengthy one. There are no quick fixes in recovery. Recovery means change. It means facing the truth about ourselves, even when that truth is painful. It means giving up our old destructive patterns, and learning new life-giving patterns. Recovery means taking responsibility for our lives rather than blaming, avoiding, minimizing or denying. It is not easy. It is sometimes painful. And it will take time.

Third, recovery is possible. No matter how hopeless it may seem, no matter how deeply we have been wounded by life or how often we have failed, recovery is possible. Our primary basis for hope in the process of recovery is that God is able to do things which we cannot do ourselves. Recovery is possible because God has committed himself to us.

Finally, these studies are rooted in the conviction that the Bible can be a significant resource for recovery. Many people who have lived through difficult life experiences have had bits of the Bible thrown at their pain as a quick fix or a simplistic solution. As a result, many people expect the Bible to be a barrier to recovery rather than a resource. These studies are based on the belief that the Bible is not a book of quick fixes and simplistic solutions. It is, on the contrary, a practical and helpful resource for recovery. We were deeply moved personally by these Biblical texts as we worked on this series. Our convictions have deepened that the God of the Bible can bring serenity to people whose lives have become unmanageable.

If you are looking for resources to help you in your recovery, we invite you to study the Bible with an open mind and heart.

May your roots sink deeply in the soil of God’s love

Dale and Juanita Ryan

Getting the Most from this Study

These Bible study guides are designed to assist you to find out for yourself what the Bible has to say about different aspects of recovery. The texts you will study will be thought provoking, challenging, inspiring and very personal. It will become obvious that these studies are not designed merely to convince you of the truthfulness of some idea. Rather, they are designed to allow the opportunity for Biblical truths to renew your heart and mind.

We want to encourage realistic expectations of these discussion guides. First, they are not intended to be everything-the-Bible-says-about any subject. They are not intended to be a systematic presentation of Biblical theology. Second, it’s important to emphasize that these guides are not intended to provide a recovery program or to replace other important resources in recovery. If you are in a counseling relationship, we pray that these guides will enrich that relationship. If you are involved in a support group, it is our hope that these studies will enrich that resource as well. What these guides are designed to do is to help you study a series of Biblical texts which relate to the process of recovery. Our hope is that they will allow you to discover in a new way the Good News for people struggling to recover.

All of the studies in this series use a workbook format. Space is provided for writing answers to each question. This is ideal for personal study and allows group members to prepare in advance for the discussion. The Leader’s Version also contains leader’s notes. These notes provide suggestions on how to lead a group discussion, provide additional background information on certain questions, give helpful tips on group dynamics and suggest ways to deal with problems that may arise during the discussion. With such helps, someone with little or no experience can lead an effective discussion.

Suggestions for Individual Study

1. As you begin each study pray that God would bring healing and recovery to you through his Word.
2. After spending time in personal reflection, read and reread the passage to be studied.
3. Write your answers in the spaces provided or in a personal journal. Writing can bring clarity and deeper understanding of yourself and of God’s Word. For the same reason, we suggest that you write out your prayers at the end of each study.

4. Share what you are learning with someone you trust. Recovery is empowered by experiences of community.

Suggestions for Group Study

Even if you have already done these studies individually, we strongly encourage you to find some way to do them with a group of other people as well. Although each person's recovery is different, everyone's recovery is empowered by the mutual support and encouragement that can only be found in a one-on-one or a group setting. Several reminders may be helpful for participants in a group study:

1. Realize that trust grows over time. If sharing in a group setting is risky, realize that you do not have to share more than feels safe. However, taking risks is a necessary part of recovery. So, do participate in the discussion as much as you are able.

2. Be sensitive to the other members of the group. Listen attentively when they share what they have learned. You will learn from their insights. If you can, link what you say to the comments of others so the group stays on the topic. Also, be affirming whenever you can. This will encourage some of the more hesitant members of the group to participate.

3. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. We are sometimes so eager to share what we have learned that we do not leave opportunity for others to respond. By all means participate! But allow others to do so as well.

4. Expect God to teach you through the passage being discussed and through the other members of the group. Pray that you will have a profitable time together.

5. We recommend that groups follow a few basic guidelines, and that these guidelines be read at the beginning of each discussion session. The guidelines, which you may wish to adapt to your situation, are:

a. Anything said in the group is considered confidential and will not be discussed outside the group unless specific permission is given to do so.

b. We will provide time for each person present to talk if they feel comfortable doing so.

c. We will talk about ourselves and our own situations, avoiding conversation about other people.

d. We will listen attentively to each other.

e. We will be very cautious about giving advice.

f. We will pray for each other.

About Leading a Group Study

You may be experiencing a variety of feelings as you anticipate leading a group using this study guide. You may feel inadequate for the task and afraid of what will happen. If this is the case, know you are in good company. Many of the kings, prophets and apostles in the Bible felt inadequate and afraid. And many other small group leaders share this experience. It may help you to know that your willingness to lead is a gift to the other group members. It might also help if you tell them about your feelings and ask them to pray for you. Realize as well that the other group members share the responsibility for the group. And realize that it is the Spirit's work to bring insight, comfort, healing and recovery to group members. Your role is simply to provide guidance to the discussion. The suggestions listed below will help you to provide that guidance.

Preparing to Lead

1. Develop realistic expectations of yourself as a small group leader. Do not feel that you have to 'have it all together'. Rather, commit yourself to an on-going discipline of honesty about your own needs. As you grow in honesty about your own needs, you will grow as well in your capacity for compassion, gentleness and patience with yourself and with others. As a leader you can encourage an atmosphere of honesty by being honest about yourself.

2. Pray. Pray for yourself and your own recovery. Pray for the group members. Invite the Spirit to be present as you prepare and as you meet.

3. Read the text several times.

4. Take your time to thoughtfully work through each question, writing out your answers.

5. After completing your personal study, read through the leader's notes for the study you are leading. These notes are designed to help you in several ways. First, they tell you the purpose the authors had in mind while writing the study. Take time to think through how the questions work together to accomplish that purpose. Second, the notes provide you with additional background information or comments on some of the questions. This information can be useful if people have difficulty understanding or answering a question. Third, the leader's notes can alert you to potential problems you may encounter during the study.

6. If you wish to remind yourself during the group discussion of anything mentioned in the leader's notes, make a note to yourself below that question in the your study guide

Leading the Study

1. Begin on time. You may want to open in prayer, or have a group member do so.

2. Be sure everyone has a study guide. Decide as a group if you want people to do the study on their own ahead of time. If your time together is limited, it will be helpful for people to prepare in advance.

3. At the beginning of your first time together, explain that these studies are meant to be discussions, not lectures. Encourage the members of the group to participate. However, do not put pressure on those who may be hesitant to speak during the first few sessions. Clearly state that people do not need to share anything they do not feel safe sharing. Remind people that it will take time to trust each other.

4. Read aloud the group guidelines listed in the front of the guide. These commitments are important in creating a safe place for people to talk and trust and feel.

5. Read aloud the introductory paragraphs at the beginning of the discussion for the day. This will orient the group to the passage being studied.

6. If the group does not prepare in advance, approximately ten minutes will be needed for individuals to work on the Personal Reflection section. This is designed to help group members focus on some aspect of their personal experience. Hopefully it will help group members to be more aware of the frame of reference and life experience which we bring to the text. This time of personal reflection can be done prior to the group meeting or as the first part of the meeting. The personal reflection questions are not designed to be used directly for group discussion. Rather, the first question in the Bible study section is intended to give group members an opportunity to share what they feel safe sharing from their time of personal reflection.

7. Read the passage aloud. You may choose to do this yourself, or someone else may read if he or she has been asked to do so prior to the study.

8. As you begin to ask the questions in the guide, keep several things in mind. First, the questions are designed to be used just as they are written. If you wish, you may simply read them aloud to the group. Or, you may prefer to express them in your own words. However, unnecessary rewording of the questions is not recommended.

Second, the questions are intended to guide the group toward understanding and applying the main idea of the study. The authors of the guide have stated the purpose of each study in the leader's notes. You should try to understand how the study questions and the biblical text work together to lead the group in that direction.

There may be times when it is appropriate to deviate from the study guide. For example, a question may have already been answered. If so, move on to the next question. Or someone

may raise an important question not covered in the guide. Take time to discuss it! The important thing is to use discretion. There may be many routes you can travel to reach the goal of the study. But the easiest route is usually the one the authors have suggested.

9. Don't be afraid of silence. People need time to think about the question before formulating their answers.

10. Don't be content with just one answer. Ask, "What do the rest of you think?" or "Anything else?" until several people have given answers to the question.

11. Acknowledge all contributions. Try to be affirming whenever possible. Never reject an answer. If it seems clearly wrong to you, ask: "Which part of the text led you to that conclusion?" or "What do the rest of you think?"

12. Don't expect every answer to be addressed to you, even though this will probably happen at first. As group members become more at ease, they will begin to interact more effectively with each other. This is a sign of a healthy discussion.

13. Don't be afraid of controversy. It can be very stimulating. Differences can enrich our lives. If you don't resolve an issue completely, don't be frustrated. Move on and keep it in mind for later. A subsequent study may resolve the problem.

14. Stick to the passage under consideration. It should be the source for answering the questions. Discourage the group from unnecessary cross-referencing. Likewise, stick to the subject and avoid going off on tangents.

15. Periodically summarize what the group has said about the topic. This helps to draw together the various ideas mentioned and gives continuity to the study. But be careful not to use summary statements as an opportunity to give a sermon!

16. Each study ends with a prayer time. There are several ways to handle this time in a group. The person who leads each study could lead the group in a prayer or you could allow time for group participation. Remember that some members of your group may feel uncomfortable about participating in public prayer. It might be helpful to discuss this with the group during your first meeting and to reach some agreement about how to proceed.

Listening to Emotional Pain.

These Bible study guides are designed to take seriously the pain and struggle that is part of life. People will experience a variety of emotions during these studies. Part of your role as group leader will be to listen to emotional pain. Listening is a gift which you can give to a person who is hurting. For many people, it is not an easy gift to give. The following suggestions

will help you to listen more effectively to people in emotional pain.

1. Remember that you are not responsible to take the pain away. People in helping relationships often feel that they are being asked to make the other person feel better. This is usually related to the helper's own dysfunctional patterns of not being comfortable with painful feelings.
2. Not only are you not responsible to take the pain away, one of the things people need most is an opportunity to face and to experience the pain in their life. They have usually spent years denying their pain and running from it. Healing can come when we are able to face our pain in the presence of someone who cares about us. Rather than trying to take the pain away, then, commit yourself to listening attentively as it is expressed.
3. Realize that some group members may not feel comfortable with other's expressions of sadness or anger. You may want to acknowledge that such emotions are uncomfortable, but say that part of recovery is to learn to feel and to allow others to feel.
4. Be very cautious about giving answers and advice. Advice and answers may make you feel better or feel competent, but they may also minimize peoples' problems and their painful feelings. Simple solutions rarely work, and they can easily communicate "You should be better now" or "You shouldn't really be talking about this."
5. Be sure to communicate direct affirmation any time people talk about their painful emotions. It takes courage to talk about our pain because it creates anxiety for us. It is a great gift to be trusted by those who are struggling.

If you find this study to be helpful. . .

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