

My name is Shan and I am on staff here at The Creek. We are continuing in a series we have called “Unearthed.” Our hope is to “unearth” the places in our lives where we do not yet look like Jesus, live like Jesus, or love like Jesus, so that the Holy Spirit can transform those areas of our lives. Today we are shining a light on fear.

I have spent the largest part of my life so far primarily being afraid of speaking in public. I’ve talked about that a number of times here at the church. My #2 and #3 fears from most of my life are still very much in play.

My #2 fear—snakes! I have been honored to travel to India to work with our missionaries there. Each time they have learned of my fear of snakes, and each time they have been entertained. (View online sermon to see photo.)

My #3 fear—things getting near my eyes! I can’t even watch people put contact lenses in their eyes. Now, if you get a snake near my eyes while I’m speaking in public

As I have grown older, the fears in my life have become more complex. Adult fears are no longer simple snakes, or heights, or speaking in public, or clowns, or spiders, or needles—they are multi-faceted. Have you noticed this as well or am I alone in this?

In 2016 I attended a multi-day spiritual retreat. As I was journaling about my life at the time, I wrote this entry in my journal:

God, I live in fear—

- I’m afraid of letting You down.
- I’m afraid of letting Lise, Jack, and Will (my family) down.
- I’m afraid of wasting my life and opportunities.
- I’m afraid of my anxiety and what that says about my faith.
- I’m afraid that my sons won’t always love You.
- I’m afraid of feeling no emotions except fear.
- I’m afraid of not taking risks that I should take because of my need for security.
- I’m afraid of letting others down: my boss, my team, my parents, the elders of the church, and everyone that is a part of the church.
- I’m afraid of not being respected.
- I’m afraid I’m not very bright.
- I’m afraid of doing lots of good things but not being what You want.
- I’m afraid of growing emotionally distant from my family.
- I’m afraid of having no friends and I’m afraid of being ok with that.

Author Ken Blanchard says that “every human being is driven by either pride or fear.” If that is true, which one are you? Are you driven by your ego, or are you driven, like a majority of

people, by the fear that lives inside you? We have to begin by being honest with ourselves concerning our own lives.

Fear is a response to a danger or threat that is real or even one that we “think” could happen. It causes physiological changes in us, such as muscle tension, accelerated heart rate, accelerated breathing, tunnel vision, and many more. It also causes our thoughts to race away on us and is closely related to depression, worry, and anxiety.

Fear can be good, as in fearing being attacked by a bear or being afraid of fire, but fear can also be very harmful. Fear can paralyze, and even cripple, your life.

Many hearing this message are living in fear. Fear of health concerns. Fear of what is next. Fear of rough relationships. Fear of financial trouble. Fear of being alone. Fear of getting caught. The list goes on and on.

God does not want us to live in fear.

If you're taking notes today be ready to write down a bunch of scripture references today for further study—it's going to be “Scripturepalooza” up here.

Jesus speaks to all of us in John 14:27 – “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” Yet the Bible is full of examples of heroes of the faith who struggled with fear. Abraham—fear. Moses—fear. Gideon, Samuel, Esther, Jonah, David—fear. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived—fear. Don't even get me started on the disciples in the New Testament—fear x 12.

The Bible character whose experience with fear I want to focus on today is Elijah. Let me give you a synopsis of 1 Kings 17-19. Elijah is a prophet, a man who follows the will of God. Miracle #1—God feeds Elijah in the wilderness by having ravens bring him bread and meat every day. He's like a Disney Princess hanging with the animals. Miracle #2—God feeds Elijah from the empty flour jar of a widow and her son. Miracle #3—The son of the widow who is feeding him dies, but God brings him back to life at Elijah's request. At God's request, Elijah confronts King Ahab and Queen Jezebel and this sets up a confrontation between Elijah and the false prophets on top of Mount Carmel. Elijah has the altar soaked in water and then he prays that God will show the false prophets who is really in charge. God burns up the sacrifice, the wood, the water, and even the ground around the altar. Miracles #4, #5, and #6—Elijah kills the false prophets, predicts that rain will now return to Israel and it does, and then races Ahab's chariot on foot for many miles to the city of Jezreel and wins.

Elijah is riding a major God high! But life has mountain top experiences, and it has valleys. For Elijah, the change comes in 1 Kings 19:1-2.

Now Ahab [the king] told Jezebel [his murderous wife] everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”

It's like an old western movie, "Hey Elijah, I'm killing you at sundown tomorrow."

This man who had been fed by ravens, who had been fed miraculously by a widow with no food, who had seen God bring the dead back to life, who had just watched God humiliate the false religions of Israel and watched Him bring rain to a land in drought—how does he respond to the Queen's threat? He runs. A man who had just seen God at work in amazing ways is found in the desert under a broom bush (view online sermon to see photo). "He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, LORD,' he said. Take my life'" (1 Kings 19:4).

Have you ever said or heard the words, "I have had enough!" These are words born out of strong emotions, like frustration, depression, or fear. If you feel that way, just as with Elijah, this does not mean that God has left the building. As a matter of fact, in the life of Elijah, God provides for him and instructs him, and I think it provides some clear direction for us today. Let me share with you five lessons that we can learn from Elijah concerning fear.

First, *take care of your body*. In 1 Kings 19:4, we see Elijah at his lowest, wanting to die. But then God tells Elijah to sleep, to eat, and to get away on a break. It is God's desire that we take care of our bodies. This means rest. I'm amazed and comforted by the patience and love that God has for Elijah as Elijah struggles with his fear. Sometimes, the most spiritually uplifting thing we can do, sometimes what God wants us to do, is to take a nap.

Being healthy means a healthy diet, making wise decisions concerning what we allow into our bodies. Being healthy means dealing with our dependence on caffeine, sugar, tobacco, alcohol, phones, television screens, and anything else that does not honor the bodies and minds that God has blessed us with. Being healthy means exercise—yes, exercise. I don't like it either, but it is what I know honors God.

Has fear ever hindered your ability to exercise? To eat well? To sleep well?

Second, *engage with God*. The story of Elijah teaches us that to deal with fear, we need to engage with God in a significant way. After some sleep and food, God sends Elijah to Mount Sinai, also called Mount Horeb. This was God's idea, but God still asks, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9). Elijah vents to God, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too" (1 Kings 19:10). God let Elijah vent, vent even some things that weren't reality, but then He knew what the depressed and fearful Elijah needed. He needed a personal encounter with God.

The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. (1 Kings 19:11-13)

Like most of us, Elijah was looking for God in the big things, in the dramatic. He had seen God in six life-altering miracles, but was he willing to experience God in less dramatic ways, even in listening to a gentle whisper? The still small voice of God speaking to the human heart is more powerful than outward displays of power. We have to set aside quality time to both speak to, and hear from, the Almighty God.

Does fear keep you from listening to, and engaging with, God?

Third, *pursue your purpose*. In 1 Kings 19:15-18, God gives Elijah a new set of action steps, a new “to do” list. “Elijah, you have been under the broom bush praying for death, you have been on a mountain spending time with me, but I have a purpose for your life, and you need to get to it. I’m glad you have gotten some rest. I’m glad you have eaten well and had a good hike. I’m glad we have been able to spend some much-needed one-on-one time together. All of those were necessary—but now we have work to do.”

God does not abandon us in our fear. He cares too much! But we need to understand that He doesn’t want us only to keep lying there feeling sorry for ourselves. I love the saying, “It’s ok to not be ok, but it isn’t ok to stay that way.” This means that sitting around and feeling sorry for ourselves isn’t ok. God has things for all of us to be out there doing.

(View the online sermon for an illustration of the speaker’s high school and college girl problems, including illusions to *Send Her My Love* by Journey, *I Can’t Make You Love Me* by Bonnie Raitt, *Against the Odds* by Phil Collins, and of course, *Ain’t No Sunshine When She’s Gone* by Bill Withers.) Now, I know, it felt good to feel bad—for a little bit. But you can’t stay there.

In John 10:10, Jesus said, “My purpose is to give you a rich and satisfying life.” God doesn’t want you to wallow in sadness, depression, and fear—He wants you to have a rich and satisfying life!

What purpose does God have for you? For each of us, it is somehow serving and loving others. It is NOT sitting back and letting life pass us by while doing nothing. In the case of Elijah, he went on to experience the greatest days of his ministry and life. I believe our best days, yours and mine, can be in the future if we will hand over our lives and find the joy of complete surrender to the will of the Almighty God.

Does fear keep you from either finding or doing what God wants from your life?

Fourth, *find healthy community*. In the case of Elijah, God soon calls him to be back among people. God sent him to find Elisha, who would be a friend and apprentice to him. God knows that we need people in our lives who can be an encouragement to us, and also people that we can encourage. If you don’t have that in your life today, God wants you to have that! He wants you to love and be loved.

At church, we build healthy community through serving and through small groups. If we are struggling with fear, we need to find trustworthy Christian people to confide in face to face, people who will take the time to sit and listen to us, to point us back to the only one who really has any answers—God. To be healthy, we also have to be that same listening ear for others that points them back to God.

We need healthy community—not a community that is perfect, but a community that will love us and point us to God’s will even in our own weakness, that will allow God’s strength to shine through when we are weak. Psalm 139:23-24 says, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Does fear keep you from engaging in healthy community?

Finally, *turn to God and His word for comfort*. God will not necessarily remove the causes of our fear, but He will give us His presence in the midst of the threats that surround us. Listen to this promise from God from the book of Isaiah:

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.” (Isaiah 43:2-3)

Notice that God does not promise to keep us out of the water and the fire, but that He will be with us when we do go through those times in life.

I love this old quote, though I have no idea who said it: “What you worry about most often reveals where you trust God the least.” Am I allowing God to have control of those areas of my life that are causing my fear? Am I allowing God to comfort me and change my heart?

A huge part of turning to God for His comfort is to make sure that what we are filling our minds and hearts with are those things where we can find Him. The book of Philippians tells us where our thoughts should be—it gives action steps for finding God’s comfort in fear:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9)

“Think about such things.” Whatever you have learned, for instance from the life of Elijah, or seen in God—put it into practice, and the God of peace will be with you.

Do your fears drive you closer to God and His Word, or keep you from them?

Take care of your body.

Engage with God.
Pursue God's purpose for your life.
Find healthy community.
Turn to God and His Word for comfort.

God has a plan for you that is far greater than any fear you can encounter.

As I thought about how I should close this message from Elijah's life, I came up with some stinking hilarious stories that I want to tell you, but they just don't speak to the issue of fear the way that God's Word does. So, I want to close by slowly reading a few passages of Scripture to you. Let them speak to your life and situation and fears on a very personal level. When I have finished the final passage, I ask that you respond in one or more of four ways:

- We have a chance to take part in the worship practice of giving our tithes and offerings in the clear boxes around the room.
- We will open the doors to The Porch. This is a place where you can go to begin a conversation about your fears and your need for Jesus, with people who will pray for you and give you healthy next steps.
- We will have some individuals, including myself, who will be down across the front of the stage who are available to pray with you if God is speaking to your heart or mind concerning this issue of fear.
- Finally, it is our chance, as a church, to take the Lord's Supper together. As instructed in the New Testament, we take the bread to remember the body of Christ and we take the juice to remember the blood of Jesus Christ, sacrificed for us so that our sins can be forgiven. Scripture asks us to remember this sacrifice and to examine our lives in light of that amazing gift.

Leading into that, listen to these passages of Scripture and write down any that you need to focus on in the coming days.

- Psalm 34:4 – "I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears."
- Psalm 46:1,2,10 – "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. . . . He says, 'Be still, and know that I am God.'"
- Psalm 56:3-4 – "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise—in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"
- Psalm 73:26, 28 – "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge."
- Isaiah 41:10 – "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."
- 1 Peter 5:7 – "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."