

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Advent Week 4—Love in the Midst of Fear

Whether we like to admit it or not, whether we are consciously aware of it or not, our fears dominate our lives. Unless otherwise detoured by something greater (i.e. God/love) our fears will motivate and direct, drive and steer, our lives. So it behooves us to get our fears to the surface, to be aware of them and how they affect us.

- Q. What do you fear? How and when did you become aware of that fear in your life? (or is it a recent discovery?)
- Q. As a group, list out (in brainstorming fashion) all the fears represented in your group. After that, categorize those fears into “circumstantial” fears (i.e. just the right circumstances have to be in place for that fear to be present...like spiders) and which can be categorized as “motivational” fears (i.e. they are always present as a motivating force in our life)?

In certain ways fear can be healthy. They can keep us from danger. But often times, fears are irrational and disproportionate. A HUGE one for many is the fear of what others will think of them. And while there is certainly the possibility that someone may not like us or might think ill of us, why does that matter?

- Q. Whose opinion of you matters to you? Why?

The reason it is important to analyze our fears and bring them into the light is because they inform us as to what is really important to us and what/whom we really trust. Once out in the open, we can evaluate whether what is important to us—for example what others think of us—should really be important to us or not. We can also evaluate if what we’re placing our trust in actually has the power to deliver as needed.

The potential (the ingredients and dynamic, if you will) for fear actually existed prior to the Fall. So fear isn’t a sin, but fear can/will quickly lead us to sin. Again, fear is about what we truly want and what/whom we truly trust. We were created to want and trust God above all else. But fear was used against our first parents to get them to believe the lie (lies are always based on fears) that that wasn’t enough.

The most frequent command in Scripture is to not fear. Some have counted as many as 365 times that specific exhortation being mentioned (I haven’t actually counted to verify that). And the reason that is often given (and when it’s not given, it’s strongly implied) as to why there is no reason to fear is because God is with us (or with whoever the exhortation is being spoken to). And that’s what we celebrate at Christmas...Immanuel, “God with us”.

Q. Is God enough for you/us? Do you/we fear there could possibly be something else we're missing out on? How does knowing that we already have everything we truly need (God) practically/functionally effect our lives?

No matter what we call it: "the Kingdom of God", "eternal life", "salvation", what we're really talking about is the "with God" life. God's presence with us is how we overcome our fears. I would go as far to say that there is no other way for our fears to be overcome. To say it another way, the life we are meant to live, the life we were created to live, is the "with God" life. Any other life will naturally be dominated by fear. (Think operating systems in a computer. We are born into this broken/fallen world with a fear-based operating system. Even as Christians we often try to add "Christian" qualities, values, principles, etc. to our lives, without actually changing the operating system. That's like adding software or applications to a computer with an incompatible operating system. The true "Christian" life means changing the operating system to a "with God" (thus, love-based) operating system. Then we will find the fruits/virtues of the Christian life come more naturally.)

As was mentioned in the sermon, we want to cultivate...

...Kingdom Identity (*I am one in whom Christ dwells*)

and

...Kingdom Awareness (*I am in the strong & secure Kingdom of God*)

These two realities are true ALL THE TIME. We must learn to live in the conscious awareness of this reality.

Q. Do you trust/believe that God is with you and for you? If so, how did you develop that trust? If not, what do you think is standing in the way of believing that?

Q. How does knowing that God is with you, and for you, help you overcome your fears. (Give examples)

Q. How do you cultivate the "with God" life? What are the practices, habits, exercises you do in order to stay mindful that God is with you?

Q. How can we help each other live with Kingdom Identity & Kingdom Awareness? What challenges the notion of these realities in your life? What challenges your ability to lean into these realities?

***Home Group Leaders: obviously something we want to cultivate in our Home Groups is an environment of safety and trust where people can open up can share whatever is on their hearts/minds...their fears, struggles, whatever. And hopefully Home Group can/will be a place

where people find encouragement for our individual and collective “with God” life. But as I was reflecting on all this, I do want to offer a word of caution.

When someone knows someone else’s fears, it’s easy to manipulate them, take advantage of them, or make light of their fears. So in the spirit of good shepherding, let’s do everything in our power to make sure HG is a safe place.

Additionally, as we minister to people, probably the 2 most important thing we can know about them is their story and their fears. We don’t truly “know” someone until we know that.***