

Reframing Emotions

Reframing Fear: A Guide for Going Deeper

Note for Users:

Reframing Fear: A Guide for Going Deeper is the third week in an 11-week guide that accompanies the podcast *More to It: Reframing Emotions*.¹ Each session is designed to help you and your community know, love, and praise God for His wonderful design for our emotions, even the ones we view as “negative.” The sessions feature an episode summary, definitions of relevant terms, Scripture reading, discussion questions, activities, prayers, and reflection prompts.

Each section in a session (for example, prayer and discussion) features a timestamp, but the timestamp is simply a suggestion for the amount of time to spend. At times, you and your community may want to linger with the discussion questions. Or maybe you need to spend more time engaging with a concept through a small group activity. You should prioritize what produces the most flourishing in your community, even if it means bending or breaking the time “rules.”

In the podcast, one of our counselors suggests emotions—even the negative ones—are echoes of Eden. If we listen to those echoes and follow them to their source, we might just end up back in the garden, not hiding from God, but experiencing the forevermore joy found in His presence. As you use this guide with your community, we pray that a spirit of unity, curiosity, and humility will be present, creating a space in which you can be vulnerable, drawing near to God and one another.

The Austin Stone Institute, The Austin Stone Counseling Center

¹ Subscribe to the podcast here: <https://pod.link/1626545281>.

Session 3: Fear

Episode Main Point

Fear can be healthy, protecting us from danger, but it can also be malformed and lead to unhelpful and unhealthy modes of being in the world.

Episode Summary

Fear is normal, and some fears are good. Fearing God, for instance, cultivates godly courage within us. We become like Joshua, heading into unknown lands and facing unknowable challenges because God is with us. We believe God is in control; therefore, we will not fear.

And yet, fear occasionally crushes us. Sometimes this occurs through narratives, either ones we tell ourselves or ones we receive from the news, streaming shows, advertising, et cetera. With the former, we may not always be aware of the narratives affecting us. We need people who will help us slow down and sit with us until we're calm enough to begin evaluating what makes us afraid. With the latter, we need discernment and, again, evaluation. These narratives often distort the good aspects of fear. If fear is supposed to tell us, "Hey, this thing isn't good for you," the narratives broadcast in commercials, shows, and even the news says, "Everything is scary. Take control," or "If you don't have this one thing, you'll be forever missing out."

Fortunately, we can retrain ourselves. God invites us to calibrate our fear properly by "cultivating a right and healthy fear of God [that informs] the way we do life" (Andrew Dealy). Recalibration takes time. In this episode, the counselors advise endurance, along with patience, humility, empathy, and curiosity. Some of our fears are so large and looming that we can't begin to process them, especially if they're rooted in past hurt. When we feel that kind of fear, we will need to learn to resist the urge to run. Our brains need help in slowing down so that they can begin integrating new narratives and identifying how a current moment is not like past ones.

Slowing down isn't easy. But it can be made easier by spending time with God and His people. In community, we help regulate one another with the gift of presence. Not one of us likely has the answer to another person's fears, but we don't need to provide an answer. We simply need to come and sit, helping each other work through our fears, and lean into God, who is patient, trustworthy, and kind, our refuge in times of need.

Definitions

- **Fear:** Fear is a response to a perceived threat, often accompanied by a desire or action to fight, flee, or freeze. Fear is primal. It often activates beneath the conscious level of our

brains, as it is tied to implicit memory. Fear also occurs on a spectrum. Our spectrum of fear is often driven by both the meaning we attach to the fear and our connected realities (implicit memories) of what we think is in danger.

- **Lust:** Lust is a craving. It says, “If you could have this thing, then everything would be okay.”

Scripture

Matthew 12:33–37; Genesis 1–3; Joshua 1:1–9; Luke 12:4–7, 22–34; Exodus 3–4:17; Psalm 111:10; Romans 5:1–5; James 1:2–4; Romans 8:31–39; Ephesians 3:14–21

Pray (5 min)

Before beginning the study, pray aloud, using either your own words or the words provided.

Heavenly Father, You often tell us to not be afraid. But we *are* afraid—of so many things. Help us to view our fears with curiosity rather than judgment. Teach us what it means to be people of good cheer and courage. Remind us of the joy and strength found in confessing our fears to one another. Father, we want to honor You, in all we do and all we feel. May we draw closer to You and our friends, even when we feel afraid. Amen.

Read (5–10 min)

Either read the following Bible verses aloud or invite a volunteer to read.

¹ After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, ² “Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. ⁴ From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. ⁵ No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. ⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. ⁹ Have I not commanded

you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:1–9)

Discuss (15–20 min)

Answer the following questions.

- Consider the role thrust upon Joshua. He is charged with leading God’s people, as Moses did during the 40 years in the wilderness. What fears might Joshua have felt? Why?
- How does God counsel Joshua so that the new leader of Israel isn’t frozen with fear but empowered to do the work God has entrusted to him? What will ensure his success?
- In the episode, the counselors talk about how lust relates to fear. What was your reaction to that connection? How has it helped you evaluate whether a fear is constructive or destructive?
- Andrew Dealy says, “Because emotions are driven by the *now*, a narrative will shape how we feel about different things.” Before Adam and Eve sinned, fear warned them against what was not good for them. They built their lives around the narrative that God was good and for them, and thus, His commands were easy and light (Matthew 11:30). How does Satan twist the narrative? What about our culture, particularly the media, or our personal histories? What can we do to counter and correct those distortions?

Engage (10 min)

In smaller groups of two and three, respond to the following questions.

- If we are being formed by narratives that tell us everything is broken, everything is wrong, everything is scary, what are some ways we can recalibrate ourselves toward a healthy fear of God that allows us to better love Him and one another?
- Identify when you felt afraid recently. How could that fear indicate a malformed love or misdirected worship? Confess that to one another, as specifically or as generally as you are comfortable with. What would it look like to reform that love and worship, directing it toward God and His ways?

Pray (5 min)

Either read the following liturgy, a worshipful prayer, aloud or invite a volunteer to read.

A Liturgy for Fear

O Lord, my God and my Savior,
You have hand-crafted me.
I know I am precious in Your eyes,
Yet fear darkens the light of Your affection.

My life crumbles,
Like my perception of Your goodness to me.
I fear being forsaken.
My nightmares have come to life,
And I am frozen by the icy breath of imminent death.

O Lord, remind me of Your promises.
Your steadfast love is everlasting for those who fear You,
So let me fear You and You alone.
You are my refuge and my fortress,
And I will trust You in this, my trial.

Reflect

Complete the following reflection on your own.

When we feel afraid, we run to one of two refuges: ourselves or God. Answer the questions to discern where you tend to take refuge. Don't rush to judgment; simply contemplate. Come before God, curious and humble, expectant of His abundant mercy and grace.

- I'm afraid of _____. What is my fear telling me?
- How do I typically respond to that fear?
- How would I respond to that fear if what God says is true?
- How can I cultivate that understanding, learning to respond to my fear in a different, healthier way?

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