

## NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Choose Faith Over Fear

Joshua Symonette

Hey, well I'm excited to share with you all this weekend as we continue our series "Out of the Shadows" and you might be wondering why I'm seated this weekend. Well, a couple of days ago I was playing softball and reminded that I'm not the world class athlete that I used to be I stepped in a little hole and I have a fracture of my tibia near my ankle, but it's all good, nothing would stop me from being here this weekend. Thank you for the two people were excited about that. But hey, listen, if you have a Bible, I would love for you to meet me in Matthew chapter number six, if you don't have a Bible, don't worry, we won't leave you hanging I promise when the time comes, we'll pop the words up on the screen and you can follow along. But before we get to Matthew six, I actually want to give you an update right around this time about two years ago, I preached a message talking about my son, Isaiah who's now three, and at the time he was 21 months and he still was not walking as a result of a gross motor delay that he still has to this day. It was a very emotional time for me. Then the therapy that he was going through week after week was just beginning to wear me down and, and I just, I had a breakdown. But we also had a breakthrough shortly after that very, very talented therapist who was very, very creative in terms of, of getting him motivated and helping him along. Turns out he loves sports; I don't know where he got it from. But we were able to kind of get him going down that path and we were able to see some great things happen, but fear and anxiety began to take residence in my mind leading up to that point and I'm not even sure that I was aware of it. And you know, now, Isaiah is doing well. Many people have asked about how he's doing are at our Kingstown campus, people can see him walking in each week which is awesome. [Picture of family on screen] Oh, you guys can see pictures of him and all of my family actually my older girls as well. And then my baby girl Journey who is 17 months, she actually has the same situation as Isaiah, a gross motor delay. She's 17 months and she is still not walking and I mean, we don't know why Isaiah is walking, but he doesn't have the ability to run and we just haven't been able to figure it out.

But, as I came into the series and I started thinking about what I wanted to share and I started collecting my thoughts, I thought about how being the father of four children now has really shifted me in a lot of ways. If I'm being honest the one area where I think fear has been able to creep in, has to do with my kids. And I think the reason for that is because I am now responsible for living humans that I can't control everything with, like I can't prevent them from every single thing. Now, I wouldn't put myself and neither would my wife put me in a category of an overprotective parent; my wife actually says, I lack compassion. Hey, you know, the kids fall and they bleed and you know, stuff happens, I'm like, hey yo, you'll be all right, you'll learn you know, and it's not because I'm trying to be mean, but I want my kids to be mentally tough and I want them to be fighters. But here's the thing, when your kid has something going on with them that you can't change, that you can't make better, something abnormal that is not even, you don't have an explanation for their born a certain way and you don't know how long it's going to affect them. You don't know what kind of future they're going to have. That is the kind of thing that would make you worry or that will make you anxious or that would even make you afraid. And it

doesn't matter how strong you are, how successful you are what things you have going on in your life. All of us are susceptible to some fear that is lurking in the shadows of our life.

Fear is one of the greatest forces of opposition that we face. And almost subconsciously, at times, many of us live overshadowed by fear, our decisions, our lives, even our motivations we can trace back to the who, what, when, where, why, and how tethered to some fear. So this weekend I actually wanted to attack this mindset of fear because that's exactly what it is. It's a mindset and it's a mindset that has power and only the power that we give to it. Now, I don't know many of your names, I don't know some of your faces, but I know that for some of you this weekend and throughout this series, these messages or one or two of these messages is specifically for you. I don't know if this is, you know, you're a church normally or you're visiting or you're listening to us on the podcast while you're driving or you're watching us online, whoever you may be, I just believe that it is time to be free. I believe that it is time for a breakthrough for you and I am speaking that over you this weekend so I want you to receive that.

Jesus, as we track his life and we follow what he has going on in the New Testament he spent a little bit of time talking about fear. Several times throughout scripture he is directly telling his disciples and others 'fear not' or 'be not afraid' and I'm just going to keep it all the way real, sometimes when you read these stories and you hear Jesus's response, like it almost seems pretty ridiculous that Jesus is actually responding to these people in this way because some of these situations are like legitimate reasons to be afraid, right? I'll give you a couple of examples. Mark chapter five, Jairus who is known as a ruler it says, he's seeking Jesus because his daughter is sick and as he is seeking Jesus, he actually gets word that his daughter has actually died. Jesus overhears this, turns Jairus and says, don't be afraid, only believe. Now listen, I just told you that I had some fear related to my kids who have a gross motor delay, I can't even imagine my kid dying or being close to death and some of you have experienced that, so I have no idea what that's like, but for Jesus to respond, 'don't be afraid, only believe', it just seems kind of crazy that he would say this.

Then in Mark chapter four, the disciples, one of my favorite stories with Jesus on the boat, and it's a storm and the boat begins to shake and Jesus is sleeping while during the storm and the disciples are freaking out. They go and wake up Jesus and they say, Jesus, don't you care that we're about to drown? And Jesus is like so annoyed and gets up and says, 'hey, wait a minute, why are you so afraid?' And I just stopped right there like, whoa, hold on Jesus. It's like, I mean the winds are blowing like, you know, the boat is about to toss us and you're saying, why are you so afraid? And then he says, 'do you still have no faith?' And what he was referencing was they had already seen him heal a paralyzed man. They had already seen him heal a person with leprosy. They had already seen miracles. And he's saying, hey, wait a minute, do you still have no faith? So when we track with Jesus and we see these situations that he's in, he often juxtaposes fear and faith, don't be afraid, believe. Now I don't think we need a theological degree or some higher level of education to see that this is a serious contrast here. But here's what I want you to understand, essentially, fear and faith required the same thing, belief in a potential outcome, the same thing.

So I want to come back to that a little bit later on, but I want to get to Matthew six and I want to unpack what Jesus is saying to us in verses 25 through 34 because I think Jesus zooms out on

this whole idea of fear, but he uses a different terminology. He gives us a more elementary perspective using a different term or different word called worry. Now I think worry is a little bit more digestible it's a little bit more acceptable we're a little bit okay with worrying so, we would accept that but actually worry is a synonym of fear. So I want to zoom in on what Jesus is saying about this in Matthew six starting in verse 25 I'll read and you can follow along. It says,

<sup>25</sup> *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?"* <sup>26</sup> *Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"* <sup>27</sup> *Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"*

<sup>28</sup> *"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin."* <sup>29</sup> *Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.* <sup>30</sup> *If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?"* <sup>31</sup> *So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"* <sup>32</sup> *For the pagans (and that were pagans, means, people who are not followers of God) run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.* <sup>33</sup> *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* <sup>34</sup> *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*

These words from Jesus are very, very interesting to me for one reason, and that reason is these are the most basic things on our mind every single day. And Jesus is saying, hey, listen, don't worry about it, your life, your sustenance or how you're going to survive or your appearance. Now, if we zoom out a bit and take into account the entire context of Matthew six once we get to verse 25 we see that this is actually a concluding thought that Jesus is giving. Prior to verse 25 Jesus is talking about how not to order your life around performance, perception and possessions. He says, when you give, don't try to be seen to get credit from others. When you pray, don't try to make a performance out of it, God knows what you need before you ask, when you fast, don't make it about you. And then he says, don't focus on accumulating earthly possessions. Then he says, therefore meaning all of these things I've said before, now I'm summarizing it by saying don't worry about your life.

So before you even ask me the question, what does this have to do with fear, I'm going to give you the answer. We worry about our lives because we are afraid of missed expectations. We have an idea in our mind of how things are supposed to go. We've got a script or someone else has given us a script or we're looking at someone else's script, our parents, we were looking at our peers who are getting into top colleges or they're getting jobs that are more high profile than ours or our colleagues are getting promotions or hey, maybe were a stay at home wife and there's someone else who a wife but she's a boss and we would want to be in that position, but we're home raising kids. Or maybe we were following people on social media and their life looks so much more glamorous than ours and we're saying to ourselves, hey baby, at this point in my life, I should be here or I should be there and we're worried or, we're fearful that we have missed some miss expectations. We worry about our sustenance which I really equate to survival because we're always afraid that we don't have enough or we're just barely making it. And hey,

maybe for some of us that's really legitimate we're literally trying to make it from one day to the next or one week to the next. But hey, there's also when it comes to this idea of our survival, our emotional and our social needs as well. And we're looking at some of those voids, which we all need to be in a relationship and we all need people as well. So, maybe some of us are filling voids in our lives to a relationship that's not good for us because we are afraid. And maybe, that relationship could even be a job. It doesn't necessarily have to be a person, because you are afraid somehow or some way that maybe you won't make it outside of this situation or you're questioning how you would. And I believe that that is because we don't understand that God is a God of abundance and we don't have to have a mindset of scarcity. We worry about our clothes and our appearance because we are afraid of what people will think about us. We're afraid of what people may find underneath. We're afraid that if they really saw or they really understood what was going on with that that they might not like us. That's one great thing about social media. You can take 25 pictures and show just the best one with the right angle, the right light, the right stance, and not show the other 24 but is it's not completely authentic. Some of us dumb ourselves down because there are people around us that are so insecure we don't want them to think that we're better than them.

None of these things are healthy for us and so as a result we're making decisions and a lot of our life is rooted in fear and at the end of the day Jesus is saying, hey, listen, you can't add anything to your life by worrying about these things or being afraid of these things. As a matter of fact, research shows that fear, worry and anxiety have a greater impact on our physical body than a bad diet. And literally to live this way, to live under this oppression of fear is to literally be choked to death, which is what the word worry means in this dialectal form.

So after hearing all of that, you may have another question, which is, okay, so what do I do with this? How should I live then? Okay, I shouldn't be afraid but I should believe, okay, how does that work? Well, Jesus answers that in verse 33 he said, *"but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well"*. It's the, when the who and the how,

The when - first seek first, that is a matter of time, place and rank that literally means that you have made it a priority in your life. You have made seeking a priority in your life to do that first and it's not the last resort after you have called all your friends, after all of your resources have run out. No, it's a reprioritization that we have to regularly do to seek first. Then he says, seek first his kingdom. Well, why his kingdom? Well, if as David said in Psalm 24 *"the earth is the Lord's and everything in it"*, well then if we need something why wouldn't we seek him? Why wouldn't we seek his kingdom if what we want actually belongs to him anyway? And then seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. That word righteousness in the Greek refers to the correctness of thinking, feeling, and acting. So, when Jesus is saying that this idea of righteousness, he's talking about how our life needs to be ordered, like our thinking, our feeling and our acting.

We worry because we are afraid and we're afraid in most instances because we don't have full control and that's what we really want. And here's essentially what Jesus is saying. You really only have control of your response, that's all you have is your response, that's the only control that you have. And let me just park right here for just a minute because I've been doing a lot of

reading and a lot of research and I'm fascinated by some of the things that I've been coming across in neuroscience. And there are some critical breakthroughs and cognitive neuroscience that support this idea of the impact of your response on your physical brain. And basically what I'm coming to understand is a science is just catching up and finding evidence of what the Bible has already said.

Let me just show you this real quick. So this is a brain right here, this is a replica of a brain and this is about three pounds you know, everyone's average brain's about three pounds. And this is basically the operating system of our body, right? Connected to the central nervous system and all those sorts of ...so this is, this is the main thing right here alright. So two things I want to highlight that I think is important for us to understand as it relates to this control center right here. The first one is, it's called epigenetics alright? Your thoughts and your choices, right? That would be your response, okay. Your thoughts and your choices change your physical brain and your body. That means your thoughts and your choices or how you respond impacts your mental health and your spiritual development. In other words, as Proverbs 23:7 says, *as a man thinks in his heart, so is he*. Whatever we think about most is what grows and what influences us.

Secondly, neuroplasticity alright, some of you have heard this term before and neuroplasticity refers to the way that the brain changes as a result of your mental activity. So, when we were talking about epigenetics and your thoughts and your choices influencing the shape, the neuroplasticity is actually the process by which your brain changes your thoughts. And let me tell you how powerful this is. The research now tells us that it's so powerful that thought networks pass through sperm and ova via DNA to the next four generations. That's a major implication. So it's not just a thought, it's more than that; it has future potential that we're not even aware of. But here's the thing, epigenetics and neuroplasticity basically point directly to Paul's words in Romans 12, let me read it to you, and this is what he says, the first two verses.

*12<sup>1</sup>"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."*

So, everything that you are, all of this mind body and so offering it to God, completely giving him control.

*2" Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

So when Jesus says, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, that is the renewal part right there. Because our brain has to be rewired beyond what the world would have us conform to because the pattern of the world is worry and anxiety and fear. It is the pattern of the world, not our biology because cognitive neuroscience through neuroplasticity is showing that we can change those patterns. This is directly; this is what Jesus is directly speaking to. So doctor Carolyn Leaf, who's well known neuroscientist, she's a bestselling author. This is what she says, 'whether we switch on happiness, peace and good health or switch on anxiety, worry and negativity, we are changing the physical substance of our brain'.

Let me bring us in for a close. Do you know when everything changed for me when it came to my babies, my three year old and my one year old? It wasn't when Isaiah started to walk and we started to see progress in him that wasn't when things started to change. As a matter of fact, that's when I was actually at my breaking point because when they brought out the apparatus that was going to help him walk, it was a reality check for me that this might be a long road, but what really changed for me was when I changed my mind. That's, when the breakthrough actually happened when I changed my thinking and I went from fear to faith. Yes, I am believing that God will heal my babies, I'm believing that because I know that he can, but in the meantime I'm going to focus on what's right with them. I'm going to focus on their smile and you know what's so crazy, they're three and one, they don't even know the difference.

But I'm going to focus on what's right with them and it reminds me of Paul's words to the church in Philippi and this is what he said. Its chapter number four, these are his closing thoughts right after he says, hey, listen, don't be anxious about anything. Pray about everything. Have a heart of thanksgiving, which is really a response of, hey, I'm going to be thankful for the good things. And then as a result, God would guard my heart and my mind that's what God... But then he says, well, let me show you how to think and I'm gonna read it for you. He says;

*{Philippians 4:8} "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."*

Paul is just echoing the same thing that Jesus has told us in Matthew six and it's all about how we respond. We can't control what happens to us. And let me just say this, yes, there are going to be some things that will make us afraid. There are going to be some things that will cause us to respond in a fearful way. But what I'm telling you is that we don't have to live in a place of fear. We can choose to go in a different direction. Our response is ultimately all we have control over it.

And one more quote from Dr Leaf, she says, and this is actually in reference to the frontal lobe of our brain. She says, we can observe our thoughts and actions and make decisions about them. Suddenly, Biblical principles such as bringing all thoughts into captivity, renewing your mind, casting your cares and being anxious for nothing become less difficult when we realize that God has given us the equipment to do that. That is a matter of choosing to activate faith over fear and that's where I want to land today.

Earlier I talked about how Jesus juxtapose fear and faith, it is a matter of where we choose to focus that that makes the difference, but just one verse before we started reading in Matthew six 25 in verse 24 and listen to what he says, he says,

<sup>24</sup> *"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."*

Some translations say mammon, which means material possessions. And here essentially is what Jesus is saying outside of choosing a relationship with God it's a sinking ship. That's essentially what he said. You cannot live out this life of freedom that he came to offer us without that. You

can't serve both. And money and material possessions and accomplishments and all of these things they somehow some way provide temporary security for us, which is what we all want to feel, we want to feel secure, but it's temporary and it doesn't last. And Jesus is saying, we will live a life of perpetual fear, worry and anxiety if we choose those things.

So here's the thing, and here is what I want you to understand this weekend, no matter where you are, no matter what things have been haunting you and fears and insecurities or any of those things, you can overcome those things. Jesus said I came that you might have life and have it to the fullest or have it more abundantly. And when he said that he was not talking about stuff, he was talking about freedom. He was talking about, hey; take no fault for your life.

I'm going to ask our band to come for all of our locations this weekend and we're just going to enter into a time of worship. At all of our locations our prayer teams will be available, our campus pastors will be available and this, hopefully we'll just be a moment for you to be free and to not walk out of here with the same fear that has gripped you for, I don't know how long. This is an opportunity to be free this weekend. And so here's what I want you to do as we worship, hey, maybe someone needs to pray with you. Maybe you need to have a moment of prayer for yourself. Maybe you brought a friend that you trust to pray with you. Maybe there's a campus pastor can pray with you or maybe you just need a time of reflection and letting the Holy Spirit just speak to you wherever you are. We just want to give you this opportunity this weekend to have a breakthrough and not accept what seems to be normal when Jesus said, you can take no thought for your life, you put your trust in me and everything else is covered. Now might not be covered the way you want it to be covered, but he said it's covered nevertheless. So I'm going to pray for us and then our bands will lead us in a time of worship.

God, we thank you so much for who you are. We thank you that you are who you say you are and I'm just reminded of Paul's words to his protégé Timothy, when he said, God has not given you a spirit of fear but of love, power and a sound mind. God, you have not given us a spirit of fear. God help us to walk in love and the power and a sound mind that you have given to us. And God if we need therapy, help us to seek therapy. If we need a prayer, help us to pray consistently and to seek out prayer, whatever it is that we need to do. Help us to be bold in pursuing a closer relationship with you so that we can have the freedom that you came to offer us through Jesus. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.