

3 Feel the fear (and do it anyway!)

AIM:

To realise that feelings of fear are normal when we are faced with new challenges

BEFOREHAND:

See how many useful little things you can fit into a matchbox, to bring on the day!

BEGINNING –Sing “Be still, and know that I am God. And be still!

BRAINSTORMING:

In pairs or small groups, brainstorm about the sort of words you associate with leaders.

Compare notes and (F/C) write up a list of all the words. List negative words separately. Which list is longer?

Now try a list of hindrances to being a good leader.

[Are we realistic in our expectations of leaders? Do our expectations and the knowledge that we don't match up to them make us think that we can't ever take the lead?]

Today's passages show how God enables people to lead - all of whom have negative qualities, and who are afraid:

- A sceptical, cynical, weak, cowardly little man with an inferiority complex.
- A foreigner, a weak woman scared to disclose her identity, nothing more than a pretty face.
- An uneducated man who's always opening his mouth and putting his foot in it.
- A comparative youngster (under 40!), relatively inexperienced, timid and reluctant to use his gifts.

Their stories set examples for us to learn from. (1 Corinthians 1:6-7)

BIBLE WORK:

Perhaps it would be useful to divide into groups. Each one could look at a different passage:

GIDEON (Judges 6:11-40)

Compare matchboxes, if any were brought. Take time to remember just how many essential things are very small!

Consider: Gideon's circumstances; the size of the task; his reasons for fear; how he dealt with the fear. What helped him?

Gideon came from the least important family of the smallest clan in the country. In his own eyes he didn't amount to much. But in God's eyes he was a 'mighty man of valour'!

God knows what we were created to be and sees our potential – look at Psalm 139: 15-16 and Jeremiah 29: 11.

What's the secret? 'I will be with you.' God says to Gideon, 'Go in the strength you have.' *What strength does Gideon have?*

See what Paul's experience was (Philippians 4:13)

We probably all know that Gideon put out a fleece to be sure that God was serious! But notice the sequence of events before that. What does that say to us?

(Your notes

.....)

ESTHER (Esther 4:4-16)

Think back to your school days. Were you ever summoned to the Principal's study? How did you feel? Imagine members of the court of King Xerxes – scared to be sent for, perhaps, but terrified to approach him otherwise and violate court protocol, in case he should have them killed.

Consider: The advantages and her disadvantages of Esther's position; her responsibilities and the risks involved; her reasons for fear and how she dealt with the fear. What helped her?

Esther's attitude sounds very fatalistic (verse 16). What gives us cause to be *optimistic* rather than *fatalistic*? See Hebrews 4:16.

Sometimes leadership is about being in the right place at the right time. *If the matchbox is full of useful things but there's no match in there, the fire will never be lit!*

(Your notes
.....)

PETER (Matthew 14:22-33)

Who feels fear in this incident? How many are paralyzed by it?

In what way is Peter a success here? In what way is he a failure? What helps him?

Do you see Peter's 'if' (v.28) as a sign of little faith, or a bold request signifying great trust? Do you think he should have asked? How does Jesus respond?

Expect great things of God; attempt great things for God. (William Carey)

How often does a group of storm-tossed, perplexed, despairing disciples need someone to step out and attempt the impossible?

A matchbox may contain surprising things!

Verse 30: notice how to-the-point Peter's prayer is! How does Jesus respond?

Hebrews 12:2 could have been a bit of advice for Peter – admittedly it's easier said than done!

(Your notes
.....)

TIMOTHY (1 Timothy 4:9-16)

Why might Timothy be afraid? What encouragement does Paul give him?

In verse 12 Paul lists six ways in which Timothy can lead by example. (Some translations omit 'spirit' so have only five ways.) Are there any that don't apply to you? Which would you find most difficult?

What does God supply to this partnership? What does the Church supply? – What's the importance of that? What does Timothy supply?

What's more important – strength or faithfulness? See Revelation 3: 7-8.

God does not tell us to be successful, but to be faithful. (verses 12, 15, 16)

All the useful little things in the matchboxes are no good unless you open the box!

(Your notes
.....)

BACK TOGETHER: Report back from your group. Each group might suggest one particular point to write on the F/C

Courage is not the absence of fear but rather taking action despite fear.

Fear is a natural feeling, but the choices we make have significant impact.

- Suppose Gideon had chosen not to confront his fear?
- Suppose Esther had chosen to keep her head down?
- What advantage was there in Peter confronting his fears? Suppose he hadn't?
- Suppose Timothy had allowed older people to look down on him?

BE REALISTIC! Look again at your list of hindrances to being a leader. Would any of them have applied to Gideon, Esther, Peter, Timothy? Put a G E P or T beside the hindrance applying.

With the person beside you, discuss: Would any of them apply to you? Have you seen them as obstacles in the past? Do you still? What can you do about it?

BE REASSURED! The command for God's people "not to be afraid" almost always occurs in relation to the presence of God or the coming of his word. It signals a good event and occurs 366 times in the Bible – once for every day, even in leap years!

BE BRAVE! List (F/C) the things that threaten your church. Which are hindrances to growth – to be tackled? Which are disadvantages – to be got around? Which are obstacles and difficulties – to be overcome now?

Which concerns you most? Maybe these are the areas where God needs YOU to step out in faith (Esther 4:14b)!

BE SPECIFIC! Remember Peter's prayer, and pray for your church about the things you have listed.

He is nigh when He seems absent. He is watching when He seems blind.

He is active when He seems idle. (G. Campbell Morgan)

BE AWARE

Song or hymn: "Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you" / HP 774 "Lord, Thy Church on earth is seeking!"

APPENDIX

[These could be read at the close of the Workshop.](#)

1. 'It is easy for us to get the impression that God is about big, spectacular and miraculous... small things are also important to God. Spiritual people realise this – it is part of the fruit of their spirituality. The spiritual life is not a life of success, it is a life of faithfulness... and it's not easy. Because we have so few heroes, we desperately need to create them... I... encourage all of us to recognise the power of the ordinary, the significance of the insignificant, the eternal difference that ordinary, messy, unfinished, under-construction people like you and me can make.' (Mike Yaconelli, *Messy Spirituality*)

2. This is how one woman's dreams helped her to recognize her fear:

DREAMS -1

They start off
as a simple trip
to fetch extra milk
for a visitor,
and end up
in territory
vaguely familiar
but unknown,
an adventure
of steeps to climb
and sheer drops,
precarious ledges
and footholds (maybe)
- a balancing act
far from home -
from which
I may not
return

DREAMS - 2

I recognise this castle.
The déjà vu of beautiful rooms.
I've often sneaked through,
attempting unseen
to take a short cut –
from where to where, who knows.
....
Strange that I always miss my way,
fail to find the obvious staircase
and end up in terrifying towers
and tunnels
in darkness
summoning the courage
(time after time)
to press on
leap
plunge
because on this route
there's no
going
back

Rosemary Lindsay, November 2004