



For Jeff, working in Iran in the 1970s and making frequent flights in a small aircraft across the desert, “fear and trembling” were a regular occurrence until he learned to hang on to these God-breathed and inspired words which calmed his anxiety: “Which one of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his life” (Matt 6:27).

Fear and anxiety are real emotions which we cannot deny and they affect each of us differently.

In this sermon series we are seeking to grow in confidence and to step out in faith, but we are often faced with fears and anxieties of many kinds: the fear of what other people will think, the fear that God may let us down, the fear that we are not good enough, the fear that as Christians we can't or won't be able to minister more proactively, the fear of being in the presence of God, the fear that actually God doesn't love us ... The list could go on. Fear has been defined by the acrostic, “**F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal.”

In the Bible passage, Paul explains how he came to the Corinthians in fear and trembling, but resolved to be single-minded “[knowing] nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” He did not come with clever arguments like the philosophers of that time. We can be afraid that we can't speak with the same eloquence as someone else, but what matters is our authenticity. In 2 Tim 1:6-8 Paul writes to Timothy about overcoming timidity. To grow from fear to confidence we have to continually fan into flame the precious gift of his Spirit within us.

Satan loves to trip us up by making us concerned (for example) about what other people might think of us. We must remember God's promises (eg 2 Cor 5:17).

When someone who isn't a Christian encounters the presence of God, there can be a sense of fear, as in Jeff's illustration from Pete Greig's book. But when God's presence comes, it's not to make us so afraid we'll run and hide, but to call us to repentance and new life. In Mark 4:35-41 the disciples are afraid of the storm, but also terrified when they realise they are in the presence of God himself.

Freedom from fear comes when we realise we are truly loved by the creator of the universe. The more we embrace his love for us, the more the promise of 1 John 4:18 will become a reality; “There is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out all fear.”

Questions for discussion:

1. Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. How had Paul used his natural weakness and fear when sharing the gospel with the Corinthians?
2. Jeff gave us this acronym: False Evidence Appearing Real. To what extent do you find this a helpful definition of “fear”?
3. In what ways can fear hinder our own discipleship?
4. Can fear ever be a positive emotion or the appropriate response to a situation?
5. Look at Mark 4:35-41. What part does fear play in this incident?
6. Does anyone have a story of a fear overcome? Consider any fears you may be facing now, and, if appropriate, share them with the group and pray for one another, remembering God's promise in Romans 8:15-17.