



DEAN WELCH – TEACHER

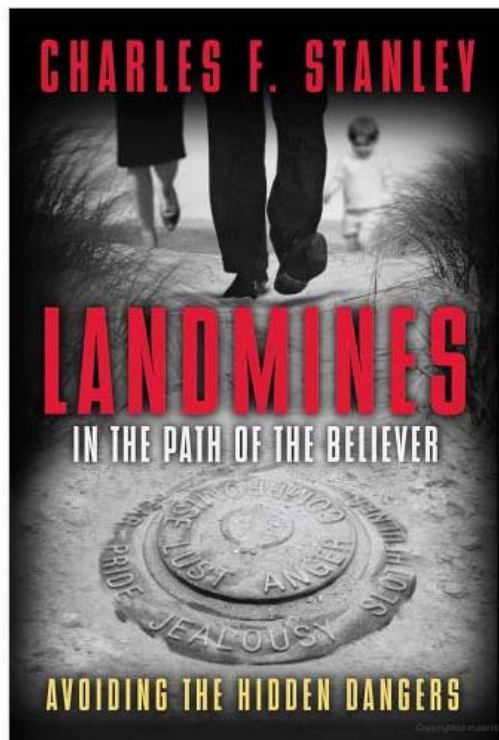
FEAR FACTOR

MATTHEW 8:23-26 & ISAIAH 41: 10

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

AUGUST 22, 2010

LESSON #4 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:



FEAR FACTOR

AUGUST 22, 2010

MATTHEW 8:23-26 & ISAIAH 41: 10

Have you ever considered how your emotions affect your life? Love, for example, influences your feelings, behavior, and even your looks. The same is true of fear. It can affect your thoughts, conduct, and even your physical health. We hear people make a comment that they were “*scared to death!*” What part does fear play in your life? What is your most dreaded fear or, as some say, *your worst nightmare*? How does it affect the way you live **today**, if at all? How many saw the original movie *Jaws*? Did that have any effect on you, say, swimming in the ocean? [PLAY FIRST **44 SECONDS** FROM *JAWS* TRAILER: [HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=UCMLFO6TSEFM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCMLFO6TSEFM)]

Fear is very much a part of our lives. Zig Ziglar says **F.E.A.R.** is **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal! On Day One of your study this week, you read a simple list of several fears (Page 145). But, what are some other things that people are commonly afraid of? Why? We fear being sued, finishing last, going broke; we fear the mole on the back, the new kid on the block, the sound of the clock as it ticks us closer to the grave. We sophisticate investment plans, create elaborate security systems, and legislate a stronger military, yet we depend on mood-altering drugs more than any other generation in history. Moreover, *“ordinary children today are more fearful than psychiatric patients were in the 1950s.”*

In your bible study this week you spent five days thinking about this *fear factor* in your individual life—reading and studying what God’s Word has to say. This is Week Four of our bible study by Dr. Charles Stanley from his book *Landmines in the Path of the Believer* and I pray that you were able to work through this often scary, and yet unsettling, landmine known as fear and that it no

longer has any control of your life. So, as we begin, the first thing I want us to do is read and focus on today's memory verse from **ISAIAH 41: 10 (MSG)**: *"Don't panic. I'm with you. There's no need to fear for I'm your God. I'll give you strength. I'll help you. I'll hold you steady, keep a firm grip on you."*

Today people seem to be afraid of almost everything. *One summer night during a severe thunderstorm a mother was tucking her small son into bed. She was about to turn the light off when he asked in a trembling voice, "Mommy, will you stay with me all night?" Smiling, the mother gave him a warm, reassuring hug and said tenderly, "I can't dear. I have to sleep in Daddy's room." A long silence followed. At last it was broken by a shaky voice saying, "The big sissy!"*

Imagine your life wholly untouched by fear. What if faith, not fear, was your default reaction to threats? If you could move a fear magnet over your heart and extract every last shaving of dread, insecurity, and doubt, what would remain? Envision a day, just one day, absent the dread of failure, rejection, and calamity. Can you imagine a life with no fear? Turn to **MATTHEW 8: 23-26 (NCV)** and let's read about just that possibility in a question Jesus asks his disciples during such a time: *"²³Jesus got into a boat, and his followers went with him. ²⁴A **great storm** arose on the lake so that waves covered the boat, but Jesus was sleeping.*

Listen to how Max Lucado in his recent book *Fearless* describes this: These are Matthew's words—one of the disciples. He remembered well that particular storm and bouncing boat and was careful in his terminology. We read it as "great storm" in the NASB, as a "furious storm" in the NIV and as a "severe storm" in the MSG. That tells us that not just any noun would do for Matthew. Can't you just see him pulling his Greek thesaurus off the shelf and hunting for a word that exploded like the waves across the bow. He bypassed common terms for spring shower, squall, cloudburst, or

downpour. They didn't capture what he felt and saw that night: a rumbling earth and quivering shoreline. He recalled more than winds and whitecaps. The word he found in the Greek was "*seismos*"—a quake, a trembling eruption of sea and sky. "A great *seismos* arose on the lake." The term still occupies a spot in our English language today. A seismologist studies earthquakes, a seismograph measures them, and Matthew, along with a crew of recent recruits, felt a *seismos* that shook them to the core. Think they were fearful? Maybe even "*scared to death*."

Sudden fear. We know the fear was sudden because the storm was. An older translation reads, "**Suddenly** a great tempest arose on the sea." Peter and John were seasoned sailors and maybe were used to this—but not Matthew. He was a tax collector. The storm is not what the tax collector bargained for. Do you sense his surprise in the way he links his two sentences? "*Jesus got into a boat, and his followers went with him. A great storm arose on the lake*" (8:23–24).

Wouldn't you hope for a more upbeat second sentence, a happier consequence of obedience? Something like, "*Jesus got into a boat. His followers went with him, and suddenly a great rainbow arched in the sky, a flock of doves hovered in happy formation, a sea of glass mirrored their mast.*" Don't Christ-followers enjoy a calendar full of Caribbean cruises? No. This story sends the not-so-subtle and not-too-popular reminder: **getting on board with Christ can mean getting soaked with Christ. Disciples can expect rough seas and stout winds.** Please remember the words of Christ about this in **JOHN 16: 33**, "*In the world you WILL* [not 'might,' 'may,' or 'could'] *have tribulation.*"

Christ-followers lose jobs, contract cancer, bury children and battle addictions—and, as a result, face fears. It's not the absence of storms that sets us apart. It's whom we discover in the storm: an unstirred Christ. So, look at the very next verse in our text. **Verse**

24 says, *"Jesus was sleeping."* Can you picture that scene? The disciples scream—Jesus dreams. Thunder roars—Jesus snores. He doesn't doze, catnap, or rest. He slumbers. Could you sleep at a time like this? Could you snooze during a roller coaster loop-the-loop? In a wind tunnel? At a kettledrum concert? Jesus sleeps through all three at once! Mark's gospel adds two curious details. Listen to **MARK 4:38 (NCV)**: "[Jesus] was in the stern, asleep on a pillow." In the stern, on a pillow. WOW!

This wasn't the typical feather or down pillow, but really a leather sandbag—a ballast bag—that Mediterranean fishermen still use today. We don't know how or where Jesus got the pillow. But this much we do know. This was a premeditated sleep. He didn't accidentally nod off. In full knowledge of the coming storm, Jesus decided it was nap time—so he crawled into the corner, put his head on the pillow, and drifted into dreamland.

His snooze troubles the disciples. Matthew and Mark record their responses as three quick and pointed Greek pronouncements and one question. The pronouncements are seen in **MATTHEW 8:25**, *"His followers went to him and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We will drown!"* So, the three are: "Lord! Save! Dying!" And the question, from **MARK 4: 38** is, *"Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"*

Do you notice that they do not ask about Jesus' strength: "Can you still the storm?" His knowledge: "Are you aware of the storm?" Or his know-how: "Do you have any experience with storms?" But rather, they raise doubts about Jesus' character: *"Do you not care..."* Fear does this. Fear corrodes our confidence in God's goodness. We begin to wonder if love lives in heaven. If God can sleep in our storms, if his eyes stay shut when our eyes grow wide, if he permits storms after we get on his boat, does he care? Fear unleashes a swarm of doubts, anger-stirring doubts.

And it turns us into control freaks. *“Do something about the storm!”* is the implicit demand of the question. *“Fix it or ... or ... or else!”* Fear, at its center, is a perceived loss of control. When life spins wildly, we grab for a component of life we can manage: our diet, the tidiness of a house, the armrest of a plane, or, in many cases, people. The more insecure we feel, the meaner we become. We growl and bare our fangs. Why? Because we are bad? In part. But also because we feel cornered. Shouldn't someone mention Jesus' track record or review his résumé? Do they remember the accomplishments of Christ? They may not. Fear creates a form of spiritual amnesia. It dulls our miracle memory. It makes us forget what Jesus has done and how good God is.

So, look at what Christ does in the middle of this—He asks a question and it's based on His most common command, *“Fear not!”* Look at His words in **MATTHEW 8:26**, *“Why are you afraid?” he asks.* The Gospels list some 125 Christ-issued imperatives. Of these, 21 urge us to “not be afraid” or “not fear” or “have courage” or “take heart” or “be of good cheer.” The second most common command, to love God and neighbor, appears on only eight occasions. If quantity is any indicator, Jesus takes our fears seriously. The one statement he made more than any other was this: don't be afraid.

Look at the rest of Jesus' response in **verse 26**: *“...You don't have enough faith.” Then Jesus got up and gave a command to the wind and the waves, and it became completely calm.* We've learned the high cost of fear. Jesus' question is a good one. He lifts his head from the pillow, steps out from the stern into the storm, and asks, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?”

If we medicate fear with angry outbursts, drinking binges, sullen withdrawals, self-starvation, or viselike control, we **exclude** God from the solution and exacerbate the problem. We subject ourselves to a position of fear, allowing anxiety to dominate and

define our lives. Joy-sapping worries. Day-numbing dread. Repeated bouts of insecurity that petrify and paralyze us. Hysteria is not from God. Remember these words from **2 TIMOTHY 1: 7**, *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear.”* Then, who’s behind all this? Duh! Our adversary—Satan. He positions this landmine of fear just below the surface in our consciousness and then ever so gently pushes us toward it. Then, suddenly, we step on it and BAM!

Fear may fill our world, but it doesn’t have to fill our hearts. It will always knock on the door. Just don’t invite it in for dinner, and for heaven’s sake don’t offer it a bed for the night. Let’s strengthen our hearts with a select number of Jesus’ “do not fear” statements. The promise of Christ here with this landmine is simple: we can fear less tomorrow than we do today.

A scripture passage that I find myself claiming often is not on your handout, but should be. Listen to these words from **PSALM 34:4 (NIV)**, *“I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.”*

History tells us that at 8:17 on the evening of March 3, 1943, bomb-raid sirens blasted through the air above London, England. Workers and shoppers stopped on sidewalks and boulevards and searched the skies. Buses came to a halt and emptied their passengers. Drivers screeched their brakes and stepped out of their cars. Gunfire could be heard in the distance. Nearby anti-aircraft artillery forces launches a salvo of rockets. Throngs on the streets began to scream. Some people threw themselves on the ground. Others covered their heads and shouted, “They are starting to drop them!” Everyone looked above for enemy planes. The fact that they saw none did nothing to dampen the hysteria.

People raced toward the Bethnal Green Underground Station, where more than 500 citizens had already taken refuge. In the next ten minutes 1500 more would join them.

Trouble began when a rush of safety seekers reached the stairwell entrance at the same time. A woman carrying a baby lost her footing on one of the 19 uneven steps leading down from the street. Her stumble interrupted the oncoming flow, causing a domino of others to tumble on top of her. Within seconds, hundreds of horrified people were thrown together, piling up like laundry in a basket. Matters worsened when the late arrivers thought they were being deliberately blocked from entering (they weren't). So they began to push. The chaos lasted for less than a quarter of an hour. The disentangling of bodies took until midnight. In the end 173 men, women and children died.

No bombs had been dropped. Fusillades didn't kill the people. Fear did. Fear loves a good stampede. Fear's payday is blind panic, unfounded disquiet, and sleepless nights. Fear's been making a good living lately. Here's a test. How far do you have to go to hear the reminder "Be afraid"? How near is your next "You are in trouble" memo? A slip of the newspaper page? A turn of the radio dial or TV channel? A glance at the internet update on the computer monitor? According to the media, the world is one scary place.

As Dr. Stanley reminded us in our study this week, "we begin each day on the battlefield of life. The enemy plants a series of landmines in our path, hoping that we will step on one that will explode and keep us from accomplishing God's will and purpose." So, as we wrap up this lesson on fear, what we can **DO** to overcome fear? I gave you a list of scripture passages that you can place in your Bible or carry with you as a reminder of what God's Word says about this. Also, let's look again at some specifics of what we can do to disarm this landmine of fear:

FIRST, ADMIT *there is a problem and you need God's help.* In order to be free from fear requires you to step out in faith. You must recognize and admit that the basic cause of your fear is your failure to trust in the sovereignty of God. Just say, *"Lord, I'm hurting and scared. Please help me to hear your voice and your words of encouragement."*

SECOND, CONFESS *your belief in God's sovereign care.* Every fear is shattered on this single truth—God is sovereign and He will not leave us in what appears to be a helpless situation. His Word, in **HEBREWS 13:5** tells us that He will **never** leave or forsake us—no matter what the adversary whispers in our ear.

THIRD, COMMIT *yourself to spending time each day with God in prayer.* The single most important activity you can do each day is to pray. Don't forget one of the verses from last week which reinforces this. **1 THESSALONIANS 5:17** says, *"Pray without ceasing."*

FOURTH, MEDITATE *on God's Word which contains His personal promises to you.* You can seal fear's fate in your life by studying and meditating on God's Word. The Lord is with you. He is not out of reach in some distant place, but is there beside you at every moment. He is your God, and He loves you more than anyone else ever could. Memorize today's memory verse from **ISAIAH 41:10 (MSG)** as a reminder of His promises, *"Don't panic. I'm with you. There's no need to fear for I'm your God. I'll give you strength. I'll help you. I'll hold you steady, keep a firm grip on you."*

God will strengthen you and help you, no matter what happens. These are solid promises from His Word, and He's never broken a single pledge He's ever made. You can expect Him to fill your every need, no matter what obstacle or challenge you face in life. This is

your wonderful heritage as a child of God—so embrace Him and the wonderful victory that’s yours through Him.

CONCLUSION: Imagine living your whole life and missing all the good things the heavenly Father has prepared for you. Every person in the world has an opportunity to live this earthly life to the fullest, but some do not take it because they spend their time in bondage to fear. Don’t allow that to happen to you. The next time you feel anxious, take hold of these steps and disarm the landmine of fear. God calls you to joyful fearlessness. The crucial factor in your fearless living is not your family but your God. *"Let not your hearts be troubled, BELIEVE IN GOD."* Believe in God! Trust God! Let God be your God! Your help. Your strength. He will uphold you with his righteous right hand.

Let’s Pray.



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F _____ E _____ A _____ R _____
2. Getting on board with Christ can mean getting soaked with Christ. Disciples can expect _____ seas and _____ winds.

☀ **JOHN 16:33**, "...In the world you _____ [*not 'might,' 'may,' or 'could'*] have tribulation."
[Emphasis added.]
3. Fear corrodes our _____ in God's goodness. We begin to wonder if love lives in heaven. If God can sleep in our storms, if his eyes stay shut when our eyes grow wide, if he permits storms after we get on his boat, does he _____? Fear unleashes a swarm of _____, anger-stirring doubts.
4. If we medicate fear with angry outbursts, drinking binges, sullen withdrawals, self-starvation, or viselike control, we _____ God from the solution and exacerbate the problem. We subject _____ to a position of fear

☀ **2 TIMOTHY 1:7** says, "'For God has not given us a spirit of _____."
5. How we can **disarm** the landmine of **FEAR**:
 - A. First, _____ there is a problem and you need God's help.
 - B. Second, _____ your belief in God's sovereign care.
 - C. Third, _____ yourself to spending time each day with God in prayer.
 - D. Fourth, _____ on God's Word which contains His personal promises to you.