

Sunday

Week 8. Freedom From Fear

Fear is the one single emotion that evokes a response from every cell of your body and sets off every physiological system within you.

Our brains are equipped to register fear through worry – more sensitively than anger, sadness, joy, ecstasy, jealousy, love, and definitely more than pleasure.

This is why positive thinking – which is a great idea – is so hard to do. As far as how we're wired, happiness doesn't matter. Survival does.

The only reliable neural circuits within the body, where intense pleasure is expected every time, are eating and having sex, because both are essential for the survival of the species.

"We are attached to the Supreme Being by a supple chain which restrains without enslaving us. What is most admirable in the universal order of things is the action of free man under the divine hand.

Comte Joseph Marie De Maistre

So, sitting on the stoop waiting for the bluebird of happiness to save a marriage that's in trouble or to strengthen shaky finances, won't work. Nature doesn't care. So, we humans have to reach up for the bluebird's leg, or set snares, or make plans, because fear and worry will rise up within us, as naturally as hunger and thirst, when trouble strikes.

Most of the time the danger is not a snake on the path ahead or a twig crackling under a terrorist's boot – it's a thought – a thought that evokes a feeling, an emotion.

But, our brains, being better suited for the life of a hunter-gatherer, set off alarms geared toward fight or flight. So, we pour out chemicals designed to prepare us to take forceful physical action. Actually, nowadays we mostly sit and stew.

At the heart of the process, buried deep at the bottom of our brains, just atop the spinal cord, right next to the centers controlling our heartbeat and breathing, we find the brain stem – the apparatus that regulates our deepest reactions of fear.

Full-fledged worry that comes from fear usually is sparked by an event. Then, the growth phase kicks in – requiring a whole brain response.

For example, you open your bank statement and find that you're \$86 overdrawn, but you thought you had about \$1,400, and there's a pile of bills. The thoughts begin:

- Where's the money coming from to pay my bills?
- If I pay this, where will I get the money to pay the others?
- What happened? How did my finances get so out of hand?
- Will we be forced to move?
- What will this do to my credit score?

A lot of people know this all too familiar cascade of worries – set off by opening a bank statement.

Sometimes, however, worry of fear rises up like a slow burn from an innocent event interpreted wrongly.

A man may pass you in the hall and wink, for example. Afterwards you may wonder, "Is that someone I know?"

Then, later, "What did he mean by that wink? Does he know something I don't?" or, "Was he flirting?" or, "Was he making fun of me?"

So, instead of ignoring such a trivial move as the wink of a stranger, you may fix on it, becoming attached to it, personalizing it, and catastrophizing it.

In truth the mind can take any seemingly innocent event and turn it into what seems like a crisis slowly building.

So, what's happening when we fixate? Place the blame on the amygdala, the brain's danger sensor, and the prefrontal cortex – the smart center. The prefrontal cortex starts working the perceived danger back and forth, signaling to the amygdala that it's worrying. So, messages zip up and down between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex and pretty soon you have a worried look.

Imagine this. You're going on a long air trip which means that you'll see lots of people. Some will have a worried look. Others will look vigilant – ready for action. Others will look happy. Here's what scientific research has discovered about our brains and worry from fear, about the causes and the ranges of expression.

- The worry of fear influences the actions of each person individually and differently – psychologically paralyzing some and making others bold and confident.

- There is a genetic basis for worry – a gene discovered in the 1990s that regulates serotonin production.
- Experiences in life play a part in whether you are a mild, moderate or severe worrier, because life experiences can modify the genetic expression to be stronger or weaker.
- When we are emotionally overwhelmed by a traumatic event of life, the information is permanently etched in the memory like a tattoo or a bad burn. The memory stays with you forever. This sometimes is diagnosed as post traumatic stress disorder – PTSD.
- Some of us have brains that are more sensitive than others to the brain's natural stress modulators – the GABA system. So, some of us are naturally cool and calm. And, some are high strung.
- Classic drugs used to treat anxiety and worry – Valium, Xanax, and others – work by activating GABA and GABA neurons. Thus the person who is born cool as a cucumber and stays that way in spite of life circumstances has plenty of GABA and GABA-sensitive binding sites. Thus, he or she need not take Valium or Xanax.
- And, the key point about what we usually consider as being issues of “character” – is to factor in the physical basis for virtues such as bravery, confidence, and grace under pressure and to say that being fearful and skittish and to lack grace under pressure most likely has as much to do with not having enough GABA as not having enough true grit.
- So, now, back to the Overweight State. This is a setup for the two basic elements of worry: 1. heightened vulnerability 2. loss of control.

The good news is that what is going on in the brain can be changed. Brains are plastic. They can change. If they have changed in a negative way there's nothing to say they can't be changed back in a positive way, modifying the genetic expressions through enhancing thought patterns and life experiences.

To conquer the worry of fear, admit it. Sheer stubbornness to not do your part will keep you vulnerable forever. Thus, there are four things you simply must do to get started:

1. You must want to regain control of your life – you must desire it.
2. You must be willing to change your thinking.
3. You must be willing to do the exercises that are coming up.
4. You must be honest with yourself.

Monday

Week 8 – Day 1

Morning Prayer

Theme: Ask God to heal our families

Evening Prayer

Theme: Changing what is, through the power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit As A Source of Dreams

Call it daydreaming. Call it visualization. Call it the mind's eye. Simply put, you have undoubtedly thought of why you're here. Why you were born. What you're good at.

Now, imagine this. In the Bible the Holy Spirit is described in personal terms, like a person – Jesus. So, imagine that you regularly meet with Jesus to discuss your plans for the future. At first the images will be fuzzy. Then, with practice, you should see yourself in an ideal situation, in an idealized body, doing what your heart believes is the thing that you were sent here to do, and, here you are, getting Jesus' point of view.

When you are able to close your eyes and see yourself in your idealized situation in complete detail, you are on the road to materializing your future. This is the way most turnarounds are achieved.

You will recognize three elements of thinking this way:

1. Frequency – the more you do it, the clearer it becomes.
2. Vividness – you will want your pictures to be crystal clear.
3. Intensity – put some emotion to this exercise.

Dreaming kept Victor Frankl alive in the Nazi concentration camps, a dream of addressing a large crowd – which he did, telling them, “What kept me alive was you. I dreamed that someday I would be here, telling you how I, Victor Frankl, survived. And, here I am.”

So, dream on.

Wrapping Up

It's time.

Tuesday

Week 8 – Day 2

Morning Prayer

Theme: Ask God for the healing of our work communities

Evening Prayer

Theme: Changing what is, through the power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit As A Source of Good Quiet Words About Yourself

Negative self-talk, the worry of fear, The Overweight State – they all go together to keep you on the worry path.

But, good words, quiet words that are positive and personal, can, through daily use, change the structure of your brain, bringing about personality changes, boosting your enthusiasm, increasing your courage, gaining control over your emotions, and building up your self-esteem, through stating the dream.

So, say . . .

“I love to exercise.”

“I have all the energy I need.”

“My weight no longer affects my health.”

Or whatever your dreams are.

All change moves from the inner to the outer, in the self-concept. Thus, you become the person you want to be on the inside before you see a change in appearance on the outside.

This is a way of telling the truth in advance, of convincing yourself in your subconscious mind that the condition you desire already exists. Your subconscious – through intuition – then makes whatever changes are necessary internally and externally, to align your inner world with your desired outer reality.

But, be patient. Habits change slowly. If you believe in yourself, well, then, there’s nothing you can’t do – with the Holy Spirit’s help. So, don’t quit. Don’t ever quit.

Wrapping Up

It’s time.

Wednesday

Week 8 – Day 3

Morning Prayer

Theme: Ask God for the healing of our living communities

Evening Prayer

Theme: Changing what is, through the power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit As The Source of A Good Show

Imagine this. You're transferred to Heaven and are sitting in person with Jesus in the Garden of Paradise at your first meal and Jesus is evaluating your earthbound performance. What you want to hear is, "You put on a good show."

So, start this very moment to work, talk, and act exactly as if you were already the person you desire to be. Behave as if you have that performance evaluation by Jesus in mind. Thus, your positive and optimistic feelings will generate actions and behaviors consistent with them. Or, you can act enthusiastic and cheerful and your behavior will generate positive feelings – it works both ways.

In fact, it's almost impossible to act the part of a happy, cheerful person for more than five or six minutes without having a backflow experience in which your actions create the emotions that are consistent with them. Thus, behave positively and enthusiastically and soon you will be positive and enthusiastic.

The basis for these techniques in reshaping your brain through training your mind is cognitive behavior. Using those techniques you can deliberately create in yourself the mental qualities of a high-performing person. You can begin today to act with purpose, courage, confidence, competence, and responsible intelligence – changing your brain through training your mind. Your body will follow. So, begin your show.

Wrapping Up

It's time.

Thursday

Week 8 – Day 4

Morning Prayer

Theme: Ask God for the healing of our nation

Evening Prayer

Theme: Changing what is, through the power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit As A Source of Optimism

Optimism, of course, involves self-delusion, your belief that your own abilities are superior to the obstacles that logically should stop you dead in your tracks.

When you insist to others that you can do a thing or that you will do something, it has a powerful impact on your thinking and on your subsequent behavior. And, that's exactly what you need to perform a heavy-duty assignment such as the permanent loss of excess weight.

How can you be any good unless you think you can accomplish what has been impossible for you to accomplish before now? Consider. Top athletes are always convinced that they can be heroes, even if they don't shout it from the rooftops. And it shows. Baseball scouts can see it in their eyes – that look – that "good face" of self-confidence that radiates outward.

So, keep your conversation throughout the day consistent with what you really want to happen. Refuse to focus on your fears and misgivings. Be positive and optimistic in everything you say. Keep your words upbeat and cheerful. This is your job. God's job is to help you actualize your potentialities.

Wrapping Up

It's time.

Friday

Week 8 – Day 5

Morning Prayer

Theme: Ask God for healing of our world

Evening Prayer

Theme: Changing what is, through the power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit As A Source of Mind Feeding

To change your brain, you must feed your mind continually with words, images, and thoughts that are consistent with the direction in which you are growing. So, read. Read books and magazines for personal and professional excellence. Listen to educational CDs or audiocassettes as you travel. Attend seminars and lectures. Open your mind to ways of accelerating your development of new habit patterns of thought. And, talk to people about how you can get better at what you do. You don't need to shoulder the whole load alone.

Thus, keep one eye on your time, not on your watch. With all the ways we have of feeding the mind, none will work if you don't organize your days to combat the most dangerous, expensive, and self-destructive habit of all – wasting time. If you blow off most of your nine to fives on useless, time-consuming behavior, you will go nowhere. Keeping track of your time is the moral equivalent of counting calories or watching portions, except you're monitoring output, not input.

And, don't watch much TV or read newspapers and magazines that focus on bad news. Next to sex, bad news sells best. Don't read upsetting stories. Seek balance. Good things are also happening. If you don't limit the amount of media news you consume, you will over dose on worry and your brain will become toxic, not changed. You are programmable and TV is your teacher

To improve your outer results, ya gotta improve your inner feeding habits.

Wrapping Up

It's time.

Saturday Eating Realities

Week 8

Plan what you will eat.

A good habit to get into is to plan out your meals Monday through Friday. While it probably has been boring eating the same thing each day, you should notice how liberating it is not to have to worry about what you will eat. If you plan simple small meals Monday to Friday you can take control over the nutritional content and amount of what you and your family are eating. Also, you will not be tempted to stop for a quick burger and fries for lunch or on the way home. And remember, the weekends are a free time. Go to your favorite restaurant and eat whatever you want.

Saturday's Messgae

Week 8

"Gather Up The Fragments"

John 6:1-13

For the past several days I have been watching T.V. news reports about the terrible destruction caused by severe storms in central Florida. At least 20 people were killed, many were injured and at least 1,500 houses and buildings were damaged or destroyed. News reports showed helpers moving into the areas to assist residents as they searched for loved ones and possessions. Fragments from the damage were moved around, stacked up or loaded on vehicles to be hauled away. The stories of death and destruction evoked compassionate concern for all the people involved as they gathered up the pieces of their lives and possessions that remained.

As I watched these news reports, my mind suddenly flashed to an event in the life of Jesus as recorded in John 6:1-13.

As Jesus fulfilled his ministry, great crowds followed Him. On this occasion Jesus asked Philip where they could buy food to feed the people. Philip answered that they really did not have the money to buy food for the multitudes. Andrew spoke up and said that a boy was present in the crowd who had a lunch of five barley loaves and two small fishes. Jesus took that small lunch, worked a miracle, and fed the multitudes. After the meal Jesus noticed that food was left over so He said to the disciples: "Gather up the fragments that remain that nothing be lost." To me, that is an interesting and challenging sentence spoken by Jesus. Although Jesus was speaking of food on this occasion, I have the strong conviction that what he said applies equally to every area of man's life. One of the great glories of the Gospel is that a person can start over again. Man often sinks down into sin but he need never to be defeated by sin. Life can be redeemed. Jesus can pick up the pieces of a person's life and put that person's life together. Any person's life can be redeemed. When we give up on winning a lost person to Christ, we are doubting the power of Almighty God.

According to the Gospel records, Jesus spent a major part of His earthly ministry trying to get people to start over gain in life. His message was always one of hope to the shipwrecked and courage to the fallen. He was forever telling people that they need not despair, for God always offers a new chance and a new lease on life. Let us turn to the New Testament and examine the lives of some of those persons whose lives were redeemed by the power of God.

Here is Zacchaeus whose life had been degraded by dirty business practices. He was a tax collector who had taken more money than the people were supposed to pay. As a result the people despised him. His life had reached bottom and was broken to pieces by sin. But just then Jesus Christ passed his way and his broken life was restored. After his despair had been replaced by hope and faith, Zacchaeus picked up the broken pieces of his life and with Jesus' help put them back together. He offered to make restitution to the people from whom he had taken unjustly and promised to follow Jesus. Then Jesus said to Zacchaeus: "This day is salvation come to this house." Zacchaeus' life had been redeemed. The broken pieces of his life had been put together. He was saved.

Here is the woman of Capernaum who was known for her loose living. She had no respect for herself or for the lives of others. Was there any hope for her salvation? Not until Jesus Christ came into her life. Her path crossed the path of Jesus and her life was transformed. She manifested her faith and Jesus forgave her sins. Then Jesus said to her: "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." The fragments of her life were gathered up and Jesus put her on the road to Heaven.

Here is Saul who was one of the most notorious persecutors of the Christians in the early Church. His love of the law had caused him to hate Christians. As a result he tried to arrest and imprison every Christian he could find. This was his sinful condition until he suddenly and dramatically met Jesus Christ on the Damascus road. After meeting the risen Lord, he became one of the most dynamic missionaries in the history of Christianity. The transformation of his life was so radical that his name was changed from SAUL to PAUL. His life had been broken by sin but Jesus Christ picked up the broken pieces. His life was redeemed. He was saved, and after being saved, he was used of God in saving others.

The inspiring part of God's message is this: Your life can also be redeemed. Perhaps sin has broken your life but what sin has left can be restored. Thank God for that! "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." AMEN – may it be so.

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