

*Where we start . . .*

Can you identify any of these formal phobias? If you had one of these named phobias, what would you be afraid of?

- Claustrophobia
- Zoophobia
- Triskadekaphobia
- Gerontophobia

Is there anything in your life that you are particularly squeamish about? What kinds of things stir some level of phobia in you?

*What we read . . .*

It's good that Mark allows us to see the disciples in all their "human-ness." That helps us identify with them. As you read about their journey across the lake, try and relate to what they must have been feeling. Read Mark 6:45-52.

How had they ended up in the situation they were in, out there in the middle of the lake?

When Jesus does come to their aid, how does He address their fear?

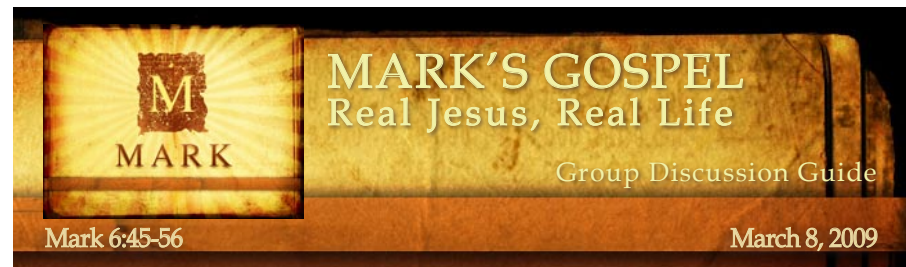
This is the third time Jesus has spoken to someone's fear, as recorded for us by Mark. Look back at Mark 4:35-41 and Mark 5:35-43.

What is common to the experiences of fear that arise in these three episodes?

What is Jesus' approach for addressing the fears He sees in others?

*Why this matters . . .*

Even if you don't have a fancy name for it, you do face fears in your life—sometimes daily. What do you think Jesus would say to you in the face of your fears?



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*Diving in . . .*

As Mark weaves his Gospel together, there are many strands we can follow along. We want to stay in the flow of his story. But this week we are going to pick up on one single thread – anchored in what we read this week, but traced back to early moments in the Gospel. We want to touch on fear . . . and how Jesus seeks to address it. We all face fears; even the “chosen twelve” (which should encourage the rest of us “average Christians!”). And Jesus’ antidote to fear is consistent and simple: It is about looking to Him.

*Discussing . . .*

You don’t have to raise your group’s awareness of their various fears to a heightened sense, but launch the discussion this week by some discussion of the truth that we all do, in various ways and at various times, face a variety of fears. The four fears listed in the Discussion Guide (and you can feel free to expand on the exercise) are provided just to launch the conversation. (In case you do not immediately recognize the formal phobia labels, claustrophobia is the fear of closed spaces, zoophobia is the fear of animals, triskadekaphobia is the fear of the number thirteen, and gerontophobia is the fear of growing old.)

Once you’ve opened up the “fearful discussion,” turn to the passage and encourage your group to *feel* and *identify with* the emotions the disciples would have been experiencing.

Jesus apparently sent the twelve out in the boat sometime before nightfall; notice that “evening” only comes after they have set out (6:47). So, they begin their venture across the sea in late afternoon; after the meal. Previous trips across this same body of water (as recorded by Mark) are hardly all day junkets; they should have crossed in a reasonably short period of time. But by the time Jesus comes to them walking on the water (around the fourth watch—Mark 6:48—or between 3 and 6 in the morning), they have been straining for hours and hours. And when they see Him, they are afraid. They are exhausted, frustrated, discouraged, anxious . . . trying to get across the sea. They are then caught entirely off guard by the appearance of Jesus walking on the stormy sea. Although they are apparently not immediately at risk of losing their lives, they end up terrified, seeing Jesus and thinking He is some kind of ghostly apparition.

But Jesus’ words to them are simple, clear, and calming. Mark’s description

indicates not simply that Jesus spoke “to them” but carries a more gracious sense: “He spoke *with* them saying . . .” Three things He communicates. First, “take heart” (ESV); literally, “have cheerful courage!” He affirms that “It is I,” as opposed to some ghostly apparition; “It is really Me!” And then He calls them to “Stop continuing to be afraid.”

There are two prior episodes in Mark where Jesus addresses the issue of fear in someone. Mark 4:35-41 is the first; where the disciples experience fear when Jesus is in the boat with them and they are concerned that they might drown. The second is found in Mark 5:35-43 in the last part of the account of the healing of Jairus’ daughter who has died.

In both of those instances, the specific words that Jesus speaks to those who are afraid are different than what He says to the twelve when He comes walking on the water. However, a careful reading of these three passages might provide some insight into Jesus’ “antidote” for fear.

In the first encounter, Jesus raises the question of *why* the disciples are gripped with fear. He doesn’t directly provide the antidote, but the implication is there: Seeing as He is with them, if they but lean on Him, rest on Him, look to Him, they can be free from their fear.

This is made even clearer in the account of Jairus. When Jairus hears that his daughter has died, Jesus tells him to “stop fearing” (apparently fear gripped Jairus when he heard the report of his daughter’s passing) and to “keep on believing, trusting, relying on Me.”

It is in this third instance of fear that Jesus becomes even more explicit. In the face of the disciples’ fears, Jesus calls them to courage by telling them to look to Him, see Him, recognize Him.

In each situation, those who were fearing were facing something that appeared to threaten to overwhelm them, undue them, bring their world into jeopardy. But notice that Jesus doesn’t address the fear by explaining either what is going on or what He is going to do about it; He simply calls the fearful to look to Him, to trust Him, to rest in Him.

When a toddler is frightened by the thunderstorm, it might help to try and explain the scientific basis for both lightning and thunder; but that often doesn’t really calm the fears. A thoughtful and attentive parent often realizes that what the child needs for the calming of such fears is not so much an explanation he or she can grasp, but a person he or she can cling to! Dad or mom may say, “It’s going to be OK. *I’m here!*”

Jesus doesn’t end up reasoning away the fears felt by those around Him, even though there might have been a way to do that. There are times when our fears seem so big and are so beyond our grasp that it might not be possible for Jesus to fully explain what is going on and what He intends to do. But He does want us to hear: “I’m here. Look to Me. Rest in Me.” And, if we but do that, we will find an antidote that is greater than our greatest fears.