

FEAR

Psalm 27 (a paraphrase)

The Lord is my torch in a dark room, and rescues me from danger - why should I be afraid? The Lord is an indestructible fortress - why should I tremble?

Those who run to attack me fall flat on their face. Even if a whole army surrounds me, my heart will not be scared.

The thing I long for most is to spend time in God's presence, to enjoy being near him. God's presence is my hiding place when trouble comes, he keeps me safe, out of reach from evil. Soon I will sing praise songs to God again!

Teach me how to live, O Lord, so that I don't go down a dangerous path. Danger lurks around the corner, but I know that you will keep me alive, God, and show your goodness to me while I live.

Stay with the Lord, in his presence. Be brave, and stay with the Lord.

Over to you!

How do you think the writer was feeling when this psalm was written?

Underline anything that would be comforting to you if you were scared.

What do you think the writer believes will help him / her be less fearful?

I make your body want to escape the danger, using the Fight, Flight or Freeze response. That's helpful when it comes to being attacked by a lion, but, I'm afraid, perhaps less helpful when it comes to sitting an exam, public speaking or telling someone how we feel - things that people are often scared of.

You will feel me in your body in tense muscles, increased heart rate and either a sudden flow of energy or feeling faint. You might shake or get cold hands and feet and a dry mouth.

My job is to keep you out of danger. **WATCH OUT!!**

Over to you!

What does Fear usually feel like in your body?

Jesus is Scared

 (retelling of Mark 14:32-42)

After Jesus had eaten the Last Supper with his friends, they went to a garden called Gethsemane, a favourite spot. They had just had a big meal and it was late, so Jesus' friends were yawning. But Jesus was not. He knew that danger was around the corner, so he wanted to pray. Jesus pointed his friends to a flat, comfy spot in the garden.

"Sit down here while I pray," he told them. Then he took his three closest friends, Peter, James and John, with him to a private spot. Jesus became very anxious and upset. *"I feel overwhelmed, it feels like death!"* he told them, *"Please stay and watch and pray!"*

Jesus went off a little further into the garden by himself, fell down on the ground and prayed for a way out: *"Dad, my Father, could you get me out of this?! But let your will be done, not mine!"*

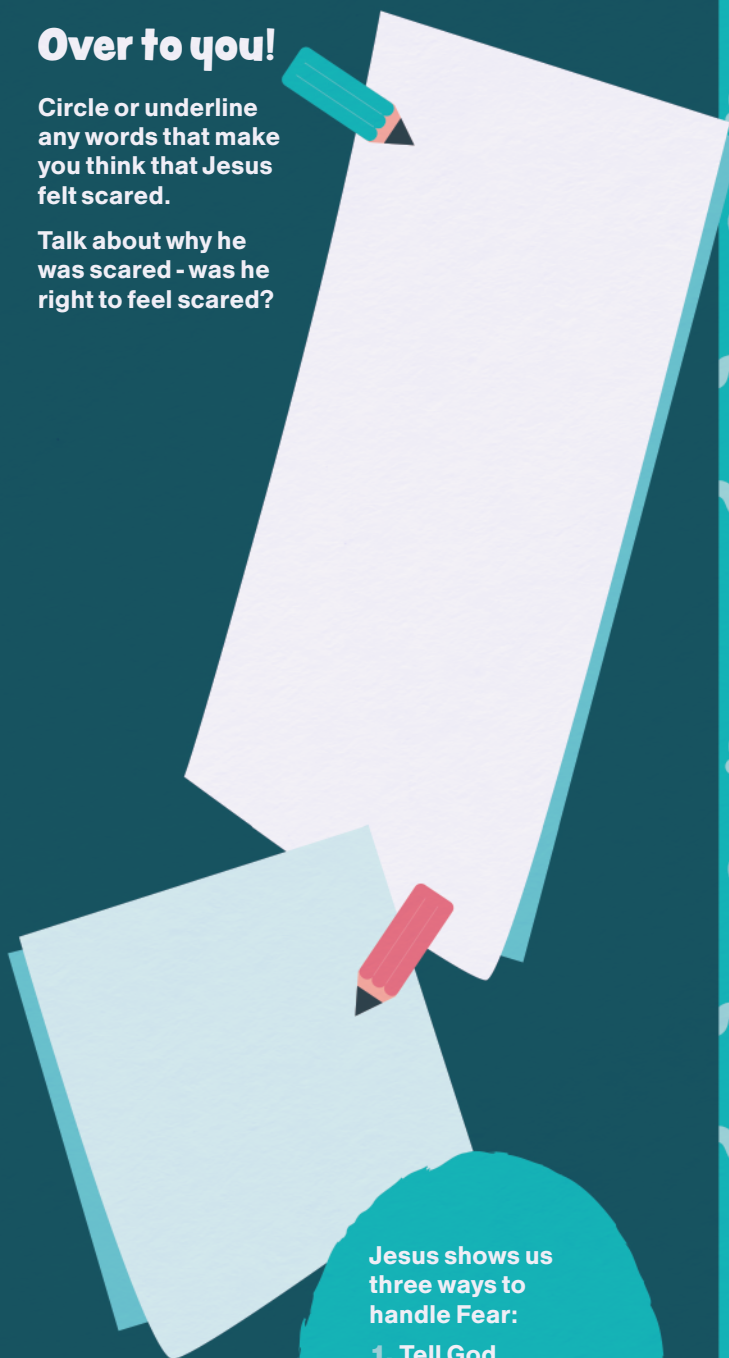
When Jesus came back to his friends, they were not watching and praying, but had fallen asleep. Jesus had to wake them up, before going off and praying the same prayer over and over. Three times he prayed the same prayer, three times he had to wake his friends up.

But after the third time, they all had a rude awakening. Judas, one of their group of friends, showed himself a traitor, and had brought a violent crowd to come and arrest Jesus. The time for prayer was over, and Jesus willingly allowed them to take him away, while his friends ran away, afraid for their lives.

Over to you!

Circle or underline any words that make you think that Jesus felt scared.

Talk about why he was scared - was he right to feel scared?



Jesus shows us three ways to handle Fear:

1. Tell God
2. Tell our friends
3. Stay with the Fear until it calms down

Which of those could you do when you feel scared?



When to run away?

If we run away every time something scares us (for example, a spider) or avoid something that scares us (for example, going to sleep by ourselves) we teach our brains that this situation was in fact dangerous. It will make us more scared the next time we face the same thing. But when something is not dangerous, we can decide to not avoid it; to not run away immediately. If we stay with the scary thing a little bit longer each time, we will eventually learn that it's not dangerous. Distraction, like counting windows or listening to a song, is a good strategy if it helps us remain in the scary situation.

It's the grown-ups' job to teach children what is dangerous (like running out in front of a car) and what isn't (like making new friends), and model how to respond to such situations.

We saw in the story that Jesus didn't run away from the fear in Gethsemane, but stayed with it, together with friends, allowing his Father to calm him and strengthen him for the challenge ahead.

What is something that you're scared of that is not actually dangerous?

How can you stay with that Fear next time you feel it?

Strategies for staying with unnecessary Fear

Even if we know logically that something isn't dangerous, our bodies still feel scared. So, the first step is to use action to show our bodies that they're out of danger. Slow your breathing down, by breathing in on a count of three and out slowly on a count of four. Then get rid of the excess energy Fear put in your body (in case you needed to run away or fight!) by wiggling your body, doing some star jumps or having a dance!

For centuries, Christians have used breathing to pray. Have a go at a breathing prayer now! You could choose any words you want to pray, but for example, why not using the last line from Psalm 27? As you breath in, think the words "Be brave" and as you breathe out, say the rest of the words in your mind "...and stay with the Lord." Repeat this as many times as you like. This is less like a "please-God" prayer and more of a "being-with-God" prayer.

(See also 'Engage at Home', 30 March <https://engageworship.org/EngageAtHome>)

Introduce...



Curiosity and Fear aren't really friends, because Fear keeps chasing Curiosity away! You might feel curious about what it's like to sing a solo at church, but Fear might stop you from ever having a go.

When we feel overwhelmed by Fear, it can be helpful to invite Curiosity in to ask some questions, like "What are some tips and tricks for feeling confident when performing?", or - if you're scared of spiders - "I wonder how spiders catch their food?" or - if you're scared of injections - "How does this vaccine work?"

Unmasking Fear

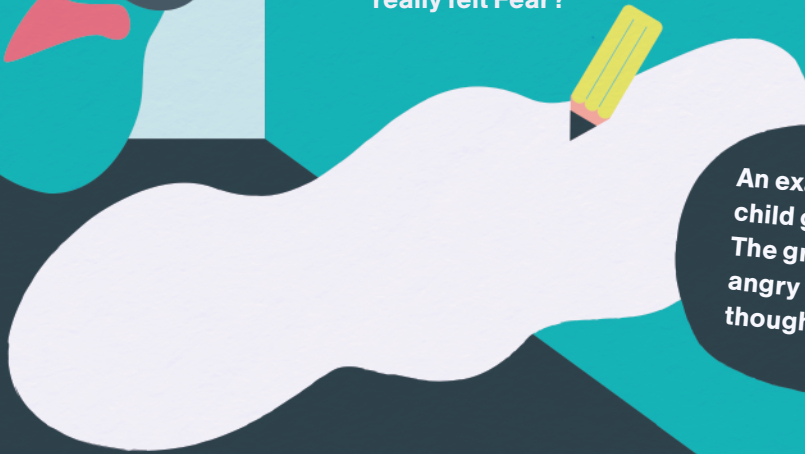


Fear is scared of everything, especially being seen and noticed. It often dresses up as a different emotion, especially Anger, to avoid being seen. When someone expresses Anger, it can be helpful to keep in mind that they might really be feeling Fear.

Can you think of an example when someone in your family has expressed Anger, but really felt Fear?

At other times, Fear might hide behind Shame. Someone might have told you that only babies get scared, and instead of feeling the Fear you need in a scary situation, you feel Shame, because you don't want to be childish.

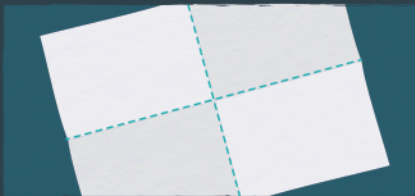
We need to unmask Fear, and use the strategies above to stay with it.



An example could be if a child gets momentarily lost. The grown-up might get really angry with the child, even though they were really afraid.

This may involve chatting and helping each other – that's OK! Praying doesn't have to be quiet or still.

A folding prayer around Fear



1. Find a piece of blank paper and fold it up twice.



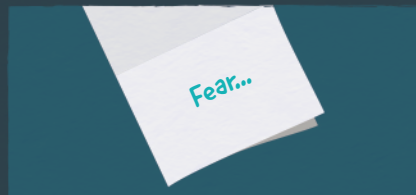
2. Write Phil 4:6 (MSG) on the folded paper: *"Instead of worrying, pray."*



3. Turn the folded paper over and write your favourite line from Psalm 27 (see page 9). Read these out as the beginning of your prayer.



4. Unfold your paper and write Anger and Shame at the top. Is there anything you feel Anger or Shame about right now? Say, write or draw these to God.



5. Lower down, write Fear. Are there things that you know that you are fearful of? Or can you look under the surface of the Anger and the Shame to see if it might be Fear lurking there? Say, write or draw these things to God.



6. Finally open the paper up fully and write Jesus in the middle. You could either just take your time over writing the name "Jesus" and simply be in the moment; you could doodle and draw about Jesus around his name or you could write thank-you prayers to Jesus for helping us carry our Fear. Rest in God's presence.