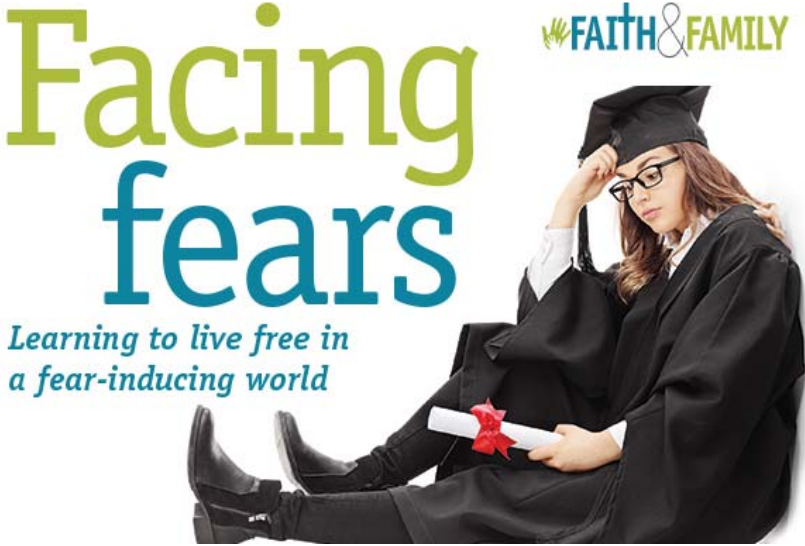


FAITH & FAMILY — FACING FEARS: LEARNING TO LIVE FREE IN A FEAR-INDUCING WORLD

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May 15, 2018



Feeling afraid

Jenny can't believe it but graduation is finally here. One more week and she'll be walking across the stage, shaking hands with the principal and receiving her high school diploma. She knows she should be excited but instead she only feels afraid.

She will miss her friends and the teachers she has spent so much time with over the past few years. She has accepted a scholarship offer at a university in a neighboring state — the college she always dreamed of attending.

She was so happy when the letter came, but now she questions her decision. Maybe moving away from her family is not the best idea. Starting over in a new place will be hard. Is she ready?

New experiences can cause fear, but potential for growth is worth risk

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Fear is a powerful emotion. The "fight or flight" impulse within us affects our actions, our thoughts and our decisions.

Fear is critical for survival, scientists tell us. They often compare our fear instinct to a home alarm system — fear warns us when danger is approaching. But fear also can be learned. Past experiences, news stories and cultural attitudes may teach us to be afraid of certain situations or people.

Fear is often associated with physical safety, a fact Jess Jennings knows well. Jennings and his wife, Wendy, have served more than 25 years with the International Mission Board (IMB) in Southeast Asia. They also direct Nehemiah Teams and Project 52, summer-long missions programs that send students all over the world.

Facing reality

The most frequently asked question Jennings receives from parents of students considering missions service is, "Will my child be safe?" As a parent of three children, Jennings understands the fear inherent in the question but says the question overlooks the common dangers we face every day wherever we live.

"Reality is there is no safe place," he says. "Reality is we cannot protect our children or ourselves from all harm. Reality is every day we take risks. Thousands of people each year receive emergency room care from falling out of bed, closing the blinds and slipping in the shower."

Familiar is often considered safe, he says, and unfamiliar is often considered dangerous. Jennings calls it a "risk-locked" attitude. Parents surf the internet and find all sorts of bad news about the place where their children will be serving and then conclude that the place is unsafe.

It's an unfair standard, he said. People take risks every day for what they believe in. Firefighters, police officers, members of the military — all daily give their lives in the line of duty.

It's also an attitude that's unbiblical.

Fear vs. anxiety

"Jesus said if we follow Him we will be persecuted and sometimes killed," Jennings said. "One student told us that much pressure was put on her by her home church 'not to go to the Philippines, because God would never call us to a dangerous place.' That may be an American value of self-preservation, but I cannot find that in my Bible."

Max Lucado, in his book "Anxious for Nothing: Finding Calm in a Chaotic World," describes the difference between fear and anxiety.

"Fear is the pulse that pounds when you see a coiled rattlesnake in your front yard. Anxiety is the voice that tells you, 'Never, ever, for the rest of your life, walk barefooted through the grass. There might be a snake ... somewhere.'"

Like fear, anxiety is a normal human response to new or different situations. In his writings, 19th century Danish philosopher and Christian theologian Søren Kierkegaard suggests that anxiety arises when we are faced with the potential for growth.

New experiences — everything from going on a missions trip to applying for college to getting married — can cause fear, but the potential for physical, emotional and spiritual growth is worth the risk.

That's the message Jennings wants to communicate to parents who naturally worry about their children.

"I would challenge Christian parents to remember the commitment you made when you dedicated your child to the Lord many years ago," he said. "They really don't belong to us. They are His. We really cannot keep them safe. They are safe in Him."

Author Grace Thornton shares how Christ is never far in new devotional book

By Grace Thornton

Special to *The Alabama Baptist*

It was a normal week, the week they found a spot on my dad's lung. It was just a tiny spot, but it was dark and unknown — and that was scary. As I lay in bed that night, things rolling around in my mind, I rolled over on my side, pulled the covers over my head and curled my knees up to my chest. And from my tiny dark spot, I whispered. "God, you see it right? That spot — you see it? And you see me too?"

I had felt as though lately there had been a few things that had popped up, little dark spots that I didn't quite know how to handle. Things that made me uncomfortable. Things that I felt unequipped to deal with. Things that made me afraid. And I'd curled up under the covers more than a few times, right into those spots, and I'd wondered — is this spot outside God's line of sight?

I know that's not true — nothing escapes His view. But subconsciously I'd been treating some of them like maybe that spot is the one place where maybe He isn't going to be who He says He is. Or that maybe it's the one place in my life where He just won't come through, that He just won't be enough. Or that maybe the spot where God brought me to save me is now the spot where He's going to leave me to figure it out on my own.

All of us who know Jesus have been in that spot — the one where He rescued and redeemed us. And we know this too: He didn't take it all and run. He didn't leave us there alone. He said, "Keep going. I'm right here."

Be strong and courageous

That was Moses's charge to Joshua when God's people were first beginning to walk into the land God had promised them. Moses was passing the baton to Joshua as leader, and his biggest piece of advice was this — be strong and courageous, for God goes with you; He will not leave you or forsake you (Deut. 31:6). It didn't matter what Joshua was going to face on this journey that God was taking him on — he would never be alone. There would never be a moment when God didn't see him and — even better — there would never be a moment when God didn't care.

In Him we live and move and have our being — He is not far from any one of us (Acts 17:27–28). That includes that spot under the covers. That includes my worry over the spot in my dad's lung. It includes all the other spots that ever have been and ever will be. He's never left us alone. And He never will.

He sees. He knows. He loves.

It's a beautiful thing for Christ followers, the way we're rescued one day from the gnawing in our soul and suddenly realize we have everything we could ever need, all wrapped up in the One who made us. We've got infinite love, joy, mercy. We've got the Holy Spirit guiding us, planting heaven in our hearts, urging us on. We've got Him illuminating the Scriptures so we can meet Him as we read and see Him for who He really is.

We don't go it alone.

There's not a bend in our road He doesn't see coming. There's no enemy we'll face that He isn't ready for. There's no pain that surprises Him. There's no grief too big for Him to carry you through.

Remember that as you face the obstacles that seem big in your life. Remember that when days hurt. Remember that as situations seem hazy or scary or unknown. Remember it when you're lonely. He's never left you alone.

And as we trust Him with our path, it also brings the opportunity to cultivate a relationship here that makes the miles we walk feel more and more temporary compared to what's to come. We look forward to seeing Him face to face. We yearn for it with everything in us. It's a different kind of gnawing (2 Cor. 5:1-5).

It's the kind that, when we curl up under the covers in the dark, we say, "Even here, God — even this part of the path is Yours. And You're with me."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Adapted from "Unshakable Pursuit: Chasing the God Who Chases Us," a 30-day devotional by Grace Thornton. New Hope Publishers, 2018. www.newhopepublishers.com (<http://www.newhopepublishers.com>). Used with permission.

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Ways Christians can learn to combat fear that stems from events out of our control

By Rod Campbell, MAMFT, LPC-S

Pathways Professional Counseling

As I sit down to write this article, the nation is still reeling from the school shooting in Parkland, Florida. The very first news story I saw this morning was about a terrorist attack in a foreign country. The second story was an interview with a survivor of the Florida shooting. At this moment, two political pundits are debating some issue (does it really matter which one?) with all the requisite eye-rolling, name-calling, the-sky-is-falling, ratings-producing hysteria they can muster. And I haven't even finished my morning coffee.

I get at least one call per week from parents whose children suffer from anxiety. Once a week or more, a client wants to talk about some fear-inducing current event. The constant bombardment of negative news about tragedies, accidents and crises, both real and invented, can certainly take its toll. If we are not careful, we will find ourselves fearful that danger is hiding around every corner and that "something bad" could happen at any moment. That's a hard and heavy burden to carry all day, every day, especially for those of us who feel responsible for the safety of our loved ones.

Here are a few specific things I encourage people to do in order to combat fear that stems from events out of our control:

- Guard your heart and the hearts of your kids. Once upon a time, in a land not so far away, the news was presented to us through a series of short video clips every evening. We could go on to read a few more details in the morning paper. Now we live with the 24-hour news cycle and are constantly bombarded with information, upsetting images and differing opinions. Some of these stories are uplifting and hopeful, but many are not.

Studies show that people react more quickly and more powerfully to bad news, which is why I strongly encourage my clients to discern carefully their news sources and the amount of news they consume. Many news sources are full of images and sound bites edited to have the biggest negative impact possible. Continually shepherd your heart and the hearts of your family by being intentional about news consumption.

- Vet your sources. Take time to make sure you're getting news as free from bias as possible. Whether your news source is the nightly news on TV, the local paper, a printed news magazine or a website, be sure to check their sources and make certain that what you're hearing or reading is factually based and fairly presented.
- Search out the good. We read in Philippians 4:8 to focus on things which are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. As you go through the day, intentionally choose to notice that really great things are happening around us all the time. Share those good things you come across with others too. In your town someone is making life better for the underserved or disadvantaged. Someone is living out the gospel by sacrificing for others. Read these stories. Share these stories. Be a source of light in your part of the world.
- Begin and end your day with a dose of good medicine. It is as important now as it has ever been to fill our minds and hearts with the promises of God and with His Word. Beginning and ending your day focused on God's provision for His people, His power over evil and His sovereignty over all things will help inoculate us against the onslaught of negativity we are likely to face each hour. Listening to Christian music and podcasts, sermons or other faith-based programming is a great way to keep your focus on things above and not on things of this earth.
- Be consistent. Because of the psychological effects of negativity, it might take days or a few weeks of doing all these things in order to fully detox. Studies indicate that long-term exposure to negative news can have a dramatic effect on our moods and can even cause symptoms similar to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

This type of stress engages the emotional centers of our brain, and the longer this persists the more our brains become wired to seek and perpetuate this emotional cycle. Left unchecked for too long, the stress can bring on episodes of prolonged and persistent sadness, anger or general feelings of being “not quite oneself” and/or lead to destructive habits. In these cases, professional counseling can help (see story below).

Early intervention

Fortunately early intervention can make a big difference. When we start to change things for the better, our own neurochemistry can fight against negativity, returning to the positive emotional cycles we've established for so long.

So unplug from the negative, check your sources, seek out good news, fill your mind with God's Word and repeat this process faithfully. It won't take long to notice that your fear and anxiety will start to subside. Living a life as free as possible from all the negative influences around us requires intentional living but freedom is worth it.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Rod Campbell is a Licensed Professional Counselor with Pathways Professional Counseling, a sister ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries. He presently serves clients in the Oxford, Ashville, Pell City and Birmingham offices.

Pathways Professional Counseling: www.pathwaysprofessional.org (http://www.pathwaysprofessional.org) | 1-866-991-6864

Professional counseling helps children, youth navigate difficulties

By Margaret Colson

Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

At a very young age, Mandy had a secret. She told no one and the secret began to control her thoughts and actions.

The once vibrant little girl became quiet and withdrawn. Her mother, concerned, took Mandy to a Christian counselor. Soon the story began to unfold; Mandy had seen a traumatic event and felt an unbearable sense of guilt for not telling anyone.

“Through working on telling her story, discussing how she was a child and it was not her fault and learning how to label and appropriately express her emotions, she was able to come out of her shell and become the little girl her mom remembered before all this happened. She was happy and vibrant again,” said Lisa Keane, clinical director at Pathways Professional Counseling.

Mandy is just one of untold numbers of students today who benefit from counseling. “Counseling provides an emotionally safe place to say and process things that you might not otherwise feel comfortable talking about. Through that processing and vulnerability in the counseling room, the client is able to make insights, work on his or her thoughts and assess the need for behavioral changes that would lead to feeling better,” Keane said.

Sometimes a child or young person — often through the intervention of a parent or another concerned adult — might seek counseling after a major life event, such as the death of a parent, divorce or even abuse, Keane said. Other times parents might seek counseling for a child or youth who is struggling with negative behaviors or dealing with depression or anxiety.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 13 to 20 percent of American children ages 3 through 17 have a diagnosable mental, emotional or behavioral disorder in a given year. Coping with mental health issues can affect learning and social interactions.

Americans are “more open to counseling today than in the past,” Keane believes. “I believe people see counseling as more of a viable, normal option.”

Christian counseling

To help address this need Pathways Professional Counseling, a sister ministry of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, provides counseling to individuals ages 3 and up, couples and families. All of the Pathways counselors are specially trained to work with children and adolescents.

Counseling is available at various locations throughout the state, and clients do not need a referral from a medical doctor to make an appointment.

As a Christian counseling ministry, Pathways Professional Counseling is “uniquely positioned to work with kids and incorporate the gospel message as we do that,” Keane said. All Pathways counselors are highly trained and licensed, even as they bring a “basic understanding that healing comes from God and apart from Him, there is none. We are able to share Scripture references, point out road maps in Scripture for biblical ways to handle things and remind them of God's saving grace that covers us,” she said.

Additionally, the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Alabama State Department of Education are seeking to undergird students with support needed to navigate life's traumas.

Alabama Department of Mental Health Commissioner Lynn Beshear wrote in an article for the Alabama News Network that students with emotional disturbances may not reach graduation. And students who do not graduate are more likely to be institutionalized than their peers. She stated, “School-based mental health programs can have a positive impact on behavioral and emotional health issues and increase attendance and academic achievement.”

To address this need, 36 school systems in Alabama have paired with 12 mental health authorities to provide school-based mental health services. Beshear wrote, “Expanding this (program) would benefit the other students in the other 106 systems.”

Pathways Professional Counseling has worked in the past with local school systems to provide psycho-education events on topics such as depression or cutting, and also has worked with specific schools on crisis response teams when a crisis occurs.

Community partnership

On March 1, Children’s Hospital of Alabama launched the Psychiatric Intake Response Center (PIRC) and a referral hotline. PIRC is a community partnership, including public and private mental health providers and the Anne B. LaRussa Foundation of Hope, intended to empower “parents, teachers, grandparents, physicians or any adult seeking mental health services on a child’s behalf,” wrote Beshear.

Concluding the press release, Beshear wrote, “The future of our youth is our foremost concern. If we want the best for them, we must invest our time and resources in preventative and interventional mental health programs.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — Mandy’s name has been changed for security reasons.

Helpful resources

- “Fear Fighting: Awakening Courage to Overcome Your Fears” by Kelly Balarie
- “Fear and Faith: Finding the Peace Your Heart Craves” by Trillia J. Newbell
- “Breaking the Fear Cycle: How to Find Peace for Your Anxious Heart” by Maria Furlough
- “Fearless: Imagine Your Life Without Fear” by Max Lucado
- “Live Fearless: A Call to Power, Passion and Purpose” by Sadie Robertson

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