



# BelPres Church

## **Courage Greater Than Our Fear**

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Great to see all of you here. Thank you for joining us for worship. Worship is more fun when we do it together. So thank you. And those of you online, thank you for joining us as well. When my wife and I lived in California, there was this one time that local news was reporting that someone's pet black mamba snake had escaped and been seen in a local park.

And so for days, the news was filled with all these stories about how black mambas were one of the most deadliest snakes in the world. Like if they bite you, you die within like 10 minutes. And they talked about how they can flatten themselves and crawl through cracks and get into your house and even get into your bed at night when you're sleeping. And so for days, people just refused to go outside.

People were afraid even to just get in their bed. And the whole time I kept saying, this seems unlikely. I think this is a hoax or it's a mistake or something like that. I'm not afraid. And then one day on my daily run, there was some slight movement in the grass next to me, and I let out this high-pitched scream like a five-year-old kid, and then had to look around and be like, did anyone hear that?

And eventually the story kind of just faded away. It was nothing. But it's an example of how fear kind of shapes how we behave. And most people have some kind of fear about something.

When I did college ministry, there were guys in my ministry who would do things like bungee jump and cliff dive and all kinds of things, but were terrified

at the thought of asking a woman out on a date. We have fears of rejection, fears of failure, financial fears, or maybe when you see the news. You know, we plan these sermons months in advance, but sometimes they just land on the right day and you see the news and what's happening in Iran or what's going on in Congo or economic fears, fears about the economy. Is AI going to take all of our jobs? Will I be able to make enough money? When you see all of that stuff, maybe you feel fear or anger.

But behind anger is usually a secondary emotion. And behind anger, there's usually fear that we're going, something's going to be taken away from us or someone's going to hurt us or someone that we cared about. So if you want to know your fears, follow your anger. Some people feel fear in certain social situations. So, for instance, if right now I were to say, turn to a person you don't know, hold their hand and pray for them. Some of you might have a little mild sense of panic, right? Because that would be an awkward social situation. And since there's no other way to get over our fears than to do them, turn to someone that you don't know.

And some of you that thought you didn't have any fear just found out that you do. Or maybe you are afraid to do the things that God commands us to do. Give sacrificially of our time and our money. Fight for justice. Tell other people about Jesus. And maybe if you don't have a lot of fear, it might be because you are living well inside your comfort zone. And not risking, because God calls us to do some scary things. And if you really don't have any fear at all, well then listen to this sermon to know how to help people who do. Because most people do. And it's human to feel fear. It's what we do with the fear that matters. We can act out of fear, or we can act out of faith.

If we act out of fear, it causes problems. Maybe we get trapped in jobs we hate, because we are afraid to get a job we love that pays less, because we have financial worries. Or we avoid deep relationships, because we have a fear of being emotionally close. And one of the ways that Jesus' good news in our lives is he gives us courage greater than all of our fears. Courage to do the right thing.

Courage to protect and defend the vulnerable. Courage to be part of Jesus' rescue mission to the whole world. And courage is not the absence of fear. By definition, to have courage, you need to be afraid, because if you do stuff that you're not afraid of, that's not courage. It might be stupid, but it's not courage. Courage is being afraid, but doing the right thing anyway. So if you have a Bible, turn the numbers, chapter 13. You can follow along on the screens, or use the table of contents to find your place. And just a

reminder, I read from the New International Version of the Bible. Yours may be a little different. That's just different translations. Don't let it distract you. The background of this is that God, through Moses, has gotten the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, and he's led them to the edge of the promised land. And Moses sends 12 spies into the land to kind of check it out. 10 come back afraid and say, We can't do this. Two, Joshua and Caleb say, No, we can do this. So we're going to pick it up in Numbers chapter 13, starting in verse 31, where the whiners say, We can't attack these people.

They are stronger than we are. And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land that they had explored. They said, The land we explored devours those living in it. Wow, devours. That's a big verb, right? Devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there, the descendants of Ana come from the Nephilim. That's just a race of really big people. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them. Man, it's Jurassic Park in there, man. Filled with humanasaures. We can't go in there. So here's one way that fear wrecks our lives. Fear causes us to maximize our problems and minimize God.

Like, they're just imagining all these horrible things that are going to happen to them. And I'm sure they made it all sound very rational, you know, the way we do. Well, we don't want to take foolish risks. Well, no, but if we let that be an excuse for not doing what God calls us to do, well, then we're not going to grow. When my oldest daughter was learning how to drive, it scared her siblings when they were in the car with her and she was driving.

And one time we were going somewhere and she was driving and our son said to our youngest daughter, remember Lucy, if you relax your body, you won't get injured when we crash. When we crash, not if, like when we crash, right? And so often we go through life like that, we're going to crash. This problem is too big for us. And yeah, sometimes that's true, we face serious problems, big, painful, difficult problems, but they aren't too big for Jesus. So let's keep reading on into chapter 14. That night, all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud.

All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, if only we had died in Egypt or in this wilderness, why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Now they're just in a fear spiral, right? Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt and they said to each other, we should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.

Wow. So here's another problem, fear causes. Decisions made in fear leash us, become leashes that hold us back. They want to go back to Egypt, where they were slaves. They want to be in slavery again. Fears that our kids are going to miss out on some educational or athletic activity that's going to mean they won't, if they miss it, they won't get into that great college and have an economic future, blah, blah, blah. Those fears caused us to sign our kids up for too many things. And now we're all over scheduled, stressed out messes. Fear of taking risks leashes us to boredom.

Okay, keep reading. Verse 6. Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, the land we pass through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, He will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and He will give it to us. So here's another problem. Decisions made in fear cause us to miss God's best.

When they were in Egypt, they longed for this day. And Joshua and Caleb said, it's just as good as God promised. It's flowing with milk and honey, but they're not going to get it because they're not going to go in because they're too afraid. So I skipped to verse 10. But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Ministry is rough, man. Talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites. The Lord said to Moses, How long will these people treat me with contempt?

How long will they refuse to believe in me in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they. Skip down to verse 15. Moses responds to God, If you put all these people to death, leaving none alive, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, The Lord wasn't able to bring these people into the land that he promised them on oath, so he slaughtered them in the wilderness. Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared. The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love, and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.

He punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation. In accordance with your great love, forgive the sins of these people just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now. The Lord replied, I have forgiven them as you asked. What? What is up with that? Like God says, okay, I'm just going to kill them all. And Moses says, oh, no, don't do that. It's bad for your public image, God.

Right, like what is up with that? Well, let me just do a bit of an aside right now to show a little bit about how we do biblical interpretation. So the Israelites here aren't just being whiny. They are talking about taking, going back to Egypt and putting their kids and grandkids back into slavery. That is no small sin. And this isn't the first time they've talked about it. And God led them out of slavery to create a group of people who could extend the good news of who he is to the whole world. And so he really needs them to understand who he is and his character. And the best way to do that isn't to tell them, it's to show them, right? Like say you don't know how to change the oil in your car, and after church someone tells you, oh, here's how you do it. Could you go home and do it?

Probably not. But if someone showed you, gave you an experience of it, included you in it, then you probably could. So through this conversation, God takes Moses and the Israelites through an interactive experience, interactive conversation, to help them understand that he is a God of justice, who punishes injustice, but key point doesn't punish them. He forgives them because he's going to come himself in the person of Jesus and die on a cross to pay the price for those sins. It's kind of an experiential conversation that helps Moses and the Israelites understand at a deeper level God's character. Well, then, why does all this stuff about he punishes the sins of the parents down to the third and the fourth? That doesn't seem fair. Well, when reading any passage in the Bible, we have to take the whole Bible into account.

And in other places in the Bible, a few of them are there on the screen, God clarifies that he punishes the children and grandchildren only if they continue to reject and hate him and disobey him the way their parents did. So he qualifies that, what he says there in other places. Plus, this is just a statement of reality. Family sins and family dysfunctions get passed down generation to generation. So God forgives them, but because of their fear, they're not capable of entering into the promised land. And they don't. They're all going to die in the wilderness because they're afraid to go in. Acting on our fears causes a lot of problems.

So then how does Jesus make us brave? How does Jesus give us courage? Well, turn in your Bibles to Joshua chapter one. We just read from the book of Numbers, then there's the book of Deuteronomy, and then there's the book of Joshua, chapter one. And this is 40 years later, and all the whiners have died, and there's a new generation under the leadership of Joshua that are ready to go into the promised land.

And it says, after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' aid, Moses, my servant, is dead. Now then, you and

all these people get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land. I am about to give to them, to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. So first, to be courageous, look at God, not the problem. God's saying, I'm gonna get you in there. I'm gonna do it. I'm with you. Those 10 fearful spies back in the Book of Numbers, what were they looking at? The problem, the giants. We can't do this. It's too big, right? But Caleb and Joshua are looking at God and God's power. If we aren't looking at God, we turn to other things to give us a false sense of security. So when we're afraid, because maybe we're not gonna have enough money for something, we're trusting in money for our security, rather than Jesus to provide for us what we need.

If we're afraid of what others might think of us, that's because we've made being well liked our security. We've made those other things, whether it's our job or getting into that college or money or reputation, we've made those things our security and we've made those things bigger than God. As I've shared with you before, one of my fears is having people mad at me, which as a leader is tough because I sometimes have to make decisions that will make people mad at me. And some of you may be thinking of some of those decisions right now. Maybe you're mad all over again because of that. And back in my former church, one time I remember I went on a humanitarian trip to the Dominican Republic, where there was a lot of gang violence and ethnic violence and a lot of armed conflict.

And when I got back, a friend of mine asked, were you scared? And I said, no, I have selective cowardice. Like, armed conflict, no problem. But mean emails are scary. Where's my security? Is it in what people think of me or what Jesus thinks of me? Verse 5. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you. So for courage, be in God's presence. God says, I am with you, always. My experience is when I am anxious about something, if I get in Jesus' presence through scripture, through prayer, especially leaving space for him to talk to me, say things to me, and worship where I'm reminded of God's faithfulness, especially worship in community with each other, because then I'm reminded I'm not alone, I've got a community, which is why in-person worship is important, if you can make it. It gives me courage to do the right thing when I am in the presence of God.

Keep reading, verse 7. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you.

Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you too, that you may be successful wherever you go. God says obey, because obedience brings

courage. If I know I'm doing what God commands me to do, especially if it's coming out of the Bible, if I know I'm doing what God commands me to do, if I'm obeying him, I know it may be difficult, there may be hard things about it, but if it's what God has commanded me to do, I know it's going to get me closer to Jesus, I know that whatever hard happens, he'll bring good out of it, and I get to be part of Jesus healing the world, which is deeply rewarding. Obedience is its own reward.

Obedience brings courage. It's when I'm not obeying God that I should be the most afraid. Look at God, be in Jesus' presence, obey, and then one last point. Fear triggers in all animals, including us, what's called the fight, flight, or freeze instinct. I'm either going to fight, I'm going to run away, or I'm going to freeze like a deer in the headlights and get hit by the car. But there's another alternative. Not fight, flight, or freeze, but faithfulness. Not our faithfulness, but God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness gives us courage. God says to Joshua, I will never leave you nor forsake you. Which sounds an awful lot like Jesus, who says, surely I'm with you always to the very end of the age. And if we really believed that Jesus will never let us down, if we really believed that hard things may happen, but he would bring good out of it, if we really believed and trusted in him, we would be the bravest people on the planet. But I'm not sure that's what people are seeing from Christians right now. We should be the bravest people on the planet. And this is where Joshua's story intersects with Jesus.

To see Jesus' actual name, it's actually Joshua, Yeshua. In the Bible, it's Yeshua in the original language, but because of complicated translation reasons, it got turned into Jesus, but really his name is Joshua. And Old Testament Joshua points to Jesus. The name Joshua slash Jesus means the Lord saves. Jesus died and was raised from the dead to pay the price for our sins, and having done all of that, having done all of that, why on earth would he abandon us now? He won't. He won't. Which means I may fail at something, but if I'm clinging to Jesus, I'll discover it doesn't matter. He loves me and he's going to use that failure to prepare me for something in my future. If I get really sick, I may be in for some suffering, but Jesus will become more real to me than the suffering. If things keep spinning out of control in the world, you know, yeah, that can be kind of scary. Yeah, hard things may happen, but again, Jesus is going to bring good out of those hard things, and he's going to give me courage and strength to sustain those hard things. If I die, I go to be with him. God's faithfulness makes us brave.

So action steps for this week. First, do this week's exercise in the journal. Journal's on our app or on our website.

And this week, just think of a time where Jesus made you brave and then fill in the blanks. I was scared of blank, but Jesus helped me by blank. And if you can't think of an example of how Jesus made you brave, ask him to give you one this week. And then second, tell someone your story. Because a lot of people are fearful right now. We are a country filled with fear, and Jesus makes us brave. And the point of this journal is that by the end of this series, you'll have a whole journal full of ways that Jesus has been good news to you to share with other people. So this week, ask Jesus to give you an opportunity to tell someone about how Jesus is good news. And if that scares you, too bad. You didn't listen to this sermon carefully enough.

So go back and listen to this sermon again and ask Jesus to make you brave. There's a man I know who used to go to this church before he moved away. And at the time, he was in his late twenties. He was a lawyer in a prestigious law firm, had a great condo in downtown Seattle, kind of living the dream, but he hated his job. It was a lot of stress. The work wasn't rewarding for him. And then one time, when I hadn't seen him for a couple of months, we got together and he'd lost a ton of weight. And I asked if he was okay, and he said that he developed some kind of disease that meant he couldn't absorb calories correctly, but that the doctors were working on it. Well, this went on for over a year. Until one day, he called me to tell me that he had been lying to everybody. He didn't have a disease. He had an eating disorder. But he was so ashamed, he was afraid, afraid to tell anyone about it. So his fear isolated him. And the eating disorder was directly related to how miserable he was from his job. But he was terrified to quit it for two reasons. First, his father put all kinds of pressure on him to be a lawyer, and every time he tried to talk to his dad about quitting, his father would get really angry and yell and lecture him, and he was afraid of rejection from his dad.

And then the other reason he didn't want to quit was just financial fears, and he loved the lifestyle he was living, and where would the money come from? So he was leashed by fear in lots and lots of ways. Well about a month after he told me the truth about the eating disorder, we got together, and right away I could tell he was better. For one thing, he'd gained a little bit of weight, but for another, he was actually smiling. And he said, I quit my job. And then I flew home to tell my parents, and they were furious, and they yelled, but I stood my ground. And I said, well, what are you going to do for money? And he said, yeah, you know, I've got a little bit saved, but not a lot, so I've got some fears around that. But I have prayed and prayed and prayed about this. I have been in the presence of God.

He's been nudging me to do this for two years, and I finally have the courage to do it. So I'm just going to trust him on all of this stuff. Well, eventually, he got a job at a university helping under-resourced students find ways that they could pay for college, and he loves it. Loves the students, finds helping them deeply, deeply rewarding for him, and he's just been set free, and he's just loving life now. Now, all that took a couple of years, but he's been set free. One time we were talking, and he said, you know, it's just the classic sermon illustration. And I said, yes, I've taken note of that. We'll be told.

And he said, you know, the minute I trusted God, I could let go of my fears of disappointing people, fears about finances, and he gave me a new life. Because he trusted that Jesus was faithful, because he experienced Jesus in prayer, and because he obeyed Jesus, Jesus made him brave and set him free. So in what ways are you leashed by fear? What risks don't you take? What hard conversations that could lead to relational breakthrough do you avoid and you don't have? In what ways are you playing not to lose rather than playing to win?

Jesus unleashes us from fear and gives us courage to do the right thing, to protect and defend the vulnerable, courage to fight for justice, courage to extend Jesus' healing, courage to be part of his rescue mission to this world and show the world that because of Jesus and because he is Lord and because he is still on the throne and because he is making all things new and because he will use every bad thing for good in our lives and in the life of this world and because he is Lord, because of Jesus, we have nothing to fear at all.

Jesus, only you can give us real courage. So Lord, this week, help us to experience your presence. Lord, help us to know that you are real. Help us to trust your promises, trust in your faithfulness, so that we can live bravely and boldly and with courage to show a very frightened world right now, that there's hope in you, there's strength in you, there's courage in you. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

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**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following (note: we use the same scripture reflection questions each week so that we can practice using the same tools over time as we examine different scriptures)

- What do we learn about God's story in this passage?
- What do we learn about our story in this passage?

**Talk:**

- Think of a “giant” you’ve faced. What made it scary, and how did Jesus steady you?
- What changed afterward (peace, clarity, courage, a next step you could finally take)?
- What fear feels loudest right now, and what one step of faith have you been avoiding because of it?

**Action Plan:**

Review the action prompt below, share any initial ideas of how you might pursue this practice this week.

- Identify one small act of courage that aligns with your journal story: speak honestly with someone, apologize or forgive, invite someone who’s been on your heart to do something with you, practice generosity, name your faith when asked, or reach out to someone you’ve avoided.

**Closing Group Prayer:**

Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement for the week ahead.