

Everything is Motivated by Fear or Love

By Bobby Schuller

We're in the middle of a series on the thought life called *As a Man Thinketh*. We affirm in this church what the scripture says about the mind, that the way we think forms our future. That when you change your thoughts today, your life may not change today, but it will definitely change tomorrow. That our circumstances are ultimately the result of our thinking. Therefore, guard your mind and tend to it like you would tend a garden. Make sure that you pay attention to what you think about, and in particular, what you dwell on. You can have bad thoughts that come into your mind, but you don't have to dwell on them. As Hannah's great grandpa used to say, birds can fly around your head and you can't control that, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair.

And I just want to say that we have to pay attention to what we think about, and probably of all thoughts, the most harmful, the most crippling, the most destructive is worry, anxiety, fear. Anyone struggle with that? If you're not raising your hand, you're lying. Fear is as human as an emotion as it comes. And through all of life, we sort of carry two emotions or two thoughts, and those are thoughts of love, passion, goodness, thoughts of dread, fear and anxiety, and both of those thoughts are going to affect our decisions.

And today I'm encouraging you to choose love, right? To choose what you love and to do what you do with people that you love so that you will move in the direction of the things that worry you. Because unlike many thoughts, thoughts of fear are really hard to just sort of get rid of. The way you get rid of thoughts of fear is by training yourself. By doing brave things with people you love. And that's at the crux of what I want to talk about today.

Have you ever heard of this thing called the blob? I don't even know what you'd call it. It's a lake toy, is that a thing? I don't even know. Let me start over. When I was a kid, I went to this camp called Indian Village. It's here in California; it's for between fourth and sixth graders. And I remember in fifth grade going and seeing this thing called the blob. It's a gigantic rainbow colored airbag pillow type thing. It's about twenty-one feet long, and about ten feet across. It's huge. And it's filled with air. And what they do is they put like a big diving board platform type thing, maybe fifteen/twenty feet high, and one kid sits on one end of the blob and the other kid jumps off of the platform onto the other side of the blob, and when he lands, the other kid launches into the air. It's awesome.

And everybody's terrified of the blob. We're all little kids, and we're watching this go on, and I remember in fifth grade staring at it, longingly, all alone thinking that looks like a lot of fun and terrifying.

Do you think I did the blob that year? I didn't. And all year I thought about how I didn't go on the blob and sixth grade was coming along. And as I was getting closer to Indian Village, I started thinking about it and I was like am I going to do the blob this year? Is this the year it happens? Is this the time?

So I get there and while I was there, I had this new counselor, I forget his name. He was a Pacific Islander. He was a really big guy, and he gave big hugs, and he was really great with all the kids. And I remember just adoring this guy. I forget his name. We'll call him Mike. And I'm standing there longingly looking at the blob again, now a year older, its sixth grade, I'm like gosh that looks terrifying. By the way, the world record for the blob – launching someone in the air – is fifty one feet. So it is scary. And all of it has to do with how big the person is that jumps behind you when you're sitting in the front. Now I'm a little guy.. I mean I'm like scrawny, probably eighty pounds, seventy pounds, something like that, just all sticks. I look like Jack Skelington. And weight, it's all about weight, right?

So I'm looking at this, I'm like I'm going to go flying if I get a big guy, and I'm just looking at it. And I'm like.. maybe I won't do that. And then Mike comes up, big guy, he goes, scary isn't it, huh. And I was like yes. He's like you want to do it, don't you. I was like I do. He was like are you scared? I said you know I'm not scared. I'm more concerned. And he said you should do it. You can do it. I said all right. I'll do it.

So I start climbing up and twenty feet high isn't that high when you're on the ground looking up, but when you're on the up looking down, it's scary. And I get up there and I stand and there's some kid and he's on the edge, and he looks back at me like really scared, and somehow that made me like not be worried about jumping. I was like oh this is awesome. So I like jump and I watch this kid launch into the air, and I think oh that is so great.

So it's my turn, I start crawling to the edge of the blob, and then I get there and I'm like oh man, I wonder how high I'm going to go. And I look back and who is standing on the platform? Mike: the double X-L Pacific Islander staring down at me. And I go Mike! No! No, Mike! And he goes (SHOUTS) and jumps off like this cannonball style, and I go no (WHOOSH) launched into the air and I did this flailing arms all over kind of thing. I didn't die when I landed. I didn't land on my feet. I'm not even sure I sank into the water immediately because the belly flop was sort of like when you take a pancake and you slap it on a plate, it was just slow sink.

And I'll just say, everything I was afraid of that would happen, happened. I was afraid a big guy would come, I was afraid I would go too high in the air, and I was especially afraid I would belly flop. Everything happened, and how did I feel when I got out of there? Like a million bucks. I was putting my hands in the air, I was jumping up and down, I

was laughing as I was calling him a jerk, and I just felt like a million bucks. And I did it again, and again, and again.

There's something about fear that like when we're scared of stuff, the fear itself is way more painful than the thing we're even afraid of. There is actually been studies that show that, in medicine and other fields that almost always, the pain that you suffer in worrying about pain is almost always worse than the pain itself when it comes.

Conversely, there's something really great about overcoming dread, or something that you're worrying about for a long time, to finally take that plunge, to jump on the blob, to ask a girl for her number, to travel the world, or to go back to school when you're too old to go to school, and the things that people do that are brave to pursue their dreams, or to do what God has called them to do, even when they fail, there's a victory in overcoming your fear, isn't there. There's a growth that happens that even when the very thing we're afraid of happens, that something internally happens in our soul where we feel more prepared to try again.

I mentioned this about a year ago, but you know, the average child, I read this study, the average child smiles about 400 times a day, but the average adult smiles 20 times a day. I've often wondered why is that? Why is it that children are so much more joyful and happy and lighthearted than adults? Is it merely because they're children, because they haven't experienced very much pain? And I've started to wonder if they smile more because children experience so much pain. I know that

sounds weird, but I feel like when I was a kid, like this, I have a million blob type stories – going down a hill on my bike, or stepping into a classroom I’ve never been in, or standing up to a bully. And I think about as a child, this sense of adventure that you have in being forced to do scary things as you become a teenager, an adult, etc. You have coaches and mentors and teachers and parents and people that come alongside you, encourage you to be bigger than you are. And as we become adults, we then, as a part of maturing, are forced to do that on our own.

I think very often, maybe at first when we’re young adults, we continue to do that, but as we age and as we experience pain, or as we experience wealth and comfort, successful jobs, things like that, we lose our sense of adventure because we’re worried about what we might lose. But we forget that when we do that, we lose something else entirely. We lose our heart, our coer.

The French word for heart is coer, and it’s at the root of the word courage. Courage means to do something even though you’re scared. And so much of life, and so much of being an adult and being a mature believer is doing things that you’re scared of doing because if you follow Jesus, He’s going to call you to do scary things over and over and over. It never stops. And thank God for that. Because it is those experiences that build into us the kind of maturity in life we need to be world changers.

So when we talk about this thing on thoughts, we must talk about fear because as the scripture says, God has not given you a spirit of fear.

He's given you a spirit of power, and of love, and a sound mind. Amen. There's nothing more opposed to a sound mind than a spirit of fear. And though all of us experience fear, all of us are afraid, all of us worry, all of us have anxiety, some of us decide to move in the direction of the things that worry us, and that is you. You were not born to live in fear. You were not born to wake up in the morning worrying. You were given the heart of the Lord. Coer. The ability to do what no one else can because you have been given a spirit of power, a spirit of love, and you've been given a sound mind, so claim it in Jesus' name.

The number one command in the scriptures above all, its mentioned more than any other command, is this: do not fear. Do not be afraid. Why do angels always say that when they appear? Why do prophets say that? Why does Jesus say that? Because there is nothing more crippling to your peace, prosperity and purpose in your life than fear, than worry, than anxiety. You don't have to live afraid. You can overcome your fear by doing it with other people, and by doing it with the Lord. See that's the key, isn't it. So many of us think that overcoming our fears means we have to do it alone and we don't. Nobody overcomes scary things alone. We do it through love. Connecting with others and connecting with God. That's what we need: that one percent extra to tilt the scale, to move in the direction of scary stuff.

I'll never forget when I was first at the Crystal Cathedral, and I joined this pastors group, and as a training exercise, all of us pastors

had to go and do this thing called a ropes course. Anybody done that before? I hate ropes courses. I hate them. I get lured into them all the time, and the reason I hate them is because they're so good for me. A ropes course is basically this: you put on a mountain climbing harness, and one of those ropes, you're totally safe, you've got a helmet on, sometimes they force you to put like elbow and knee pads on. And you climb up this.. it looks like a giant telephone pole, and then all you do is walk across like another telephone pole, you go across a couple of wires, and then you jump from this pole and grab a zip line in mid air and you ride it down. And you're so safe. You have this rope attached to you, like nothing bad ever happens to anyone on a ropes course.

And I remember, I got there before, this was like my third time doing a ropes course and they had a practice log. The hardest part is simply walking across a log, because it's up in the air. And so they had a practice one on the ground, it was only a foot off the ground, I'm like okay, I'm going to do this a bunch of times so when I get up there, I'm just going to do it and I'm going to go, it's no problem. And I do it, you know, I'm like walking across the log, no big deal, right? Dancing across the log, right? No problem. It's like no problem. And then I climb up and you start climbing and it gets higher and higher and higher. And then you finally start to get to an elevation where the pole kind of wobbles a little bit and now you've got wind in your hair, and you've got this rope but it's starting to look thinner than you thought and you're like I've

been eating a lot of double stuffed Oreos lately, I don't know if this is going to hold.

And I get up there, and I'm like I'm just going to walk across, and I'm like it's so hard! And you're just so high. The wind is blowing. You look down at some eagle flying below you. And all of us pastors, it took us forever to do the stupid ropes course. It was like three little things took forever. Some of us didn't even finish it. There was one guy, Bill Gaultiere you might know Bill. Climbs up, smile on his face, walks across, no problem, still smiling, across the wires, stands on top of a pole, jumps, grabs a zip line and gets down, no problem. Bill's my mentor now. He literally seemed to have almost no fear doing this ropes course, and I asked him, I said Bill, what are you doing? And he said I'm just walking to Jesus. I'm just walking to Jesus. So Bill is living every day in the easy rhythms of grace, in deep, intimate relationship with Jesus.

And maybe you come here today and you have crippling anxiety. Maybe you have chronic anxiety, and you can't overcome it. Let me give you some hope. Bill was there, too. For years, he struggled with anxiety, with worry, with fear, but over the years, he trained his life in the easy rhythms of grace by not having to be perfect all the time, by not trying to control everything, and most importantly by connecting deeply with God, and by connecting deeply with people, he was given the ability to start taking small steps, doing things that scared him so that he could become the great man of God he is; a person I love very much.

See that's the thing. We learn as we grow in life to not move away from the things that scare us, but to move towards them, but not alone; to move towards them with our brothers and sisters of faith, and with the Lord and that's all we need. That's all we need to move in the direction of the thing that worries us.

The scripture reading for today highlights this point very clearly. It says "This is how we know that we live in Him and He is in us, that He has given us His spirit." Wow. God's spirit is within you. His will. His life. His breath. Pneuma. The breath of God is in you. "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God and we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love, lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us, so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment. In this world, we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love, but perfect love" does what? It casts out fear. Perfect love casts out fear. Perfect love casts out fear. Because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because He first loved us.

Many of our hero stories are bad stories when it comes to being brave because many of these hero stories are stories about solo, lone rangers who through sheer willpower overcome their fear. But that's not really how most people do it. People overcome their fear with friends.

That's why Lord of the Rings is such a good story. You have a group of heroes, a group of people who aren't altogether heroic. They're all sort of antiheroes. Great stories that I think really capture a Christian view of courage are this: people who do it together; people who don't feel isolated in their fear. People who are not afraid to be vulnerable about the fact that something scares them and ask their friend to help them have courage to endure and do the thing that they're worried about. Yes, sometimes you have to do things alone, but most of the time you don't. And if you continue to do the things that scare you with people you love, you will have the power to do it alone when that time comes. Can I get an amen?

Look, when I was in fifth grade, I wanted to do the blob, but I couldn't because I didn't have any friends. And in sixth grade, I had Mike. So many of us, we think that we have to just will it, that we have to keep it all to ourselves, that we have to keep our fear hidden and pretend like everything's okay, but you don't see that in scripture. Rather, you see a church, a community of loving people, imperfect but striving towards perfection to be like Jesus, and to help each other out. In other words, you're not isolated, and you're not alone, and you're not a coward for feeling fear. Everyone feels fear, everyone worries, and everyone is afraid and you don't have to go it alone. Therefore, reach out to your neighbor, to your friends, and to people who love you and simply tell them I'm afraid, and watch how much courage that gives you.

That's why perfect love drives out fear. When we know God's love and when we know the love of our neighbors, we have everything we need to overcome the things that worry us. When we know God's love, especially, we're able to face cancer, we're able to face the loss of a loved one, we're able to face the loss of a job, or a lawsuit, or whatever it is that is bothering you, because we're able to say I know God's in control. I know my God is love, and I know my God is on my side, and I'm going to trust Him. I know He's not keeping my past over my head. I know nothing in scripture says that He is cursing me or against me. I know that every curse and every sin died on the cross with Jesus Christ, and the only thing He sees me is He sees me through the eyes of grace, the eyes of love, the eyes of favor, the eyes of adoration. He sees a person of purpose. He has a dream for my life and He's going to do anything He can to get me there. And so when I know that, and I know it like in my bones, like in my gut, I can abandon my outcomes. And I don't have to be perfect. And I can bond with my friends and my family. And that is just the thing I need to get me where I'm going.

You don't have to worry, you don't have to be afraid, you can move in the direction of the things that worry you. Everybody feels fear, everybody feels worry, everybody wants things to be perfect, everybody wants to have control, but sometimes we have to let those things go, and just take one step in the direction of progress.

That's the temptation. The temptation is when there's something that we're dreading, or something that worries us, or something that bothers us, the temptation is to withdraw. We all have our ways of withdrawing, and they're not all unhealthy, but maybe we just go watch TV, or we just forget about it for a minute, or we go take a nap, or we go on a drive and sometimes it's okay to clear your head, but if that becomes a pattern, it ultimately makes it worse. The temptation is always when we have a worry to just withdraw. That brings temporary relief, but ultimately it is training you in the direction of being a fearful person.

It's like Jonah. Jonah was called to preach to the Ninevites. That is a bold call. The Assyrians who were the Ninevites, were the most brutal, vicious, violent, scary people in human history. They would skin people alive, they would torture people, they would burn cities to the ground, and Jonah, this Jewish man is asked, go into the heart of the capital of those people, the heart of that city, and preach my judgment against them. And Jonah was like no way. Jonah gets on a boat, and he sails from Jaffa to Tarshish. If you look on a map, it's like saying he went from the farthest place in the east, to the farthest place west. He goes from like basically Israel to Spain, as far away as he can get from Nineveh.

And on that boat ride, a whale gobbles him up, as the story goes, and it's in the belly of the whale he prays for forgiveness, God gives it to him, and what does God do? The whale vomits him on the shores of

Assyria. And many of us, that's what happens to us. We keep running away from the things that worry us, the things that cripple us, and we get swallowed by a monster. We get swallowed by life where we find ourselves literally drowning in anxiety and worry because all we've always done is walked away from scary things, withdrawn from things that cripple us and we find ourselves completely lost. By the way, friends, this is something we all do. You're not alone in this. This is something everybody does. And we find ourselves stuck in the belly of the whale, but I want to warn you, when you pray to God to give you freedom, He will vomit you on the shores of Nineveh. He will present you face to face with the thing He's called you to do. Why? Because He's given you everything you need to have victory, and He wants you to know it in your bones. He wants you to see how awesome He's made you and you'll never know that unless you start doing scary things.

Look, if you're hearing something today like try harder, you're hearing the wrong thing. I don't think we become braver people by trying harder, I think we become braver people by training. And the way we train ourselves is not by taking gigantic leaps of faith all the time, but by every day starting to do some of the things that are scary to us. And just watch, every day if you, I think it was Eleanor Roosevelt that said do something scary every day, there's a lot of wisdom in that because it trains us for the big things when they come.

Following Jesus requires courage. It requires heart. It requires a drive. It requires a decision that up here, before I get to something scary, I will do it. That even though everything in my bones, in my mind, everything is saying no! Don't do it! I will take a step in the direction of the thing that worries me, that scares me, the thing that I'm afraid of. And every step you do that, you're going to get so much stronger, so much braver, and so much smarter.

I think it was Abraham Torsky or Twerski that said.. he asked how does a lobster grow? He said you know lobsters are this squishy, delicious animal. Everybody wants to eat them. And they're given this rigid hard shell to protect them. But that squishy delicious animal, that grows, but the shell doesn't. And so that animal has to go under a rock or something like that, shed the shell, and put on a new shell.

And very often he says we're like that. He said the stimulus for the lobster to grow is pain. The stimulus for the lobster to grow is stress, its pressure. And without that, he said if lobsters had doctors, they wouldn't grow. They'd give them something to numb the pain. There's nothing wrong with medication, by the way, but I think the point remains that we shouldn't run away from pain, we shouldn't run away from the things that scare us, because ultimately that will cripple us. Instead, we should move in the direction of things that scare us but not alone. We should do it with loving friends, loving family and a loving God. And if we do that, we will train our heart into a place where we can sleep at night and doing

what is brave becomes natural to us. And in fact someday, you'll be an encouragement to somebody else who struggles with worry, fear, and anxiety.

Tony Campolo said this: I don't want to tiptoe through life only to arrive safely at death. Good point. I don't either and neither do you. It's not who you are. You are brave, you are strong, you are wanted, you are called, you are needed, you are given everything you need, every tool, every bit that you need to do what you're called to do. And I believe in you, and so does the Lord.

Thank you, Father. We love you. And I pray in Jesus' name that you would hear us from heaven and that you would open up and pour out such a power from your Holy Spirit that we wouldn't be afraid to share our fears with one another, and we wouldn't be afraid to move in the direction of the things that worry us. God, we love you and that's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.