

Leader Guide

UNAFRAID

LIVING WITH

COURAGE AND HOPE IN

UNCERTAIN TIMES

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UNDERSTANDING AND COUNTERING FEAR

Planning the Session

Session Goals

As a result of conversations and activities connected with this session, group members should begin to

- examine the role fear plays in the lives of contemporary people;
- explore biblical perspectives on fear and how God's people have been liberated from its power;
- experience faith as the critical background for understanding and controlling fear; and
- understand the goals for the study more clearly.

Scriptural Foundation

Do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.
(Isaiah 41:10 NRSV)

Special Preparation

- Prepare the room with the seating arranged in a circle so everyone will be able to see each other.
- Create a small worship space in the center of the circle with visual reminders of God's presence. This could include a cross, a candle, or a Bible.
- Have name tags available as well as pens and markers.
- Have available index cards, paper, and pens or pencils.
- On a large sheet of paper that can be posted in the room, print the following question for the opening activity:
 - Where do you hold your fear?
- On another large sheet of paper (or several), print the following statements:
 - "False fears and unhealthy worry ... keep us from living well."
 - "So many of us live our entire lives paralyzed by fear, just a mile from the Promised Land."
- On another sheet of paper, print the verse above (Isaiah 41:10), broken into four lines as shown.
- Have another blank sheet of paper posted on the wall for the acronym activity. (Once completed, you can retain this paper for use in future weeks.)

Getting Started

Opening Activity

As participants arrive, greet them and invite them into the circle of chairs. Especially if it is a newly formed group, have each person write

his or her name on a name tag and put it on. Begin the session with brief introductions.

Invite group members to consider the question posted on the wall: Where do you hold your fear? Note for the group that fear and stress have physical manifestations that we can feel when we are aware. Ask volunteers to share how they would answer the question.

As preparation for prayer, invite participants to get into a sitting pose that they can maintain comfortably for several minutes. Use the following suggestions to guide participants through a visualization:

- Place both feet on the floor and sit upright with your hands resting loosely on your thighs.
- Close your eyes and sense where there is tension in your body. It may be in your shoulders, neck, chest, or elsewhere.
- Visualize that tension as a brightly colored web of energy.
- Try to relax the part of your body that is holding the tension. As you do, imagine the colored energy moving to the palms of your hands.
- Make a fist with your hands and hold the energy tightly for a few seconds.
- Now open your hands, palms upward, and release that energy to God as we pray.

Opening Prayer

Pray together, using the following prayer, or one of your own choosing:

God who calms the troubled waters, we bless you for your presence in the midst of our fears and trials. We release to you the things we hold too tightly, and we trust your words of peace. Be among us in this session, and may our souls and bodies be secure in you. Amen.

Learning Together

Video Study and Discussion

In video Session 1, Adam Hamilton introduces us to Carlos, Ginger, and Marie, three people who face fears just as we all do. Afterward,

he talks with a neuroscientist, Dr. David Zald of Vanderbilt University and asks how our brains play a role in how we experience fear. Dr. Zald is Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry and the Director of the Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Program for Undergraduates. Discuss:

- What are the fears expressed by the three people in the beginning of the video? How have these fears been a part of your own life?
- How does the faith of the people interviewed help them confront fear?
- Why does Dr. Zald say that fear “clearly is a gift”?
- What are some of the ways that Dr. Zald suggests for treating anxiety and worry?

Book and Bible Study and Discussion

Examine the Role of Fear in Our Lives

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the first two paragraphs of Chapter 1 in the book. Point out that Adam Hamilton lifts up the prevalence of worry, anxiety, and fear in our lives. Later in Chapter 1, he notes that many of the people who responded to his church’s survey reported moderate or significant levels of fear. Discuss:

- What are the aspects of contemporary life that make people fearful?
- In Chapter 2, Hamilton says that fear may play a role in keeping us safe. Talk about a time when fear kept you safe.
- Hamilton also identifies false fears and unhealthy worry as things that can keep us from living well. When have you experienced your fear as something that kept you from living well?
- In talking about the promise of this book in Chapter 1, Hamilton expresses confidence that we can learn to address our fears, control them, and learn from them. What tools do you already have that help you deal with your fear? What are your hopes for this study?

Study a Biblical Perspective on Fear

Read aloud Numbers 13:32-33, and encourage the group to glance back over the first few paragraphs of the chapter. Discuss:

- What were the fears that kept the people from entering the Promised Land?
- Why do you think the people listened to the ten pessimistic spies rather than to the two spies who assured them that God was with them?
- Hamilton says, a little later in Chapter 3, that our visions of a Promised Land, or of a future we would like to see, can be clouded by our assumptions about the risks and dangers involved so that we can become paralyzed by the obstacles. When have you seen a group become paralyzed by risks and dangers? When have *you* been paralyzed by risks and dangers?

Now have the group visualize the situation of the Israelites as they sat one mile from the Promised Land.

- What hopes and dreams had the Israelites had for the land?
- What would their lives be like as nomadic people living in the wilderness?

As a group, choose a contemporary situation that causes a great deal of fear. Discuss together what “preferred future” lies beyond our fears.

- What would it mean to “stare down the giants” of our fears in this situation?
- What would our lives be like if we do not stare them down?

Define Faith

Have someone read Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don’t see.” Discuss:

- What does this definition of faith tell us about the nature of faith?

In Chapter 3, Adam Hamilton talks about one aspect of faith as trust or confidence that things will get better despite whatever circumstances we face in the current moment.

- How does this definition compare with the definition in Hebrews 11:1?
- In what ways is it different?

In relating the story of Jeff, the corporate executive who lost his job, Hamilton describes how Jeff wrote his way to finding faith. Then, by acting on his faith, Jeff overcame his fears.

- What would an action plan look like for overcoming your own fears?

Consider the FEAR Acronym as a Tool for Confronting Fear

At the close of Chapter 3, Adam Hamilton introduces an acronym outlining four steps we will be exploring through the course of this study. Have a volunteer come to the blank sheet of paper on the wall and write out each of the statements that make up the acronym:

Face your fears with faith.

Examine your assumptions in light of the facts.

Attack your anxieties with action.

Release your cares to God.

As the volunteer finishes writing each line, read it aloud as a group.

Acknowledge for the group, as Hamilton does, that an acronym can seem like a flimsy response to the fears that we have, but it is one way to move us to action and out of paralysis. Discuss the acronym together:

- What about the four steps seems unclear right now? What more do you want to know?
- Which of these steps seems most difficult to you? Why?

Give each person an index card and a pen. Invite them to write the acronym on the card and take it with them. Challenge them to put the card in a visible place in their home (perhaps by a mirror they use each morning). Ask them to look at the card daily through the course of this study.

Imagine Your Own ThunderShirt

In the closing section of Chapter 4, Adam Hamilton describes a vest called a ThunderShirt that his family puts on their small dog, Maybelle, when there are thunderstorms in the area. Review this section and have participants discuss experiences when they have had to comfort a distressed pet.

- What actions seem to help?
- Why do you imagine that a ThunderShirt calms Maybelle?

Read again Philippians 4:5b-7 (the passage printed in the section titled “Maybelle’s ThunderShirt”):

The Lord is near. Don’t be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

Discuss the following:

- What promises are contained in these verses?
- What advice does Paul offer to the Philippian Christians?

Hamilton lists a number of spiritual practices that have a calming effect for many people, such as prayer, reading Scripture, singing hymns, and meditation.

- How have you experienced these practices as calming?

Now invite group members to reflect on a physical reminder of God’s presence and the call to prayer. Perhaps the reminder is a piece

of jewelry, a wristband, or a cross placed in a prominent spot in their home. Maybe it is an actual ThunderShirt—a sweatshirt or sweater they can wear for prayer time. Maybe it is a chair or corner devoted to prayer and Bible reading.

Ask group members to follow up in some way on this visualization by locating or creating this physical reminder. Ask them to use it during the course of the study and to observe how it affects their approach to their fears and their relationship with God.

Invite volunteers to share their ideas and intentions with the group.

Wrapping Up

Before the closing activity, tell participants that next week's session will be based on Part Two (Chapters 5–8) of the *Unafraid* book. Ask them to read as much of Part Two as they can during the coming week.

Closing Activity

Remind group members about the model of “conversational prayer” that Adam Hamilton illustrates in the section of Chapter 4 titled “Praying the Scriptures.” Direct attention to Isaiah 41:10, written on the paper on the wall.

Ask participants to take a smaller piece of paper and use it to compose a prayer conversation with God that is inspired by the Isaiah verse. Suggest that they write a line of the verse to be spoken by “God” and then respond to it with a line or two of their own, expressing their response and spoken by “Me.” Alternate lines of the verse with lines expressing their responses.

Encourage participants to be honest in their prayers, offering their true selves to God. Some may want to express their mistrust or skepticism in the course of talking with God. Assure them that this exercise is entirely between God and themselves. They will not be asked to share what they write.

Closing Prayer

Offer the following prayer or one of your own:

God of peace, you know our fears before we speak. You know how fragile our faith is and how difficult our struggles are to trust you more. For faith like a mustard seed in a fearful world, we pray. Amen.

Jesus said, “Do not be afraid.”

For anyone struggling with fear, worry, or anxiety, or who wonders how families and communities can live as peacemakers in troubled times, *Unafraid* offers an informed and inspiring message full of practical solutions.

In this five-session study based on his book, Adam Hamilton explores the worries and fears that all of us experience. Your small group can learn to identify fears and discover practical steps for overcoming them, all in the light of Scripture.

This Leader Guide contains everything you need to guide a group through the study, using Adam Hamilton’s book and DVD for *Unafraid*. The guide provides session plans, activities, and discussion questions, as well as multiple format options. Each session covers one of the book’s five parts:

1. Understanding and Countering Fear
2. Crime, Race, Terrorism, and Politics
3. Failure, Disappointing Others, Insignificance, and Loneliness
4. Apocalypse, Change, Missing Out, and Finances
5. Aging, Illness, Dying, and Fear of the Lord



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