

Changes In Character 2 Series

Contributed by Dr. Madana Kumar, Phd on Jun 27, 2022

Scripture: 1 John 4:17-19, John 13:1, Matthew 14:25-30, Matthew 26:69-74, Proverbs 29:25, Luke 22:61-62, Galatians 2:11-13

Denomination: Evangelical/Non-Denominational

Summary: When we have an encounter with God, our character will change. One of the character changes is when our fears get replaced with God grounded confidence.

Encounter with God Series

Part 5

Character Changes (Continued): Fear to confidence

A video version of this sermon can be found at https://youtu.be/IcnSfC6a_pA

Good morning.

We have reached the fifth part of this series where we are studying Encounters with God. We have seen several important insights into God encounters over the past four parts of the series. What we learned include

1. If we are not watchful, we might miss the opportunity to have an encounter with God
2. It is up to us to seek and have the encounter, because the first party of the encounter is always there and always willing
3. God encounters are for everyone, it does not depend on your past or heritage or qualifications
4. God encounters are an everyday affair. It is not a one time experience
5. God encounters are intensely personal. It one to one with the maker
6. God encounter will result in changes in us, whether it is dramatic like Paul or subtle like Jacob, but change will happen.
7. The changes could be in three areas Vision, Character and Relationships
8. Encounters with God will change and enhance our vision and will make it aligned with God's vision for us, as we saw in Paul's case.
9. Encounters with God will change our character, for example from being proud to being humble, as we saw in Peter's case.

Today, in the fifth part of the series, we are going to continue to look into the Character change aspect. Today we will look at another character flaw that many of us go through and see how an encounter with God will change it.

Last week we looked specifically at the pride aspect of Peter's Character. We also looked at some of the

other attributes used to describe Peter. Those attributes included brave and bold among many others. After all, Peter is the one bold enough to jump into the water when Jesus called him out. It was Peter who bravely took out the sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant. So, we won't be entirely wrong if we say that Peter was bold and brave. Or can we? If we analyse Peter's behaviour deeply, we will come to the conclusion that Peter harboured deep fear inside him.

When we speak about Peter and fear, one of the first instances that come to our minds is in the familiar settings of Peter's profession, or when they are at sea. The first one is recorded in Matthew 8:23-26. This incident is described in all the three synoptic gospels. This is where the boat is tossed about so badly that the disciples think that they are done. "perishing" is the word Matthew, Mark and Luke use to describe their emotions. Here Peter is not named individually but we can safely assume that he was among the disciples when they got afraid. The next incident is narrated in Matthew 14:22-33. They were in a boat, this time without Jesus and the boat is being tossed around a bit. This time it is not the storm that makes them afraid, but the sight of someone walking on the water. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear (Matt 14:25-26, NKJV). And when Jesus assures them that It is Him, Peter in his characteristic style goes overboard and challenges Jesus, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water (Matt 14:28)." I am sure that Jesus knew the end result, but decides to play along with Peter. He says, "Come", and Peter gets out of the boat and starts walking on water. Courageous act indeed, until he looks around and realises what a foolish thing he had done. The fear grips him and he starts to sink. Once again he realises his utter helplessness and cries out "Lord, Save me" (Matthew 14:30).

While these two instances do show up the fear that Peter had in him, my analysis is that this was not a bad type of fear. Yes, there is good fear and there is bad fear. We need to be afraid of things that could cause ourselves and others harm, like rash driving for example. In the corporate circles when I teach about fear, this is what I refer to as positive fear. A positive fear is when you are focused on your actions, and it results in effective behaviour. This is what happened in this case to Peter. And here Peter was dealing with what Insurance companies refer to as "Acts of God". Storm, tempest, waves etc. Insurance companies do not cover you against such events. So, Peter's fear was justified in these two instances we saw. And the Bible tells us that Peter did the right thing when faced with this fear. He cried out to the Lord and the Lord saved him (and the other disciples). Positive fear, effective behaviour and a great end result.

But not all of Peter's fear was of the positive type. Let us look at another time when Peter was afraid. After Jesus gets arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Fear gripped the heart of all the disciples "Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26:56)". This included Peter despite his seemingly brave act of cutting off the ear of the servant of the High Priest. It is after that fleeing and hiding that we see Peter's fear come out in true colours. He denies having known or seen or having had to do anything at all with this man Jesus, an act that included cursing and swearing (Matthew 26:69-74)

Let us analyse Peter's fear in this incident. It was the fear of man that was holding him back from acknowledging Jesus. He was afraid of what other men would do to him. This is very different from the earlier situations on the sea. This is a fear of what others might do to you, what others might think. This is clearly a fear of man. The fear of man brings a snare, (Prov 29:25). The right translation of snare is a trap. So, what the bible is telling us is that the fear of a man is trap. And in this incident Peter

walks just into the trap. He lies once. He covers it up another lie and a third lie laced with swearing and cursing. This is the fear that I call as negative fear or self-protecting fear. This is a fear based on what others might do to us, and it results in ineffective behaviour as we see in Peter's case.

That is where the continuous encounters with God change us. Bible records that after Peter denied Jesus for the third time, the rooster crowed, and Jesus looked directly at Peter. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." 62 So Peter went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:61-62). What an encounter immediately after a failure and what a result. Peter realised once more what a lost sinner he is, something that he confessed right at the beginning as we saw last week, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord! (Luke 5:8, NKJV)."

But as we saw throughout the series, God does not give up on us because of our character flaws. God encounters us and chips away at our rough edges. Jesus encounters Peter with his fears and restores his confidence. Jesus drives away Peter's fears and replaces that fear with confidence. Nowadays, the business world is full of motivational speakers who try to boost up your confidence through rhetoric, speeches and good communication. Jesus used a very different approach to drive out Peter's fear and replace it with confidence. Jesus used love. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:17-19). This was what Jesus was doing through His encounters with Peter. He did it with the feet washing. Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end (John 13:1). He did it by looking at Peter directly after his denials. Jesus's look would have told Peter, "I love you, even though you have denied me". He did it after His resurrection when He asked Peter to reaffirm his love for Jesus, in the three-fold restoration that we saw last week. The conversation was not about fear or confidence, but it was about love, it was about the perfect love. And after the third time when Jesus asks Peter "Do you Love me?", Peter knows that it is more about making him confident about the task ahead of him, of feeding the sheep, of taking care of the sheep. It was an act of perfect love driving out fear when Peter answered "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You (John 21:17)." Peter's fears are replaced with God-grounded confidence through perfect love that was demonstrated on the cross.

One of the biblical perspectives that we examined in the very first part of this series is that Encounters with God are not a one-time affair. In the book of Acts we see that Peter got transformed into a confident man, not afraid of men, and could speak boldly in front of several people. But he did fall for the fear of men even after such bold acts. He exhibits his fear of men once more. This is described in Galatians Ch 2. Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11-13). Paul's description of the event clearly indicates that Peter feared the "circumcision group", and wanted to avoid any confrontation with them. Oh that fear of man rearing its head again in Peter's life. This is surprising because Peter had already defended his actions in Caesarea at Cornelius' residence to the Jewish apostles and had already gotten their permission to preach the gospel to gentiles. This incident and Peter's defence before the Jerusalem council is recorded in Acts Ch

10 and 11. The whole incident ends with the Jerusalem apostles (or the circumcision group, as they were called) accepting Peter's act of sharing the gospel with Gentiles. When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life (Acts 11:18)." Despite this, we see Peter falling prey to the "fear of men" in Antioch and shying away from eating with Gentiles when the men from James were present. This shows the depth to which fear of men could go inside us, if we do not constantly work on it. That is why we need to seek an encounter with God every day. We need to be strengthened every day. It required a strong encounter with Paul to once again remove that fear from Peter.

Last week we saw the aspect of Pride getting replaced with humility as a result of encounter with God. This week we have seen that fear gets replaced with confidence when we encounter God. Both of these need to go together. Humility without confidence makes you feel worthless. It makes you indecisive, it makes you shy away from using God's talents bestowed upon you. It is dishonouring to God, and we deny God's Grace when we do that. Confidence without humility on the other hand makes you arrogant. It made Peter pump up his chest and say things like "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble (Matt 26:33, NKJV)." Or "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You (Matt 26:35, NKJV)!". Confidence without humility made King Nebuchadnezzar look at the glory of Babylon and claim "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty (Daniel 4:30)?" We know the rest of the story of Nebuchadnezzar. He loses his kingdom instantly and is driven to the fields, ate grass like oxen (Daniel 4:31-33). This is what confidence without humility can do it. We deny God's power when we exhibit confidence without humility. It takes a balance of both to accept God's grace and to know that without God we cannot do anything. It takes both for us to realise that we sinners and yet, if we have faith as small as a mustard seed , we can move mountains.

In our next encounter with God, let us seek to change our character. Let us seek his help to understand our pride issues and replace it with humility. Let us ask him to do the uncomfortable digging into our hearts to unearth the deepest fears that we might be harbouring and seek his help to replace it with God grounded confidence. Let us seek an encounter with God and let us seek change in us.

Let us pray.

To dig deeper into these topics, please read the book Not-So-With-YOU, available here https://www.menorahleadership.com/not-so-with-you_book/