

DARK HORSE | WEEK 4

READ

- 19 "Do you give the horse its strength
or clothe its neck with a flowing mane?
20 Do you make it leap like a locust,
striking terror with its proud snorting?
21 It paws fiercely, rejoicing in its strength,
and charges into the fray.
22 It laughs at fear, afraid of nothing;
it does not shy away from the sword.
23 The quiver rattles against its side,
along with the flashing spear and lance.
24 In frenzied excitement it eats up the ground;
it cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds.
25 At the blast of the trumpet it snorts, 'Aha!'
It catches the scent of battle from afar,
the shout of commanders and the battle cry.

"Laughs at fear; afraid of nothing" - At first this sounds put on. It's hard to believe the fearless life is possible, that it even exists. But for just a second I want to imagine that it's actually plausible to be dauntless, to literally face anything without fear coiling around you like a boa constrictor. To say I want that kind of spirit is the biggest understatement ever because I literally daydream about losing all my anxiety and insecurity and being daring and bold and stouthearted. To laugh at the intrusion of fear's voice and to send it back to the pit of hell from whence it came. To look at things that illicit terror in order to make me afraid and to stare them down and send them packing. What a life this would be! Fear can either stop me or stall me more than I care to admit. I want to have such a confidence in God that all my doubt and dismay dissipate in the light of his awesome presence abiding inside me. I want to laugh at fear, like the horse.

"Does not shy away from the sword" - In a world that avoids suffering and struggle and doesn't think any cause is worthy of one's life or even death, I want to embrace the reality of peril that is all around me and enter into it. I don't want to be a coward cowering away from hard things or painful things hoping someone else will take the risk and brave the unknown. I see this phrase and it almost seems impossible to not be afraid to die as long as you believe in what you're dying for. Whether this is spiritually laying down your life for people or actually laying your life down for God, the "laid down life" is the life I long to live. And when you decide to lay down your life for people, it is a decision to have swords swung at you, lancing you and sometimes even piercing you through. Because of sin, we were born into battle and the sooner I can accept that and take my place in the battle to bring redemption to what's been broken or lost, the better. But that means facing the sword on many a day, and I don't want to shy away from the sword, like the horse.

CONNECT

Fear and anxiety have never been respecters of persons. Moses told the Israelites not to be afraid, Moses told Joshua not to be afraid, Paul told the people of Philippi to not be anxious, and Jesus told his 12 closest companions to fear not on multiple occasions. It seems to be easier said than done, though. One such story of facing fear in the Gospels is the story where Peter walks on water toward Jesus. This is a story of Peter facing his own fears, questions, and uncertainty to press into faith.

But first, take a moment and read the story in Matthew 14:25-36. As you read, consider the following questions: What parts stand out to you? How does the text, the emotion, the verbal exchange land in your heart and mind as you read it?

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APPLY

Peter is usually the guy that gets egg on his face, isn't he? I mean, Jesus actually calls him Satan at one point because Peter says the wrong thing! In this story, Peter initially exhibits immense faith and does what no other human has ever done (except for Jesus) - he walks on water. After reading the story, did you notice how the disciples felt? They were afraid and terrified. Yet Jesus commands them to take courage. He tells them not to be afraid. Then, Peter joins him on the water. With his faith moving him to action, he steps out of the boat and walks toward Jesus. But a focus on the wind brought on fear in Peter. He began to sink as he focused more on his fear than on his faith in Christ. Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "You of little strength, why are you weak?" No, he says, "You of little faith, what do you doubt?" The combatant of debilitating fear is active faith in Christ.

Dale Carnegie puts it this way: If you want to conquer fear, don't sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy. While faith is the combatant of fear, we have to identify what fears are present to experience victory over them. Before the horse can charge into the fray fearlessly, it has to know what the enemy is. Below, we've identified some of the big categories of fears.

There are five big universal fears that render many of us incapacitated:

1. Extinction - the fear of death and ceasing to exist.
2. Mutilation - the fear of pain, bodily harm, and the like.
3. Loss of Autonomy - the fear of being immobilized, entrapped, or out of control.
4. Separation - the fear of abandonment, rejection, or losing connection.
5. Ego Death - the fear of humiliation, shame, or feeling unworthy.

I think Jesus is calling us beyond those fears. Like his statement to Peter, Jesus is calling us to move through the pain, sorrow, and fear in order to live with authentic and free faith. To laugh at fear. To fear nothing. To not shy away from the sword, but to be people of faith and courage.

REFLECT

- ICEBREAKER - Share a story with your group of a time when you saw an animal stuck with fear, startled, or spooked in some way.
- When you look back on the APPLY section, what is the primary category that you have faced fear in your life or even presently? Share with your group how this affects you.
- What are the most significant causes of fear in your life?
- Let's take another look at Peter and the disciples. What do you think were the primary factors of fear in Matthew 14?
- Why do you think Jesus brought up Peter's lack of faith when addressing the fear that caused him to sink? Do you think faith is the thing that always combats fear? Why or why not?
- Ryan shared in the message that fearlessness takes conditioning. It takes time and training to make the war horse strong and courageous. How might your faith need to develop or grow to fight the fears that you mentioned previously?
- What has helped you overcome fears in the past? Share with your group to help identify helpful tactics from each other to attack fear.