



Practices of Releasing
Script: Fear and Courage
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Greetings! I'm imagining you gathered in your groups listening to this recording.

I decided to record myself for this session on Fear and Courage. It sometimes seems that Fear and I are almost like sisters, I know Fear well. And I have learned from Fear, and at my best, I've learned not to fear, fear. And I've learned to use fear to kindle courage. So here I am.

I think there is a legacy of fear. And I think it gets handed down in families, like an enfolding shawl. I say that because I know my grandmothers favourite scripture verse, one that sustained her, was:

*I sought the Lord, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears. (Ps. 34.4)*

She had great faith and used this verse to meet great fear.

I don't think it skipped a generation but since I suspect my mother is sitting out there in one of the circles, I won't say much.

I know I wear the shawl of fear.

Fear takes shape for me in the way it can leap out of the present and imagine the most terrible future about to happen. Every headache could be a brain tumour, you know! Every road trip could end in catastrophe. Every new project a failure. It wasn't last time but it could be this time!

Its not just me. I think we live in a culture that is increasingly steeped in fear. Our 24 news cycle bring home terrifying images so constantly that we can barely escape feeling that danger lurks in every corner. We are afraid.

I'm reading Barbara Brown Taylor's book, [Learning to Walk in the Dark](#). She talks about our fear of the dark and our determination to brighten darkness with night lights. She talks about "the dark emotions", fear of God, the dark night of the soul." There are all kinds of fearful things coiled in us and we are afraid to look closely.

I remember a time when I learned to break free of fear's grasp. I visited Israel for a few months. I loved it and had opportunity to go back after I returned to Canada. In the six months I was away, the country was held in the terror of bus bombings. So I returned to a different country.

The place I volunteered was outside Jerusalem and the convent where I lived was behind a wall and in a beautiful garden. It had been my practice every Sunday to travel into Jerusalem and explore the city. The first Sunday I was back, there were so many warnings that I felt justified in staying behind the walls. The next Sunday I was just too scared to get on a bus. So I stayed home. The following week I could feel my fear deepen daily. I wanted to go. I was scared to go.

Fear was taking up all the room in me. In a dawn wrestling under an olive tree, I finally came to the conclusion that terrorists would always win if I was too scared to move out of the garden.

I wish I could say that I left my fear underneath the olive tree and got on the bus. I did get on the bus that Sunday but I took my fear with me. But that fear had softened into courage.

What have I learned from fear?

I learned that there is always a threshold. I just have to find it. And that threshold most often leads to "the present." The better rooted I am in the present, the more grounded I am, the tamer fear is. When I am in the present, I often find that all is well, right here, right now and I can walk away from the narrative that is creating a future not yet here,

I've discovered a few ways to do this. Breathing helps! So does the Welcome Prayer. I'm sharing a simple version of it with you later in the session. The Welcome Prayer helps me welcome fear. I know it sounds counter intuitive. When you create hospitality for fear you are remove its power to control.

The Welcome Prayer also helps me notice where fear likes to live in my body. My jaw tightens and I relax it. My stomach churns but I can fill that space with breathing. Give hospitality to fear and it often transforms. Resist it and it multiplies.

I've come to trust fear. Sometimes it is a habit of thinking; more often it is a messenger. Fear has something to tell me. It is a helpful warning signal. Sometimes it is beckoning me into adventures. I think every new step, every new piece of acceptance, every embracing of the self or another begins in fear. Fear is an usher taking us into new ground. I trust this fear.

And sometimes fear is just the other side of courage.

David Sobel tells this story: "When the barn owl whoo-whoos loudly from the oak in the backyard shortly after midnight, I slip up to my daughter's room. She's sitting up in bed, listening. "What's that?" she whispers, a mixture of fear and wonder in her voice. Cold wellies on bare feet, parkas over pajamas, we creep out across the frosted grass, flashlight in hand, hoping to catch a glimpse. The thick darkness is imposing, but we are emboldened by our mission. Sadly, this bird has flown. But perhaps she'll hold on to an image of the warm alliance between us, the dark, and a mysterious presence." - David Sobel

This is a fear that is courage. Fear and courage are not opposites. Courage is fear transformed.

I think I will always be afraid. It's woven into my DNA. But I hope I will learn, even more keenly, to welcome fear and allow Fear to draw me deeper and deeper into Mystery and adventure.

I'll give the last words to the Celtic poet John O'Donohue:

*Awaken your spirit to adventure
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.*