

Facing the Lion

By: Karla Kantola

People are dangerous.

It may not be the first thing that you think you would hear from a counselor, but it's true. People can disappoint us, reject us, and hurt us - if you interact with them at all, you've experienced this to some degree in your life. Some have had to grow up with people who have treated them this way, others have dated or married them, and others yet have received it from friends, church family, or coworkers- all people they didn't expect to be hurt by. These hurts can be smaller, like a papercut, making us more sensitive for a period of time but healing with some loving care. These hurts can also be much more serious, like a critical injury, affecting our emotions, thoughts, and behavior in way that feels life threatening. It is in these situations in particular that we have to protect ourselves the most, so we fear.

Fear is not a wrong or evil emotion, it is actually a very healthy and appropriate emotion that God has given us to help us survive. If I were to walk into a room only to find a ravenous lion crouching in anticipation to devour me, fear would help my mind and body to react in such a way to escape and live. This is good and healthy, and needed in our lives. The problem arises when fear decides to materialize in situations that are not truly life threatening. This would be like being afraid of a lion every time I opened a door or walked into a room - the fear would take over my life, preventing me from living. This can even happen in love.

People are dangerous, but not all people are to be feared. Some people truly have been in situations where they need to be protected from the person hurting them, their 'lion' is an abuser and their life is in danger and they need to get out of that room. Once they are out, however, they have a choice between holding onto fear or letting it go for the freedom to love. This isn't an easy choice, and often people need help to make this a reality because it means making oneself vulnerable to hurt again, which is absolutely terrifying. What if it happens again, what if I don't see it coming, and *what if* I can't survive it this time?

There is a time for fear, but it can take over our life if we face it and challenge its rule over us. It can isolate us and keep us from the full life God has offered us. Fear can cause us to attack (think fight or flight response to danger), cause us doubt and distrust, cause us to despair, and can even cause us to give up and run away from a healthy relationship.

Fear and love cannot co-exist together.

We may vacillate between the two and may do so quickly, but we cannot feel and express both love and fear at the same moment. This is because "Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Cor. 13:7). Love offers and accepts protection (a covering, a shield from harm), it offers and accepts trust (an assurance, confidence, and security), it offers

and accepts hope (the anticipation of a cherished desire), and offers and accepts perseverance (willingness to undertake something despite discouragement). Love gives and accepts exactly the opposite of what fear demands. Love is choosing to be vulnerable and choosing to risk being known. Fear is locked down and requires withdraw.

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...” (1 Jn 4:18)

So what do we do to face the lion, to take back our freedom and roam freely? Quite frankly, it takes great courage to love again. Although perfect love drives out fear, there is no human being who can love perfectly. It takes courage to love again because you may get hurt again, but the only way to conquer a fear is to face it. The courage to do so must come from a place of security, not from what others can offer you or the affirmation of who they think you are, but from the security of knowing who you are and the value given to you. We are approaching a time of year that celebrates the love that God has for all of the world and for each of us individually. God knows exactly who He created you to be. He was intentional in making you and you are considered His masterpiece (Eph 2:10), each and every work of God is wonderfully made, which includes you (Ps 139:14). You are known, and you are valued, and most importantly you are loved. There's is nothing that can ever steal this love from you or cause it to waver and fade (Rm 8:39). You are loved so much that He was willing to die for you (Jn3:16), and there is no greater love than this (Jn 15:13). Knowing and experiencing this can give us the strength to risk love because we can know that we are never alone in taking that risk. God knows each and every day and He is right beside you saying

“For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you ‘Do not fear; I will help you’.” (Is 41:13).

You *can* come to Him with your fears and with your burdens, knowing that He cares and He will help (Mt 11:28, Ps 55:22, 1 Pt 5:7). It may feel impossible to face your fear, but we know that perfect love drives out fear, and we know that “...God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). This truth does not make facing your lion easy, but it makes victory possible, and that is an encouraging thought.