

Feel The Fear and Do It Anyway

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Reading Excerpt from the book *Feel the Fear* by Susan Jeffers

Excerpt: **How to Turn Your Fear and Indecision into Confidence and Action**

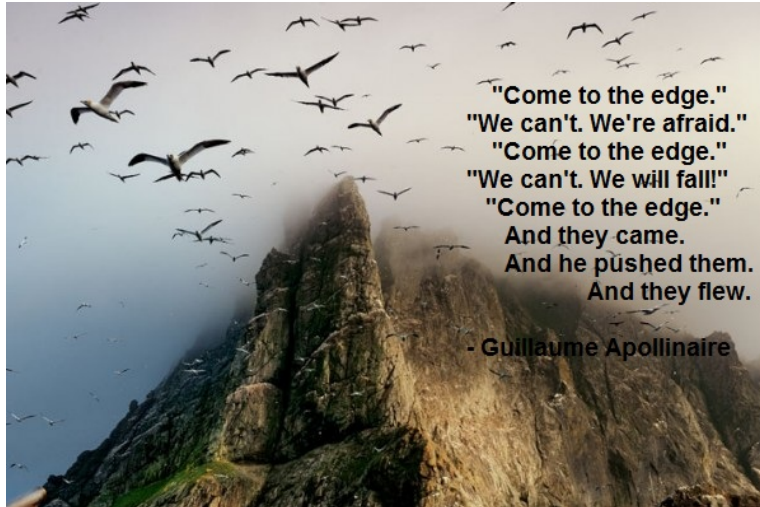
“I learned an amazing way to demonstrate the effectiveness of positive versus negative thinking from Jack Canfield, President of Self-Esteem Seminars, which I now use in my workshops. I ask someone to come up and stand facing the rest of the class. After making sure the person has no problems with her (or his) arms, I ask my volunteer to make a fist and extend either arm out to the side. I then tell her to resist, with as much strength as she can muster, as I stand facing her and attempt to push her arm down with my outstretched hand. Not once have I succeeded in pushing her arm down on my initial trial. I then ask her to put her arm down, close her eyes and repeat ten times the negative statement “I am a weak and unworthy person.” I tell her really to get into the feel of that statement. When she has repeated the statement ten times, I ask her to open her eyes and extend her arm again exactly as she had before. I remind her to resist as hard as she can. Immediately, I am able to bring down her arm. It is as though all strength has left her. I wish I could record the expressions on my volunteers’ faces when they find it impossible to resist my pressure. A few have made me do it again. “I wasn’t ready!” is their plea. Lo and behold, the same thing happens on the second try—the arm goes right down with little resistance. They are dumbfounded. I then ask the volunteer once again to close her eyes, and repeat ten times the positive statement “I am a strong and worthy person.” Again I tell her to really get into the feeling of the words. Once again I ask her to extend her arm and resist my pressure. To her amazement (and everyone else’s) I cannot budge the arm. In fact, it is more steadfast than the

first time I tried to push it down. If I continue interspersing positive with negative, the same results occur. I can push the arm down after the negative statement, I am not able to push it down after the positive statement. By the way—for you skeptics out there—I tried this experiment when I was unaware of what the volunteer was saying. I left the room, and the class decided whether the statement should be negative or positive. It didn't matter. Weak words meant a weak arm. Strong words meant a strong arm.”

Sermon **Feel the Fear** (overcoming Fear part 1)

Strong, affirming words mean strong resistance to toxicities that come our way. Weak words that demean and tear down make us susceptible to illness and toxic thinking. We don't need to do a kinesiology exercise to prove this out because we know this intuitively. Negative thinking makes us feel scared, tired and afraid. This is apropos for me this morning because, well, I'm afraid to sit in the car and let my son drive. LOL! He's 16, has his learner's permit and, well, Joni has to take him driving to practice for his driving test because I get too nervous. I can't! I'm afraid. But I too must feel the fear and do it anyway. That's the sermon this morning. Compromise? I will let Zephyr drive me around but only in Joni's car. There. I fixed that problem. Okay on to the sermon...

SLIDE UP - Come to the edge...



I shared this poem when I preached a few weeks ago. It's a favorite of mine and fits again today.

Friends, we fly in life when we are able to feel our fear and do what needs to be done anyway.

That's my message.

Which is more powerful? Is fear or love the most potent force on the planet? I guess it depends on what outcome you want or how you view your life experiences, right? I think love is more powerful but that's what I **choose** to see. I want to focus my life on what brings us together not what tears us apart. For some fear is the greater. For me, one way of thinking focuses on problems while another focuses on opportunities. Are you a problem-creator or an opportunity-maker? Problem creators zap your energy and wear you down when they are constantly talking about what's wrong. What's right? What's possible? I much prefer this conversation.

Opportunity makers energize, inspire, and give you hope. **SLIDE UP** Are you a fear-based thinker or a courage-based thinker? Probably we are both. But what would our lives look like if we were MORE courage-based in our decision-making? Finding courage is all in how we LOOK at a person, place or thing we experience. Am I looking at problems to get rid of? Then I will only see problems; or am I looking at opportunities that will open new vistas or ways of

thinking and being that will transform our idea(s) or relationship(s)? That's why most UU church meetings start with positive framing words or a prayer or something else. It is a way of bringing us all together to see the bigger picture FIRST before the details happen. If you start a gathering with negative discussion, guess what, that will dictate the tone of the rest of the meeting. Humans are pre-disposed to look for negative. It's a survival mechanism. But it can be destructive in a community. To create beloved community we must, as it has been said, "feed health and starve dysfunction" because as we speak we are creating realities. We are constructors of realities. With this great power then we must use it to empower healthy ways of being, less we create what we are currently experiencing in our country.

Dr. Susan Jeffers, like many, discovered that subtle mental shifts change our lives for the better once we discover the power of reframing. Yes, we all feel fear but when we respond with courage, hope and love again and again and again; the fear that enveloped us subsides.

(SLIDE UP)

Look at this picture: This tells the story of how to stretch yourself and feel the fear and still do what needs to be done. This is on page 46 of Jeffers's book. We start out in the center with a narrow comfort zone but as we live and make a conscious attempts to find/see the light and live bold and compassionate lives, risk after risk, the square or our comfort zone expands. Jeffers says every person should "take an insignificant, intermediate, or big risk each day—be intentional about it"-- to keep your mind and body vibrant and sharp and current, lucid and flexible. Otherwise we will lean toward the negative, bitter, and broken not the positive, sweet and whole. It's a choice we must make every day. Some days are better than others. Amen.

What is fear? Why do we fear? How do we fight it? That's what I want to continue discussing with you.

SLIDE UP - Fear is “False evidence appearing real” or a person’s perception of impending hurt, harm or danger. Fear is about our perception and not reality. Reality is that at our core we are powerful beyond measure. Even as we face death, we have a choice in how we perceive that impending death. But fear, all the while, is an energy drain. It comes and seizes us and demands much of our time and emotion. Why? Because it’s an ancient helper in our biology and sociology to keep us alive. It is there as a survival instinct or mechanism but it is primitive and malfunctions often. We over-judge, over perceive, and over manipulate by over-thinking things. When humans operate at high levels of compassion and understanding there is no need for fear. When we live knowing that every one of us is made up of star stuff—by greatness for greatness—then fear subsides. But it is a lifelong companion still as a rudimentary advisor that needs to be checked often. We just have to learn how to better harness fear or even subdue it. Question: What would your life look like if you lived fearlessly? Fearlessness is living and acting and asking out of love instead of fear. How different would things be? I often look at this world and say “Where am I?” Things are so backward. The good die young. We allow tyrants to rule us; and good people suffer and die all the time in tragic ways. What kind of God forsaken mess is this? But then I catch myself and say, “Ah! This is a beautiful mess being made better by our love... I have the power through my thoughts, words and deeds to shift the paradigm in my spheres of influence each and every day...I can make a difference and be the difference.” Those words bring me back every time. I reframe. We must reframe.

What are we fearful of? Jeffer's says there are three levels of fears. The first level consists of those things that happen upon us, and those tough things requiring action. As an example:

SLIDE UP Aging, retirement, being alone, natural disasters, dying, war, illness; (then, things requiring action) like going back to school, ending or starting a relationship, etc. The list is on the screen. Fears....

Level 2 fears deal with inner states of mind like rejection, success, failure, vulnerability, disapproval, helplessness. Both levels of fear drive our actions and reactions toward what she describes as level 3 fears which sums up level 1 and 2 fears in a few words: **SLIDE UP** "I can't handle it...I'll lose control." Have you lost control in 10 years, 20, 30, 40, 50, 80 years? Reframe. Instead of I can't handle it, how about I will handle it as it comes with grace?

We say though: *I can't handle losing my job or making a mistake or being alone, or losing my money, or something happening to one of my children; or the success I have accumulated; or the lack of success I have. I can't handle it! The changes in my job, the current political environment, it's all just too much. I'm gonna break!* We have anxiety about the anxiety. We worry so much and it is mostly fear based.

Here's the thing... If you think you can't, you can't. If you think you can, you can. Cliché but true. If you see the world as out of control and unmanageable then that will skew everything you see, taste, touch, smell and hear. That is what your life will become. Because no matter what—cancer—I got that—divorce—I've been through that—financial struggles—been through that. That is NOT who I am. That isn't who you are! That is an occurrence. That is a happening. And, let's be authentic, some of it happened due to your fears which drove your inappropriate actions.

Today, I am saying NO MORE. We have to take our power back and not give it away to anybody or anything else!

There's a proverb that says it best: (SLIDE UP) "The power of life and death is in the tongue."

But it's bigger than just what we say out loud. It's really about our emotional content and our spiritual relationship with the ground of being that makes us react or not react in love. You see, *when we know that we are not JUNK but a divine manifestation of the cosmos—I AM that I AM—I just like IT creates, loves and destroys—when you realize you are powerful beyond measure—that you are "The master of your fate and the captain of your soul" (Invictus) the unconquerable—when you know this, then you KNOW that you are the one in control of your response to every situation.* That deserves an Amen!

When we fear, basically we are feeling out of control or that things are beyond our control.

There are many things beyond our control. But we have full power over the things that are in our control. Like our attitude, what we watch, read; who we hang out with. Defeating fear, expanding our comfort zone, drawing the circle wider requires a certain kind of fearlessness to take full responsibility for the things you and I can control and leaving the rest for another time. Leave the rest to life, or the God of your understanding.

We cannot control what happens but we can control our reactions and with practice we can control our fear. We can feel it and do what needs to be done anyway.

There is just so much fear in our world, country and, sadly our UU faith. It often feels like everything we do is fear-based. "Build a wall, take away universal healthcare. Let's go back to the way things used to be." It's just so toxic, contagious, and constant. We must do something different. "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result."

What can you do that is different—something love-based perhaps? Love is greater than fear when you choose it to be and it opens new ways of seeing things.

Ask yourself this...**SLIDE** how many decisions have you made today that were based in courage instead of fear? How much of your thinking has been courageous and bold? Have you done anything courageous today? It's not too late.

Religious liberals, too often, I think, espouse what they despise and not enough what they love. Why? Because it's easier to go for the negative as mentioned. For religious liberals, fear drives too much of what we do. We won't have enough money, we can't afford to do that; they won't come; we are losing something. How about *we have more than enough resources, we can do whatever we decide to do; they will come in due time, we will gain so much from them...* Saying the latter feels so much better to me. You know, what if we just stopped shooting ourselves in the foot and getting in our own way? What if we did not ask any fear-based questions? What if all our questions were appreciative and about that which is possible? My, my, my!

When you give the thing that you loathe power, it has power over you. It will, like a magnet attract experiences and people that are negative. Have you ever been in a hurry to get somewhere and it seems like everyone is driving slowly? The madder you get the more you yell at people driving slowly, the longer it takes; you catch every red light; and inevitably an old model mini-van will pull in front of you. "AHH!!!! Deep breath. Refresh." When this happens to me, after I realize I'm creating this reality through my impatience, I'm able to shift my thinking and normally I laugh out loud (to release the tension) and bad energy, making the rest of my trip more tolerable. And the slow mini-van magically disappears. Amazing!

Fear and hate blind us. They give us the illusion of strength but they in fact weaken our souls. Fear and hate short circuit all of the rational/spiritual parts of the brain leaving us susceptible to toxic energy that drains the life out of us. When that happens, reframe.

The current political climate we are witnessing what some call “the dark political arts” which is ‘win by any means necessary’ follows the path of hedonism and narcissism. How does it work? You say something about me—I escalate and say something about you that’s even worse. You blame, I blame. The demented political arts use fear as a way of giving a false sense of security to followers using fear as a weapon to galvanize and organize hate. Fear of the other—of that brown person is a huge issue today—we are all more afraid of black and brown people today because of this rising tide of hate in this nation. We must stop giving our power to one man. Stop watching so much. Stop reacting so much. Profess what you believe to be true. Promote your values. Stay in the light because light always drives out darkness in time. As Dr. King said: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

So what do we do then as a church, as people who believe in love and justice, as people who want to move beyond fear? We face the fear with love. We ask appreciative and courageous questions not fear-based questions. We do the brave thing enough until it becomes routine. We take a calculated risk every day that in our eyes is legal, moral and ethical. And we don’t give away our power to principalities and people who are not worthy of it. We do all we can do to shine our light by reframing our intentions... As an example, from Jeffers’ book: Our ‘should’s’ (that are painful) become ‘could’s’ (that are powerful); our blaming (painful) becomes responsibility (powerful); our dissatisfaction becomes curiosity and growth; our ‘it is so terrible’ becomes ‘it’s a learning experience’; our problem becomes our opportunity.

I plan to lead this congregation in the years ahead. But we cannot do business as usual. We have to up our love-vibration. We have to up our love-energy to a new level. We have to become more relational in how we interact by being more curious and less judgmental. That means we are getting to know each other more. We have to learn to reach-out and get to know each other, instead of acting-out through gossip and innuendo... one is based in love and the other is based in fear. One is relational—the other is not. We have to up our civility if we are to live-in-to our eight principles. This is a relational act as well.

FEEL THE FEAR AND DO THE RIGHT THING ANYWAY! That is my message to you today. Amen.