

WHY THINGS GO WRONG AND HOW TO PUT THEM RIGHT - Part eleven

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How God Can Help When You Are Haunted by Fear

Like worry, fear is one of those responses to external circumstances that *feels* as though it is beyond our control. Yet God's Word *does* speak specifically about fear, and usually puts it within our reach. The principles for dealing with fear are much like those for dealing with worry.

Here's what to do:

1) DETERMINE THE SOURCE OF YOUR FEAR

I talked to a person recently who told me all fears were of the devil, that he is the source of every fear in life. However sincere she was, this is simplistic and simply untrue.

Like all problems, fear must be traced to its source. This was studied in the very first lesson in this series. **Before you can solve a problem, you have to Biblically identify and define the problem.**

Not all fears are the same. We know this from experience:

- a) **There are fears that are a normal part of healthy living in this world.** You see a car skidding out of control. You naturally jump up on the curb and off the street corner. The reason you jump so quickly is fear. And that's a very good, healthy, normal fear to have. This is the same fear that keeps you from skating on thin ice, putting your hand on a hot burner, etc.

These fears are a **God given means to avoid danger reflexively**, without pausing to **think about what reaction would be best when there is simply no time to think everything through.**

- b) **There are abnormal fears and phobias.** "Because I once saw a car skidding out of control, **every car** is going to skid out of control. I will never leave the house again!"

This is a normal fear gone sour. This is where fear becomes **bondage producing**. No room is made for the keeping power and protection of God. The fear becomes the lense through which the rest of life is viewed. Cars that skid out of control are no longer the problem. My fear is what has gone out of control.

- c) **There are fears that can be overcome with more knowledge and experience.** I was once afraid of the dark. But you learn there is nothing especially dangerous about darkness in itself. This fear is overcome as you **face the common fact of darkness** and learn how to cope with it.

The same is true for riding a bike, driving a car, teaching a Christian Education class, leading out in prayer, singing in the choir, etc. There are still many people who **could overcome the fears they have if they gave themselves a chance instead of being ruled by their fear.**

- d) **There are fears caused by sin and a guilty conscience.** Nothing produces a life ruled by fear like human wickedness. The Bible is quick to point this truth out: **Proverbs 28:1** - "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion."

I have an incomplete understanding of sin if I only see the **pleasure** it can produce. The devil loves to show this side of sin while hiding another: **sin always produces fear.** It sucks peace out of the life.

The main point of this verse from Proverbs is **sin produces a fear that isn't the result of any outside, foreign cause** ("no one is chasing..."). Sin produces **self-induced** fear. It **breeds** fear like a swamp breeds mosquitoes. That's because, however he labors to avoid it, man, in committing sin, does so against the **inborn awareness of moral accountability and judgement**. Sin is ultimately a case of people working **against** the way they were designed, and **against** the accountability they know they will have before God.

The catch-22 here is these heart revealing fears will eventually go away. This inward kind of moral fear will evaporate as the inward moral compass rots and deteriorates with persistently practiced sin.

- e) ***There is also the fear of man.*** This fear is used very specifically by the Devil to keep people from properly pursuing righteousness. This is the most ***spiritually relevant*** fear dealt with in this study. It is specifically used to ***impede the influence of the Holy Spirit*** in God's children.

Proverbs 29:25 - "The ***fear of man*** lays a snare, but whoever ***trusts in the LORD*** is safe."

Notice the contrast held up before us in this verse. The important phrases are "***the fear of man***" and "***trusts in the Lord.***" So the trust being advocated is the trust that tilting your will in God's direction and giving up the cherishing of our culture's praise will ultimately bring a satisfaction and safety into your life that isn't immediately apparent.

While using a different terminology, Jesus described the result of the very same fear in the lives of those to whom He tried to minister: **John 5:44** - "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"

Here Jesus describes ***fear of man*** as the ***love of appreciation (glory) that comes from people more than the glory that comes from pleasing God.*** This is the same as the ***snare*** described in Proverbs - the ***ring through the nose*** that is the result of being more careful of maintaining reputation with peers than relationship with God.

This fear is the most common cause of ***spiritual indecisiveness.*** This fear is what ***splits the life up among different masters.*** This fear keeps people from living ***whole lives*** in the truest sense. Our world is led by the spirit of this age to play this fear to maximum effectiveness in the Church.

What you can see from this quick overview of the sources of fear (and this list is only a sampling), is ***not all fears should be dealt with in the same way.*** Not all fears, for example, are matters for spiritual deliverance, though some ministries ***treat*** them as though they were. A Christian is setting himself up for disappointment by a lack of Scriptural understanding on the subject of fear. ***Know the source of your fear.*** Each needs to be dealt with in the proper, Scriptural manner.

2) **JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES, UNDER NORMAL CONDITIONS, THEY WERE ABLE TO CONTROL AND DISPLACE THEIR FEARS**

Granted, there may be some people, who, for various reasons of limitation, can't take responsibility for their actions. But under normal conditions, there is a Scriptural means of dealing with fear.

John 14:27 - "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. ***Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.***"

Remember, these words came from a Teacher who knew the difference between the things we ***can*** change and the things we ***can not.*** This is the same Jesus who, as we studied in last week's lesson, taught about the foolishness of worrying about changing your height by one cubit (**Matthew 6:27**). You and I cannot ***do*** anything about our height. And Jesus understood, and reminded us of that truth.

But Jesus clearly taught fear was something we ***could*** do something about. Cut it any way you want, Jesus was speaking to His disciples. They were afraid. And Jesus said they ***shouldn't allow themselves to react that way*** ("do ***not let*** your heart be fearful").

So what can we do with our fears?

- a) ***Don't punish yourself for fears that can be overcome with understanding and practice.*** This was covered in the first point on tonight's study. It's normal to fear some things. And the fear of new challenges can be overcome with practice and experience. ***Don't let the Devil question your faith just because you feel uneasy about a new challenge or experience.***
- b) ***Fill you life up with the three antidotes to fear - the Word of God, prayer, and the encouragement of the saints.***
- i) ***The Word of God - Psalm 56:10-11 - "In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word***

I praise, [11] in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

Learn this lesson: It is very difficult for any of us to exercise faith in God **generally**. We simply find it difficult to conjure up mental images of a God who can't be seen by the naked eye.

When David talked about putting his trust in God, he immediately centered on **God's Word**. This is visible, provable and accessible. Faith in God **comes from** knowing and relying on God's promises. Remember, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

And here's the key application point. There are thousands of Christians who simply **don't know** what God has promised to provide regarding their root fears simply because they don't know enough about what's in their Bibles. Remember **Biblical ignorance will always result in fear**.

- ii) **Prayer - Philippians 4:6-7 - "...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."**

I like that phrase, **"...will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."** This seems to imply the benefit of prayer in overcoming my fear will go beyond the exercise of my own mental strength or willpower.

Once I make the decision to pray, God will maintain the effectiveness - the **preserving power** - of my prayer time long after I am off my knees. He uses my commitment to pray to guard my mind during the assaults of fear that come during the day. What a precious promise!

- iii) **The fellowship of the saints - Hebrews 3:13-14 - "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. [14] For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."**

See also **Hebrews 10:23-25** - "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. [24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

Hear the clear exhortation from the Spirit of God to **encourage one another daily**. Notice also how immediately following the injunction to **"hold fast the confession of our faith without wavering" (10:23)**, there comes the plea to **maintain close enough contact with the Body of Christ** so this ministry of encouragement can flourish, unhindered until Jesus comes again.

Do you see the connection? **You aren't strong enough to "hold fast the faith without wavering" without the ministry of others. They must regularly have input into your life.** And you and I must make ourselves available for that input.

So this is the most important point in dealing with fear. Fill your life with the three antidotes God has provided.

- c) **Do the courageous thing, in spite of your fears.** Many fears can be **overcome** by working through them with God's help. Remember, **courage isn't the absence of fear. Courage is doing what needs to be done in spite of your fear.**

Joshua 1:6-8 - "Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. [7] Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. [8] This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."

God is not asking Joshua to *feel* or *not feel* anything. Courage will be revealed by *obedience* rather than emotion. As Joshua obeys the Lord - as he steps out in faith - God will be with him. In time, Joshua will *learn* in a deeper way that God will be with him. But that lesson will only be learned *after* Joshua takes these initial steps trusting in God's Word.

Remember the same words of Jesus: ***"Do not let your heart be afraid."***

- d) ***Keep your heart clean.*** Cherished sin destroys confidence in God. And only confidence in God can overcome fear. Remember the verse we read earlier from the wisdom of Solomon: ***Proverbs 28:1*** - ***"The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion."***

There is a boldness that can't be bought cheap. It only comes to the righteous. A clean life will be a courageous life.

- e) ***Involve yourself in service to God and man.*** What would you consider a suitable antonym (opposite) to fear? Most of us would pick *courage*. Let me give fear's opposite in the Scriptures: ***2 Timothy 1:7*** - ***"....for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."***

This really makes perfect sense. When you think about it, the root of fear is a concern for self - ***"What will happen to me?"***, ***"What if I lose my job?"***, ***"What will happen to my future?"***, ***"What is in store for my health?"***, ***"What am I going to do about my finances?"***, etc.

That's why the opposite to *fear* is *love*. Service to God and others frees the life from the bondage of fear. Never make the mistake of allowing your fears to immobilize you from the service you can offer to the Lord:

Matthew 25:24-25 - ***"He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, [25] so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'"***

With God's help, concentrate on what you can do to keep your life moving in an *outward* and *upward* direction, rather than *inward*. God is faithful. There is a world of opportunity out there awaiting discovery.

Remember what we said earlier. Fear is deeply rooted in the concerns of *self*. Ministry involves your life in Christ and others. In ministry you will see the hand of the Lord activated in your life. And nothing will drive out fear faster than that.