

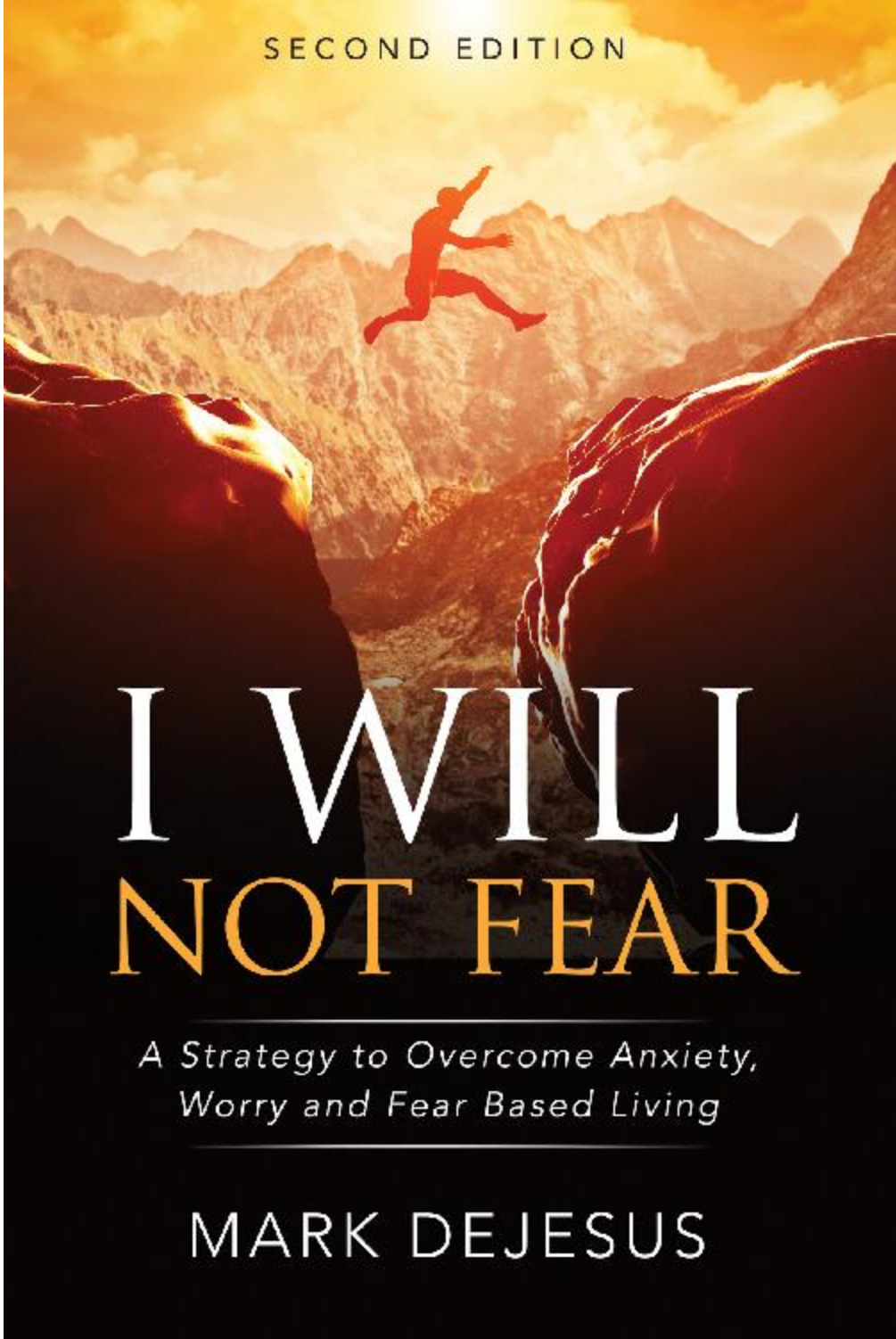
SECOND EDITION



I WILL NOT FEAR

*A Strategy to Overcome Anxiety,
Worry and Fear Based Living*

MARK DEJESUS

The background of the cover is a photograph of a person in silhouette jumping over a deep canyon. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise, with mountains visible in the distance. The sky is filled with soft, glowing clouds. The overall mood is one of triumph and overcoming challenges.

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I Will Not Fear: A Strategy to Overcome Anxiety, Worry and Fear Based Living

By Mark DeJesus

Turning Hearts Ministries & Transformed You

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Dedication

I am thankful to my wife, Melissa, who has been 100% supportive to living a life that is not based on fear. You've backed up every fearless decision we've made with your whole heart, no matter the cost. I love you and honor your heart.

May our children live fearless and step into everything that is available to them.

To everyone who's struggling with fear...may this book empower you to take your life back.

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INTRODUCTION

Men's hearts failing them for fear . . . Luke 21:26

When I wrote the first edition of this book years ago, I felt a strong call to warn people of their need to live a more fear-free life. I had gone through an intense season of untangling myself from the spider web of anxiety, panic attacks, obsessive thoughts and constant dread. I began to share the freedom I discovered with anyone that God put in my path.

I felt a great sense of urgency, because I kept noticing that people were not really dealing with their fears, church people included. The broken areas of their heart were being ignored. It's like everyone had their head stuck in the sand regarding the captivity they were being held in.

Instead of rising up and overcoming fear, I watched a consistent pattern of people running to comfort to escape their pain and finding the road of least resistance in decisions, rather than facing the fears that were holding them back. Burying the broken and fearful areas of their heart was easier than facing them.

Too many are making life decisions, not based on what is best, but what seems least fearful. This pattern has left so many unprepared for what they need to face while masses of people are settling for a lower potential. The fears we do not face eventually catch up to us as life gets more challenging. The good news is that you can overcome fear's influence over your heart. Life doesn't get easier, but you can get equipped to overthrow the fear that is seeking to keep you from the victorious future that belongs to you.

There are those who are well aware of how fear is affecting their life, but don't know what to do. Like myself many years ago, they have no tools or training on dealing with the everyday thoughts that plague them. They live with constant anxiety, bouts of worry or sudden panic attacks that just take over. Today, some people come to my office with panic attacks saying, *"I don't know what's going on. I've never had anything like this before."* Unfortunately, that example is happening more and more. It shows how little we have been equipped to combat the fear factor in our life.

A VIRAL PLAGUE

Fear is spreading throughout the earth at a rapid pace; stealing the peace of people's hearts while holding people captive to an inner world of unrest. It is viral in nature and very contagious. More people than ever before are manifesting the anguish that fear brings to their emotions, mind and body.

Whether it is anxiety, phobias, panic attacks, worry or timidity, the goal of fear is still the same: steal, kill and destroy. This underground torment is harassing our families, communities, churches and fellowships in massive numbers. Many people suffer quietly, because of the shame they have regarding their inner torment. As a result of fear's attacks, people are showing increasing signs of mental unrest and a lack of wholeness. Fear is infecting our financial perspective, the decisions we make and how we do relationships.

The cry of my heart is to attack this fear problem at a higher level because it is affecting hearts both outside the church and within. The pain of those who are bound and held captive is way too loud to ignore. In fact, this burning passion combined with indignation, propelled me to leave everything and invest my whole life helping people face their fears and overcome.

THE DAMAGE

Fear seeks to rob mankind of peace, hope and bold faith. It is depriving people of being able to give and receive love. Brothers and sisters have lost their sense of rest and are unable to hear God's voice because they have been clouded by fear's arsenal.

Because of fear, people are losing excitement, vision and even physical health. Stress is on our nations to the point that people are become emotionally and physically ill. For example, I have personally witnessed a number of people going to the emergency room with chest pains. Their tests came out normal, but what they were experiencing was the growing effects of anxiety and stress.

THE SEARCH FOR ANSWERS

Meanwhile, masses of people are desperately seeking relief from various forms of anxiety related struggles. As a result, masses are turning to any resource in order to find relief. Many are emotionally "checking out" because they are weary of not seeing any breakthrough. Others numb out

with an addiction to escape the torment. Yet in the hearts of people, there is a genuine cry that says, *“There must be more than this.”*

Living as a Christian since childhood, it amazes me that believers struggle with just as much anxiety and worry as those who are unbelievers, with little improvement. I myself came under its grip for quite some time, which sent me on a journey to find true and solid answers from God to set me free.

In these pages, not only will you discover insights for your fear struggles, you will also see the conclusions and strategies I obtained after years of diligent study, research, prayer, and godly mentoring.

I ask you to read this book with an open heart, because it is the Father’s intention to set you free from fear that is holding you back. His heart is for you, not against you, so I encourage you to open it up to Him. Ask Him to help you keep yourself tender towards Him so He can begin to do a cleansing and healing work in your life.

A LINE IN THE SAND

I firmly believe that fear has dominated our thoughts, decisions and relationships for too long. The time has come to put a stop to it, but we’ve got to start talking about this subject more. Look around your church, workplace and family and the majority of the faces you see are struggling with fear-related battles. Why are we not talking about this subject more?

The only way freedom will take place is when we as brothers and sisters start sharing our journey and supporting each other to overcome the blockades that fear puts up. We need to get equipped to know why fear sneaks into our lives and how to rid ourselves of its influence. It’s time we declare that fear will no longer hold us back.

Today you can say, “God I want to take a new step,” and on the authority of what the Bible says, you can walk towards wholeness. Our Heavenly Father wants to set His children free from fear and the effects it has put on their mind, health and relationships. This message is a timely one that will have earth shattering effects on communities that apply it. God’s desire is to free us, so we can help free others. I am so excited that you are taking this step. If I can do this, so can you.

I’m thrilled to share this journey with you.



1

Getting Honest

Let me ask you a very important question up front. You'll have to be honest, for this to really help. Otherwise this entire book will be pointless to your life.

Are you ready? Here is the question.

What are you afraid of?

Or maybe another way of asking it...

Are you aware of how fear is influencing your life?

You may have to take a deep breath and come to terms with some struggles you have. But living in denial or pushing down this subject will do nothing to help you.

The answer to this question may determine how far you'll be able to grow to the next level. Without an awareness of how fear is holding you back, you may have little awareness for what you need to face.

Most people bury their fears so deep they have no connection to how it is affecting them. Denial has made them so unaware of how much fear is dictating their journey.

Others may answer my question rather easily. They wear their fears on their sleeve, ready to share them with the next person they see. *Duh, Mark.*

Of course, I have fear in my life. That's why I am asking for help.

DENIAL AND AVOIDANCE

When I post questions online about fear, many respond by claiming, “*I am not afraid*” or “*I don't have any fear.*” I chuckle, because this is a huge manifestation of denial. It's like saying, “*I don't have any weaknesses*” or “*I don't make mistakes.*” It's just ridiculous.

We all have fear issues that we need to confront and heal from. In fact, facing our personal fear battles is how we grow the most. If we can all stop playing games and get real, we might actually heal and grow together faster.

Too often, fear has become such a common influence, that society is unaware of how deep it has infected their lifestyle. We've become conditioned to adjust to fear instead of making the changes to overcome its influence. Through my extensive work, I find that people spend the majority of their days modifying their lifestyle to avoid fear. The goal is to stay away from discomfort at all costs.

AVOIDING PAIN

Fear trains us to move away from pain, discomfort and risk, while running towards comfort as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, people wonder why their lives have little breakthrough, growth or adventure. The breakthrough is not found in comfort, but in facing pain and discomfort so we can grow.

One of the biggest decisions I had to make in overcoming anxiety, panic attacks and the constant torment of fear was, “*Am I willing to face my discomforts to find the healing that my heart needs? Do I want easy relief, or do I want to face my battles and grow?*”

God has never called His children into comfort, but into transformation. And part of that process involves facing and overcoming our fears. Yet how many of us have settled for the false comfort of avoiding fear at all costs? How many of us have been trained to live boring lives in fake bubbles that we think are safe? When in fact, we are slowly dying because we don't step out into the life that we were made for.

I will be of no help if you cannot be honest about how fear influences your thoughts, decisions and behaviors. If you want to get real about your fears, but don't know where to start, its ok. Keep reading. Don't beat

yourself up, because everyone around you is battling many of the same fears that you do. Trust me. I meet with them and know they do.

RELABELING OUR FEARS

Those who are in denial about their fear issues often use certain words to relabel them. Various statements cover up our fears and actually keep them from being confronted.

“No, I don’t have fear. I’m concerned.”

“This is a good fear that I have. It’s a healthy fear.”

“We’ll I’m basically a nervous and anxious person.”

“I am not afraid, I am stressed out.”

“I can’t help myself. I am a worrier.”

These are all phrases that reflect some type of fear working within. See how we so easily cover over our fears, relabel them and attach them to who we are?

I am a worried person.

I am an anxious person.

These statements imply, *“this is who I am. This is me and it’s what I’m most likely going to continue to be.”*

A GROWING COMPLACENCY

Unfortunately, we have accepted that we are destined to live under the bulling work of fear. It’s steals our confidence and leaves us on plateaus of false comfort, where we hesitate to take any risks.

Fear has become so much a part of our lives that it seems like we tolerate it over and over again. People today struggle with all kinds of anxiety issues and think they will be stuck with it for the rest of their lives. We see living underneath of fear in line with paying taxes—there’s nothing you can do about it.

Really? That’s the reality we are willing to accept?

A PANDEMIC PROBLEM

There is no area where fear does not seek to attack. For example, a fear of poverty torments both the rich and the not so rich. Take away someone’s savings or financial position and watch their emotional security bottom out.

Fear will cripple them. Even though every person who I've talked to, including myself, that has hit rock bottom financially says, "It's really not that big of a deal. You don't die there." Yet we spend our every waking moment worrying and fretting over our financial future.

Parents worry every day over their children. Dads stress every day over their jobs. Moms mull over their child's bad behavior and questionable decisions. Pastors become anxious about the pressures they face. Business people live in chronic fear over their day to day activities. Millions struggle to make solid decisions because fear dictates their outlook. A growing mass is held back by traumatic experiences that leave them paralyzed by replay of their past pain.

When I was a staff pastor, I found the majority of people in the large fellowship were struggling with some kind of anxiety or fear related issue. Yet no one seemed to feel safe to talk about it. Churches were not and today are often still not saying much about it, even though most of their flock are neck deep in fear related battles.

NUMBING THE PAIN

People struggle, but they run to comfort instead of overcoming. So, the option becomes to numb the pain instead of facing it and healing. It's way easier to have a drink, watch Netflix or get busy with church involvement. All of those behaviors can become band aids to what we really need—heart transformation and healing.

So, what happened? Why aren't we invested into our God-given healing process and giving out what we discover to others? Do we have to just accept that living under chronic fear will always be our lot in life? Does worry, anxiety and stress have to dominate our lifestyles this much? Have we just thrown in the towel to let fear override the greater potential that we carry?

I had to personally come to grips with these questions in my own life. As someone who deeply battled with anxiety, panic attacks and more, I had to make a decision about my future. Was I going to accept these battles as my destiny, or was I going to wage war and find a way to get victory? Thank God, I chose victory, because it led me into the adventure of a lifetime. But it didn't come easy. Some victories happened overnight while most of them were a process.

COUNTING THE COST

Even in my victories it has so often been a lonely road. You would think others would want to be free too. But I learned the hard way that too many don't want to face their issues, let alone deal with personal brokenness. They are more interested in pursuing easier roads and avoiding anything that makes them feel pain.

We live in avoidance, which plays to exactly what fear wants us to do. *Don't deal with it. Shove it down. Hide it and at all costs, don't let anyone know you have fear issues.*

Personally, I got sick and tired of the games. I was done putting on a fabrication and living in false comfort. I was ready for a life that was whole and the adventure I was made for. I wanted my faith to count for something, rather than spending my life trying to preserve myself from discomfort.

I got angry at how much fear was stealing my life. And I find that until we get stirred up about what has been coming against us, we will always live our lives passively, hoping God will rescue us. We'll remain in discouragement as we notice nothing changes.

THE CALL FOR THE OVERCOMERS

You may be reading this and have a growing list of fear-related issue. You may have chronic anxiety, panic attacks or maybe you are recognizing that fear is holding you back.

ACTION STEP: If you are serious about your freedom, then take a moment to write down the fears that you need freedom from. If you are not sure, ask God to show you. It may be helpful to get a trusted friend to help. It's time to make a firm decision and wage war on fear.

Today, I make a firm decision to wage war on the following fear issues that come against who I am and what I am capable of:

The good news is that God will work with you, layer by layer to help you overcome. Come with a heart like King David and you can echo the cry that he wrote:

*I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.
Psalms 34:4*

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What do you find most difficult when it comes to addressing fear?
2. What bad habits do you fall into when it comes to dealing with your fears? Do you hide them? Sulk in them?
3. What area of fear do you feel you need to deal with the most?
4. What do you think keeps people from facing their fears and overcoming them?

PRAYER

Father, I thank You that You love me and You are with me as I learn to overcome fear. I pray that You help me to be aware of where it is operating in my life, so that I do not allow it to hold me back or keep me in any bondage. I thank You that You are greater than any fear I may have. I believe in Your power to help me breakthrough. I trust that at each stage, You will show me where I need to face fear and teach me how to grow in love, hope and faith. I thank You that You are faithful to deliver me from all my fears. I look forward to the adventure You are leading me on. In Jesus name, amen.



2

The Language of Fear

F

ven though fear can be loud and obnoxious, it often hides itself to remain undetected. Many fears lie under the surface. One of the biggest ways it conceals its mission is in the language we use. Words like *concern* or *worry* can often disconnect us from facing what is really driving our problem—plain old fear.

Most people describe their fear issues by using other words that don't seem like fear. The complexities of language keep us from getting to what we are really dealing with.

It's not fear, I'm just anxious.

It's important that we clearly confront the culprit that is stealing our peace and confidence. Fear is the enemy, yet it operates through many different mindsets and expressions. The meanings of many fear-based words can reveal what is going on behind the scenes in our thoughts that may surprise you.

CONCERN

When we say, "*I am concerned about this,*" we are at a threshold that can lead to fear's domain. The definition of concern actually involves worry and anxiousness, two of fears most common words. It is important to be aware of how *concern* can become the gateway to a life filled with fear-based thinking, worry and anxiousness.

It may be helpful to stop and realize what you are saying when you say, “*I am concerned.*” You may be expressing some pain and heartache over a situation that God can help you with. But you may also be inviting fear to tag along with you as a friend.

God created a remedy for the issue of concern, when He inspired Peter to write, “*casting all your care upon Him, because He cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:7). Quite often the best thing to do about a care is to release the pressure to God. Fear wants to steal that vulnerable place in your heart and torment you. Meanwhile, God wants you to experience His loving nurture in a powerful way. Casting that care upon God gives Him room to process your situations with His loving affection.

WORRY

Worry is the fear of tomorrow. Those who battle it at intense levels usually find it runs in their family. Over the generations, worry has become a profession to them. It involves constantly projecting scenarios we don’t want to happen. Though studies have shown that the majority of what we worry about never happens, it doesn’t stop millions of people from spinning in it.

The middle age English word for worry means “*to strangle, choke, or constrict, to harass by tearing, biting, or snapping especially at the throat.*” It also can be defined, “*to feel or experience concern or anxiety.* ^[1]”

We use the term worry to describe how we concern ourselves over the future. It causes us to be troubled over an issue and to feel uneasy about an upcoming event. Worry is focused on things going wrong and projects a negative outcome. Worry tends to leave things unresolved within and causes people to become restless about the future.

Studies have shown that around 95% of what we worry about never happens and the remaining 5% we are well equipped to handle and work through. But rationale often does little to help a “worry wart.”

Worry keeps most parents up at night and business people checking their bank account status. It keeps us living in constant protection of possible doom while remaining disconnected from present life.

What keeps worry intact is the lie that says *if I keep ruminating about this issue enough, then maybe I will feel better* . This only compounds the tornado that worry creates inside us. Worry is a complete joy thief.

The greatest danger that worry creates is that it keeps us from the moment that is right in front of us. We lose out on enjoying the here and now because we are lost in a dreaded projection of tomorrow.

Most people who struggle with worry have not been given tools to overcome it, so they often fall into thinking it's just a flaw in how they were made. I've worked with many so-called worry-warts who have given into that and think it will never change.

This is why Jesus took a drastic step to say, "take no thought for tomorrow." He wanted to shake us out of daily concerns about tomorrow and get us more present into today.

ANXIETY

Anxiety is the looming presence of fear. To be anxious or feel anxiety is a growing expression for millions. This is occurring so much that having anxiety seems to be a common cultural experience. People don't like it, but they think they'll have to live with it for the rest of their lives.

Webster defines anxiety as "*an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physiological signs (as sweating, tension, and increased pulse), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it.* ^[2] "

Similar to worry's definition, anxiety comes from the Latin word *anxius* which means "*to choke, to cause distress.*" A related word means "*tightness or narrowness.*" Notice fear has a lot to do with choking or constricting the throat.

Anxiety is a word that expresses the painful impressions, physiological reactions, and mental uneasiness that comes over a person. During my deepest struggles, I found that anxiety manifested in my chest and throat the most. I would lose my appetite and be unable to settle in any situation.

Many who struggle with anxiety share they do not even really know what they are anxious about, but the symptoms are there. This is especially true when people are diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). There are a series of conditions labeled under the umbrella of Anxiety Disorders, including, phobias, panic attacks and more. Anxiety is a presence that looms and can grow without relenting.

PRESSURE

“I am under a lot of pressure ,” is an expression of what fear does to our minds and bodies. The very nature of fear brings an uncomfortable pressure. We often avoid the pressure all together, or gear up under the pressure.

As we can see in countries across the world, the more a nation becomes industrialized, the more intense the competitive pressures arise for that society to *produce* and to *perform* at high levels. With that pressure comes a tremendous opening for fear, stress, anxiety and worry to factor in at epidemic proportions. You may even notice this intense trend spreading in your own work place.

Stress has become so familiar that most cannot perceive life without constant pressure. If someone is not experiencing major stress and fear pressures, they are sometimes seen as lazy or “not with it” in today’s culture. Those who are intensely overstressed and overloaded are often admired as being hard working and wise.

Stress can easily open the door and enter in because of our predisposition towards always needing to be busy. With that constant busyness comes a pressure to perform and achieve. Even more disturbing is the inability to maintain personal peace or quiet confidence because of all the chaos. The reality is that the stress, noise, and constant movement seem to be incredibly productive in the short term, yet over the long haul the destructive consequences will manifest.

Over the years, the standards of performance and bottom line results are raised higher. At the same time, levels of stress and tension increase right along with it. Yet instead of making significant changes and creating healthy boundaries and expectations, we feast for more because we have been so deeply programmed to drive hard in remaining extremely competitive. As a result, because we maintain this “drive and perform at all costs” mentality, our well-being is suffering.

Fear leaves us under a great deal of pressure and tension. Many say, *I’m under a lot of pressure* , voicing the influence that fear has on them. But at some point, we have to realize that fear has contaminated our culture. So, in order to walk free of fear’s influence, we will have to cut against the grain of many in society who serve fear’s every command; listening to its beckon call every time it speaks.

STRESS

Stress is the pressure of fear. Without fear there is no stress. In fact, when we use the word stress, we are actually describing our fears.

Although people don't readily admit to having fear in their life, everyone admits to feeling "stressed out." What we don't often realize is that stress is a work of fear. You probably will not complete a full day without hearing the word *stress* used by yourself or someone around you. The pressure of our modern lives has gone out of control and no one seems to be slowing down. Fear has conditioned us to keep the pressure cooker of life going; even though it is slowly killing us.

Merriam-Webster's first definition for stress is "*a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation.*" Today, stress is being considered in higher priority as a major factor for many mental ailments and even physical diseases that are statistically on the rise.

If ignored or overlooked, stress can have major long-term effects on people, especially through mind and body connections. But the reality is stress is simply just another word to describe layers of fear that are at work to keep you from your peace and wholeness.

PANIC

Panic is the sudden attack of fear. It seems like it arrives out of nowhere, when in reality, it is often a buildup of unaddressed anxiousness and stress filled living. When someone has a panic attack, it's often after anxiety has been present for some time.

Today a "panic attack" is becoming a very familiar term. We use it socially, yet it has also become a medically diagnosable issue. Panic is categorized under the umbrella of anxiety disorders. They have a violent suddenness to them, where most of the time a person wants to withdraw and leave the environment they are in. A mom shopping in the store will leave her shopping cart or a man in a business meeting will leave the meeting in the middle of it in attempts to cope with severe panic attacks. The common place people run to is home, the closest reference of safety they can think of.

Panic is a work of "terror" as described in the Scriptures, which can happen at day or at night.

In the morning you shall say, 'Oh that it were evening!' And at evening you shall say, 'Oh that it were morning!' because of the fear which terrifies your heart, and because of the sight which your eyes see. Deuteronomy 28:67

Oh, how I remember that feeling—during the day, wishing it was night; while during the night, wishing it was day. Fear's intent is to never allow us to permanently land into a life of peace at any time of day.

The background of the word panic is based in the Greek language and in mythology. Panic comes from the word “pan” which is what the Greeks named one of the demon gods. ^[3] It is a word used to describe terror and immobility that comes with certain triggers. It creates emotional paralysis, sweating, dizziness, hot flashes, chills, and can lead to deep feelings of loneliness.

PHOBIAS

Phobias are specific fears that cause us to avoid. They are often irrational, regarding an object or situation that poses little or no actual danger, yet torment people nonetheless. Phobias involve a preoccupation of fear-based thoughts regarding a specific stimulus. There are around 530 documented phobias, but the possibilities can be endless. Here are some examples:

- *glossophobia : the fear of public speaking*
- *claustrophobia : the fear of having no escape and being closed in small spaces or rooms*
- *agoraphobia : the extreme or irrational fear of crowded spaces or enclosed public places*
- *hypochondria : the fear and excessive preoccupation or worry about having a serious illness*
- *ecclesiaphobia : the fear of pastors or church*
- *mysophobia : fear of germs*
- *arachnophobia : fear of spiders*
- *necrophobia : fear of death or dead things*

Phobias include a seeming inability to change focus from the feared situation. You can't seem to get their mind off of it. Along with this narrow focus is an intense desire to flee the situation. Remember, fear always trains us in avoidance and displacement.

TIMIDITY OR INTIMIDATION

This word means “to fear, or to be easily frightened.” It also means “to be shy,” describing a feeling of fear under the pressure of another person or situation because of a lack of boldness and courage. Timidity kicks in when one is under the pressure of another person or force.

Most people live under an intimidation factor. It is often the biggest relational hurdle, because it keeps people from standing up for themselves or engaging healthy confrontation. Intimidation seeks to kill the power of our voice and words we can speak. Most people are trapped because of intimidation. It locks out boldness, keeps us passive and our greater potential always seems elusive.

CONTROL & MANIPULATION

Whenever we are afraid, we lose our sense of certainty. Most people attempt to regain their certainty by executing control. We end up trying to control situations and most of all, we end up exerting control over people. The idea of losing control is the worst nightmare for most, so control methods are easy temptations.

Parents control children, spouses try to control each other, pastors control people in the church and business people control those they manage. It never produces health in people or in relationships, but control gives us a false sense of certainty.

The myth of control says, “*I am comfortable because situations and people are conforming to what I need them to be.*” Yet control is deceptive. You cannot control other people or the circumstances around you. The only thing you are in control of is the thoughts you focus on and the decisions you make.

That is why learning to release control is one of the marks of maturity. It grants us a blessed place of peace. Yet fear wants to keep us living in constant stress by pushing the control button. And we cannot control without manipulating. The two combined form what I call *relational witchcraft*. There is no manipulation and control if fear is not present. So, if you deal with the fear, you help release control and cease the manipulation.

FEAR-BASED THINKING

One definition of fear is “*a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined.* ^[4]” It looks towards the future and projects images and thoughts of evil and destruction taking place in some form or fashion.

For the sake of clarity, I am going to address the wide variety of battlegrounds here under one word...FEAR. It is the banner work that drives all the words I have described here. The branches of its work will infiltrate so many of our struggles and limitations and needs to be addressed for what it is.

As you can see, there is fear that is involved with everything. I have faced and worked with others on a vast array of fear-based issues. Here are some of the main areas:

Fear of the Future	Fear of Failure
Fear of Rejection or Being Hurt	Fear of Abandonment
Fear of Man/Intimidation	Fear of Confrontation
Fear of Evil	Dread/Terror/Horror
Night Terrors	Fear of Death/Disease
Being Scared of God	Fear from Not Feeling Safe

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Where do you find yourself covering up fear struggles with other words, like *concern* ?
2. Of the words listed that describe fear, which one sticks out to you the most as a problematic issue?
3. What do you think keeps people from being honest about how fear works in their life?
4. What do you think that fear is holding you back from?
5. What fear issue keeps you living under the effects of stress?
6. How does control or intimidation hold you back in your life?
7. What one fear issue is God speaking to in your life?

PRAYER

Father God, I ask that You give me the courage to get honest about how fear has been influencing my life. Let me not be in denial about where I

need to grow and what I need to face.

I ask that You illuminate the battleground, so that I can develop a strategy to overcome. I know that You are with me to deliver me and set me free. Help me to see that fear is my enemy. I do not have to live with its torment in my life. Thank You for freedom. I receive it today. In Jesus name, amen.



3

the culture of fear



Overcoming the fear factor will require a sober realization as to how much our culture is saturated with fear as a primary motivator. The cultural pull into fear's influence can be intense. This is intended to lure your senses towards coming into alignment with fear's bondage.

Turn on any form of popular media and you will quickly see fear-filled expressions far and wide. Social media and news feeds use fear as a primary mechanism for communicating. There is no question that fear captures the attention of an audience. If you present fear-invoking news messages, you can increase television ratings. News stations prey off the anxieties and worries of people by magnifying them or by simply inventing new ones.

Next time you tune into the news, notice how the broadcasts use fear tactics to suck the audience into staying tuned in for the rest of the broadcast. You'll see preview clips exclaiming, "*Tune in to the 11 o'clock news and find out why your children are not safe in your neighborhood. Live at 6; find out what is on your kitchen counter that could be killing you.*" It is a pathetic attempt to attract more viewers, but the fact is most of the time, it works pretty well.

The enemy uses the media to condition people into fear's narrative. Quite often, when working with people who have anxiety, chronic worry

issues or struggles with negativity, I will ask them about what they watch and read. Many news headlines are designed to provoke worry, doom, gloom and paranoia. You will need to monitor your input, otherwise you can easily come under the spell of fear.

Fear is a highly contagious virus and it can spread through seemingly innocuous conversations. Everyday interactions can be riddled with fear-based thinking that can spread from one person to another. Worry warts can attempt to alleviate their fears by looking for others who will agree with their worry. Fear looks for agreements amongst friends, so that its torment can be reinforced amongst communities.

It is important that you are aware of people that influence your thinking. Many well-intentioned friends and mentors can be so marred by fear's influence, it can flow into every day conversations and infect you with the fear virus.

FEAR-BASED ENTERTAINMENT

There is a fascination and oftentimes strange delight that humans have with leisure activities that are intentionally induced with fear. Millions of folks all over the world gather in entertainment venues of varied formats to observe storylines and performances that stimulate all kinds of fearful reactions.

Action and suspense movies are called “thrillers” because of their ability to bring flashes of exhilaration through the portrayal of fearful situations. This brings excitement to audiences because of their thirst to experience a crisis or a moment of sheer adrenaline rush. Although this entertainment can be enjoyable and exciting (especially for those that lack excitement in their lives), many movie studios take fear to a whole different level.

Horror movie producers step in and visually craft all kinds of terrifying situations by unleashing unthinkable situations of gore and fright onto a screen. You would think that most people would not want to pay money to be frightened or induced to anxiousness. Yet the popular response is always overwhelming as people pay to see more. Quite often the driving mindset is, *the scarier the better* .

Scientists and researchers have tried to identify the reason for this strange fascination that people have with frightening entertainment.

Although many studies have been done and continual experiments will be attempted, very little information comes forth to bring solid scientific reasoning for this attraction and behavior. Yet one thing is very certain: *human beings seem to be addicted to the rush that a fearful thrill brings them .*

The adrenaline rush these attractions induce can feel pleasurable to entertainment seekers, but it can take a toll on your emotional and psychological perspectives. The conditioning that fear-filled entertainment offers will train people into perspectives that are tainted with dread and even despair. It's no mistake that these forms of media being watched continually can hypnotize us with fear's perspective. In addition, these entertainment habits reinforce how we ramp up our emotions to match the anxious "buzz" we seem to be living with every day.

FAMILY FEAR

Homes filled with constant arguing and strife can stir up an atmosphere that lacks love and security; thus, creating an avenue for fear to become an invader. Additionally, traumatic experiences in home life can lock in fearful associations when children or spouses are abused physically, verbally, or sexually.

A pressure in the home to perform and excel at extremely high standards can lead to a heavy sense of drivenness and perfectionism in our children. This will train them to see the fear of failure as their number one threat and leading motivator at the same time.

Where there is a lack of unconditional love in a family, there is more room for fear to operate. Since fear is not always addressed effectively in family trees, various forms of it end up being repeated, generation after generation.

For years, I have been helping people who happened to have been raised by one or both parents who were alcoholics. In just about every situation, the person raised under that dynamic struggles constantly with anxiety and a lack emotional safety. The ups and downs of living with an addict conditioned their mind and body to be geared up all the time. They never knew what to expect and that stress response remained with them.

Today's teenagers face an onslaught of fear and intimidation that much of the world has never seen before. Young people in this time encounter hours of constant peer-pressures, which manifest in various manners and forms. With great influence, fear comes in to pressure teens into behaving a certain way and conforming to a particular image. Because many teens are in an awkward stage of insecurity and in many cases do not experience loving environments at home, the temptation to give in to these pressures increases.

FEAR DRIVING OUR RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS

Those who are vulnerable to peer-pressure will do anything to get accepted. The threat of not being received into a group becomes a major threat to their confidence. The fear of rejection can be a driving force throughout their lives, causing them to make horrible decisions.

In addition, the temptation to indulge in sexual activity, drug use, and rebellious behavior become more of a reality when the fear of other people and the fear of rejection are on the scene. These fears can cripple a young person's self-confidence and can last well into the adult years.

Sometimes we are driven by F.O.M.O., the fear of missing out. We long so much for relationship, connection and acceptance that we can be tormented that we will miss out on something special.

FEAR BASED PARENTING

Years ago, I spent more than 7 years as a youth pastor and had the responsibility to connect with hundreds of teenagers and families. As I got to know the families in the church, I observed many parents who struggled to connect with their children. In addition, they did not know how to effectively maneuver through the changes and transitions in their teens' life.

For many of these sincere parents, I felt compassion for them because I knew they themselves were not shown love and nurture in their own households growing up. They were raised by parents who were strict, unloving and cold. As a result, they walked into parenting with their own brokenness still intact and no references on how to lovingly raise a child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The unresolved damage of their past affected how they dealt with their own teenage children. Their dysfunction and inability to connect with their kids opened the way for intimidation and control to become the chosen

methods. Many times, this led to a family run by rules without relationship, which undoubtedly can lead to rebellion. This ultimately repeated the patterns of their parents which they sincerely thought would never happen.

Other parents recognized their childhood wounds but were driven by fear to overcompensate. These unhealed fears cause them to not be able to release their children to God and nurture their children in a healthier way.

EARLIER AND EARLIER

In early years, fear's influence can take root and easily carry on into adult life. Many people in their mid-life years begin to manifest the pain and dysfunction that those childhood fears brought on. Yet they often do not realize how or where it began. Many are able to manage through their twenties, but once in their thirties and forties, symptoms begin to increase. At the source of many of their struggles is most likely a root of fear that has never been dealt with.

I am finding that fear related battles are manifesting earlier and earlier in people's lives. It is not uncommon for very young children to share an intense struggle with anxiety or chronic worry. What we are seeing is a snowball effect of unhealed and unaddressed fears in our culture that keep growing.

Because these matters have not been tackled aggressively, especially in the home, mental health issues become a greater part of our society. For example, when do you remember your parents showing you how to deal with fear, anxiety and stress? Most people honestly say, "never." It wasn't talked about and people were not equipped.

Well now we *have* to talk about it, because the swell of struggle cannot be ignored any longer. When fear has not been properly addressed and resolved, the results can be devastating.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Where do you find that fear seeks to influence your thinking in news, entertainment and social media?
2. In what way do you need to "detox" from unhealthy fear-based influences?
3. Where do you find that fear influenced you in your home growing up? When did fear have an effect on your teenage years?

4. In what way has fear conditioned those in your family?
5. If fear was removed from your family, what would daily life look like?

PRAYER

Father God, help me to become more aware as to how fear seeks to influence my thinking and keep me from living in faith, hope and love. I ask that You help me to structure my life in a way that doesn't come under fear, but rises above it.

I give You my family and my generations. I ask that You begin to heal my heart and cleanse my family line from the effects of fear. May my life be an example of breaking through the bondage of fear, anxiety, stress and worry, so that a new legacy can be left for future generations.

I pray that every area of fear that becomes a breakthrough for me will be a blessing to others that interact with me. I thank You for this, in Jesus name, amen.



4

The History of Fear

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he onslaught and torment of fear began on this earth at sin's entrance. When sin did not exist in the world, neither did fear. That is because fear is a part of sin's network, counterfeiting and seeking to hinder the safety of relationship.

THE ORIGINAL DESIGN

Before the fall, there was a protection in place from the oppression of fear. Part of this included the responsibilities given by God to Adam, which included watching and guarding over the garden.

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2:15-17

Tending the garden meant to serve and fruitfully work the land. The word "keep" actually speaks of guarding over, protecting, preserving and watching over. God put Adam in the garden to guard over creation. He was to be a guardian and keeper for the family. This would grant his family a sense of safety and protection.

In this environment, the Lord gave him a simple charge to follow and obey: *do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

THE DECEPTION PLAN

Satan, an ex-arch angel and defiant created being was banished from God's heaven because of his rebellion. He then sought to bring deception to Eve, the one whom Adam was chosen to cover, protect and keep.

The adversary could not give Adam a thought in his mind, because before sin, there was no internal access to his thinking. So, he channeled himself through one of the more cunning animals of creation, the serpent, to present his temptation.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Genesis 3:1-3

The accuser comes to question if Eve even knows the command that God gave to Adam. If he could find any vulnerability by way of ignorance, lack of knowledge, doubt or confusion, he was going to take it.

Eve's response is interesting, because she adds a phrase to the command that was not originally there. She claims they were not allowed to eat of the tree *or touch it*. Yet God did not say they couldn't touch it, which tells us that Adam probably did not clearly communicate and pass on the command correctly to Eve.

With that potential vulnerability, satan tempts Eve to doubt that God's word is true:

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:4-5

Satan presents doubt to Eve by saying that God is really holding out on them and does not have their best interests at heart. He deceives her and leads her to believe that God is worried they will be able to know good and evil and, in the process, become more like a god or even like the Living

God. With this agreement, sin was able to take root and with it, a kingdom of wickedness was able to have access to this earthly realm.

ADAM'S ROLE

So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Genesis 3:6

Notice that the pleasantries of the fruit and the lure to gain wisdom against the ways of God drew Eve in to fall under the temptation, which gave room for sin to be birthed. Yet there is something very critical to make mention of here in this passage. *Adam is standing right there with her .*

Many think that Adam showed up randomly and ignorantly ate the fruit that Eve gave to him. Yet through this whole temptation, he was there and let this whole process occur. Not only did Adam fail to stop this evil encounter, he ate of the fruit himself. Even though he had every opportunity as the keeper of the garden to stop this mess and keep the workings of Satan out of Eden, he chose to stand by and eat the fruit.

In a way, Adam knew what was happening. In fact, Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:14 that “*Adam was not deceived,*” meaning Adam knew the rebellion he was getting into. He could have stopped Eve and put a halt to this whole deception. Instead, he let it occur and participated. Meanwhile Satan took advantage.

This is what happens in our life when we are not protected. Human beings are meant to look out for each other. When we don't, it allows the enemy to invade. God specifically gave man a charge to guard and protect. When that assignment is not engaged, then people do not feel safe. Therefore, fear enters the picture.

BEING UNCOVERED

Much of fear's tactics have had greater room to operate because people have not been properly covered, loved and instructed—especially by the men in their lives. God has given men a unique role to guard, protect and love in a way that is unique to them. The problem is that today, millions of people, both men and women, have broken hearts because they have not been shown the love and protection from men; whether it be a husband, father or male authority figure.

God gave one commandment to Adam: do *not* eat of the tree. Adam's responsibility was to convey that command properly to Eve and then guard against it being disobeyed or compromised. Instead, he allowed Eve to be deceived and went along for the ride. In addition to that, later in this passage Adam begins to blame Eve for the whole thing, when in reality He had shrugged off his God given responsibility.

This is not meant to bring condemnation or unnecessary judgment upon men. It is a call for the church to proactively minister to the broken hearts of men and women. In addition, we must address the need for men to be spiritually fathered into becoming godly leaders, who will impart the love of Father God to their families and their world. This call to guard over and care for one another will bring healing to our land and will lay a new foundation of love for generations to come.

THE DRASTIC CHANGE

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

Genesis 3:7

Instantly, the power of sin and torment entered the lives of Adam and Eve. Immediately, their perception changed while uncleanness, unlovingness, shame and fear entered in to make their nakedness feel forbidden. Their attempts to rectify the situation were futile as they quickly covered themselves and ran in fear to hide from the voice and presence of the Lord.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Genesis 3:8

While hiding, they could hear the voice of God who was seeking to walk with them in the cool of the day. Yet their sin and torment was now keeping them from being able to walk in God's glory and receive His love and intimacy freely. There had been a time when they did not need to cover themselves. The animals all had coverings of skin, fur, feathers or scales, but Adam and Eve were covered by the glory of God! Yet all that was lost.

As God approached them, He knew in His omniscience that Adam and Eve sinned, yet in His mercy He still sought them out to commune with

them. Sadly, His love and compassion could not be received by His creation, because they were filled with fear.

ADAM WHERE ARE YOU?

Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?"
Genesis 3:9

Did God know that Adam and Eve sinned?

Of course He did. Yet in the context of sin invading the planet, God still called out to them. He sought after them.

God surely could have vaporized Adam and Eve instantly for disobeying the *one* command that He gave them. Instead, He called out for His two most precious creations on the planet to have a conversation. Interestingly enough, God has been doing that with mankind ever since. However, fear along with shame and a list of other thoughts kept Adam and Eve from responding freely to God's call.

WHO TOLD YOU THAT?

So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." Genesis 3:10

Fear is now in operation. Adam, not being able to discern a foreign thought has invaded and is now seeking to make him *one* with fear. So he says, "I was afraid." He was in essence saying, "I am fear." He didn't realize that fear was not a part of his original spiritual DNA.

Through thought, fear joined Adam and made him think those thoughts and feelings of anxiety were *him*. Quite a deception!

And He said, " Who told you that you were naked?" Gen 3:11a

The emphasis on the word *who* is very crucial here, because it gives us insight into fear and the source of fearful thoughts and impressions. Thoughts do not just enter from somewhere in outer space. *They come from a source*. They either come from God, your own system of thoughts that you've gathered, or from satan's kingdom.

In this case, this fear was not an original part of Adam's life. He lived a life in Eden without fear. This thought certainly did not come from God, because He does not operate in fear, nor is tormenting fear a part of His character.

The *who* that told Adam to be afraid is the *who* that I want to firmly address in the next chapters. The *who* is your enemy that seeks to paralyze you with fear and keep you from ministering as God's servant in boldness, confidence and love.

This enemy is a *work of fear* that has been in operation ever since Adam and Eve, and desires to manifest itself in our world through any way possible, to keep humanity in a prison of ongoing torment. Yet there is a way of freedom that reveals how minuscule in comparison the enemy is to the presence and power of Almighty God.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Even though Adam and Eve were full of fear, God still pursued them. He continues to pursue relationship, even while we are in fear. In what way can relationship connection with God help you overcome your fears?
2. What is the history of fear in your life? How did it begin?
3. Go back to your first memory of fear. The odds are that the same fear continued to follow you. You also may have not felt protected. How did this impact your life?
4. When you think about fears that you battle with, what comes to mind when you are asked, "who told you?"
5. In what way can you be more alert to the fact that the enemy uses fear in your thoughts to torment you? In what way can you become more aware?

PRAYER

Father God, I thank You that even though many people in history were held back by fear, I do not have to be a victim to the assault of fear-based thoughts. I know in many ways, I have experienced times in life where I did not feel safe or protected. In those moments, fear became a bigger threat or I became vulnerable to lies.

As You pursue me God, I give You permission to love on my heart and settle me in the safety of Your love. I thank You for Your patience, that even though I am afraid, You still love me. I pray that I would be more able to receive that love so that it can drive out the work of fear. I choose to take responsibility to overcome fear, knowing that You will walk with me each step of the way. I thank You for it. In Jesus name, amen.



5

Hijacked Physiology

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he modern lifestyle of society is saturated with tension and pressure, that is compromising the health and vitality of our bodies more than ever before. Because of this, I have a deep passion to help people recognize the negative effect that chronic fear is unleashing on our physiology.

The good news is that the human body is beautifully designed by God to handle momentary stressors or crisis events. This helps us avoid a bear that is chasing us or to cope with a famine in the land. But we were never designed to live in a chronic stress-filled lifestyle.

Even though most people are not running from bears or facing famine, their bodies are responding like they are. Modern pressures have replaced the bear and famine. Non-stop schedules, overworking and achievement-based living is causing our stress response to become hijacked.

THE BODY'S CONTROL CENTER

God designed our bodies with a very complex, yet effective system to handle the adversarial situations that we face. This system is known as the “fight or flight response” or the “stress response.”

I'll keep this as simple as possible, but it's important to understand. The function of your stress response is driven by the hypothalamic-pituitary-

adrenal axis. This HPA Axis includes the hypothalamus gland, the pituitary gland and the adrenal glands.

The “fight or flight” stress response works with how your body processes a general sense of calm and stability. This is called *homoeostasis* ; a technical term for a person’s state of internal peace. In fact, you were designed to spend most of your life living in homoeostasis.

THE FIGHT OR FLIGHT?

Fight or flight is an involuntary system that does not need your direction or attention. The crisis presents itself, and your body automatically reacts. You don’t have to tell your body, “*there’s a bear coming so it’s time to react.*” Your body is pre-programmed and designed to kick in the necessary mechanisms.

To use another example; if someone unexpectedly screamed your name, most likely you would become startled and physically react. Your body would automatically enter into a minor state of shock. As soon as you realize you have entered a surprise birthday party, your body was designed to acknowledge there is nothing to be afraid of. Other systems then engage to bring your body back to homeostasis. You were not designed to stay in that state of shock.

Humans can achieve extraordinary victories in crisis because of the process that the fight or flight stress response brings to the situation. You may hear amazing stories of a parent who has been able to pick up the back end of a car to save a child who is trapped under it. Human strength and resourcefulness compound rapidly to astonishing levels during stressful situations, as energy increases and focus intensifies. This helps us rise to the occasion, if needed.

GEAR UP OR GET AWAY

During any stress-related experience, the body receives signals that you either feel the need to *fight* (gear up) or *flight* (get away). With a stressor, it sends signals for the nervous system to gear up, so the body can become more alert, more on guard and tense. This is only meant to be temporary, so that you can deal with a stressor and come back to peace.

When the fight or flight stress response kicks in, signals are sent throughout the body:

1. *Heart rate increases and blood pressure rises.*
2. *Breathing changes, to allow more oxygen in the lungs.*
3. *Blood vessels constrict for the increase blood flow.*
4. *Pupils dilate for increase focus.*
5. *Blood glucose levels increase.*
6. *Muscles become tense.*
7. *Adrenaline pumps throughout the body.*
8. *Certain body systems shut down to preserve energy to face the stressor. This includes digestion, reproduction and the immune system.*

THE CORTISOL DRIP

Cortisol is a hormone that gets secreted throughout your body during “fight or flight” through your adrenal glands. It has a major role in helping to supply the energy needed to face the intense situation at hand. Cortisol is sent into the blood stream to help give you the energy to escape or survive a crisis situation. It also aids in bringing greater focus to your mind and it lowers your vulnerability to pain for that temporary situation. Yet one thing is very clear, increased levels of cortisol will result in pulling resources from certain body systems in order for the person to have the necessary energy to survive.

Let’s go back to the example of a bear jumping out at you in the woods. In this “fight or flight” moment, cortisol is secreted. It travels to your reproductive system and acquires resources from it. There is certainly no need for sexual activity in this situation because the highest priority is running from a bear.

Cortisol also takes energy from your digestive system and begins to shut down parts of it so that more energy can be used for the crisis. It is not time to eat; it is time to run from the bear, wouldn’t you agree? Do you ever notice that when you are in fearful or anxious situations, there can be a loss of appetite?

IMMUNE SYSTEM DEPLETION

It is imperative to know that there is another system that gets depleted of resources when “fight or flight” is in action and that is the immune system. Because you are encountering a moment of crisis, you obviously do not need to fight off a cold or a disease right now. Your body’s primary

focus is to run from the bear, an undertaking which will require as much energy as possible. Yet when the immune system becomes tapped out for too long, major problems begin to set in.

When a person remains in a chronic pattern of stress and anxiety, the immune system loses its ability to effectively fight off invaders of sickness in the body. That is why continual fear, stress, and anxiety are contributors to many diseases and ailments that people have.

Increased cortisol levels also halt the operation of important interleukins and macrophages that serve the body in powerful ways. Macrophages attack pathogens and infectious agents to preserve health in your body. There are also multiple interleukins in your system that contribute to immunity and health in the body by performing a litany of tasks, from creating a fever which will fight off a sickness, to attacking cancer cells and destroying them.

Yet when cortisol levels are heightened, these agents cannot fight off those invaders, which leave your body susceptible to sickness and disease. Overworking of cortisol can be responsible for many issues in the body, including brain health, weight issues, cardiovascular diseases and so much more.

GENERAL ADAPTATION SYNDROME

When a person has continual patterns of chronic fear, stress or anxiety at any level of intensity, this process of “fight or flight” is occurring in endless loops. At this stage, the body’s reproductive system, digestive system, and immune system are not operating as designed. The body is now entering into a sequence called the “General Adaptation Syndrome” (GAS). This process takes place in three stages.

1. THE ALARM STAGE

When a crisis moment hits, our bodies automatically gear up for that moment, but are meant to return back to a state of peace. The problem is, most of society does not return to a state of peace, mostly because we don’t know how. In fact, many times, we barely recover. We often just move on with little attention given to processing what just happened.

Without proper attention to recovery, the body will adapt to living under the effects of the stressor. The body systems are adjusting to this “fight or flight” condition for long term protection. The physiology has recognized

that the alarm stage is not temporary, but will remain in effect for an indefinite amount of time.

2. RESISTANCE STAGE

Although you were not designed for long-term adaptation to stress, your organs do their best to maintain survival in the resistance stage. Unfortunately, our culture is so driven and intense that millions live in this state for long spans of time. For some, it is even a regular way of living.

After a while, this lifestyle becomes increasingly threatening to good health. The “fight or flight” response is firing in repeated fashion without much of a break or relief. I want to emphasize that whether you are in high or low levels of cortisol drip, if it is continual, it is dangerous. Being in this chronic state, whether it be high intensity or a low “hum” through the day, leaves the body in a geared-up mode of protection, without much rest and refreshment. The “fight or flight” is convinced you are not safe, so it keeps these mechanisms operating indefinitely. Meanwhile, resources are being drained constantly as cortisol keeps being secreted.

3. EXHAUSTION STAGE

At this point, the effects of stress on a person are beginning to show signs of wear and tear. It is at this junction that the body starts to wear out. The adrenal glands have been constantly pumping adrenaline to the extent that the body ends up living on fumes. When we get accustomed to living in this pattern, one does not know how to slow down, let alone stop.

It is my conviction that a large and growing percentage of people today are living in this exhaustion stage. Their stress response is shot. Poor sleep, improper nutrition and constant stressors are recipes for people’s bodies to break down. The greatest complaint people have is a lack of energy, fatigue and constant pressure. They want peace, but don’t know how to make the change. Some people don’t even want to give up the stressful lifestyle, because they are addicted to it.

Exhaustion leads many to burnout and depression. Hope is harder to grab onto and the mind has trouble processing thoughts in healthy ways. It is very hard to take thoughts captive and have a sense of vitality when you are in exhaustion or adrenal failure.

AN EXHAUSTING LIFESTYLE

The problem is that fear owns too many of our lifestyles. We move and go, and we cannot seem to stop. The next appointment is coming. The meeting is right around the corner. The next event needs to be prepared for. Whenever free time is made available, there is an incessant drive to fill it with more tasks and chores to complete.

Understand this: God never designed us as His creation to live this way. He did not create us for hyper speed movement with microwavable results. In all truthfulness, *He really designed us for camel travel* . Instead of only focusing on the destination, our bodies were intended to experience the peace and joy that comes when we simply enjoy the ride that leads us to the destination. Yet, today people seem to just want to get to the bottom line and to the end target as quickly as possible, so that another task can be stuffed into the schedule.

According to camel travel, it takes some time and patience to set out on a particular journey. For example, if you were to take a trip from New York to Chicago, you would have to get the camel ready, pack your bags and get prepared for a lengthy trip. Yet along the way you would experience many adventures that would add value to your life, all while teaching you the joy of a patient journey experienced.

Instead, we find ourselves today in a totally different environment, filled with fast-paced deadlines that seem to progressively get more jam-packed. The heartbreaking result is that millions of people are struggling and don't know how to get well, because they are sucked into a culture that is motivated by pressure. The result is that many are left without answers. Meanwhile, God is calling out with a much better way to live.

HEALING THE STRESS RESPONSE

Most people don't realize how "geared up" their physiology is. Our neck pains, constant fatigue, digestive problems and compromised immune system issues are showing the results of living underneath the pressure of fear and stress.

If you are reading this and recognizing where your body has been affected by stress, anxiety and worry, then you will need to be intentional about letting God heal your stress response. Understand that it's going to take some lifestyle and thinking changes. We cannot expect God to heal us of our fears and not change how we do life.

Before we move any further, we have to make a decision that we want to move out of what fear has conditioned us in and walk into a new life that is based on the peace and love of God.

You can live a life of fear or live a life of love. You have the choice! But I can tell you that if you choose to see a world full of love, your body will respond by growing in health. If you choose to believe that you live in a dark world full of fear, your body's health will be compromised as you close yourself down physiologically in a protection response. ~ Bruce H. Lipton, Ph.D

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Where have you noticed that chronic fear, stress and anxiety have had a negative impact on your physiology?
2. If you began to make changes in how you think, what kind of effect would it have on your overall well-being?
3. What changes can you begin making today that will help lead you into more peace and health?

PRAYER

Father God, I know it is Your heart for me to not be held back by fear. You desire to fill me with power, love and a sound mind. Reveal to me where stress and fear-related influences have hindered the peace and wholeness of my body.

I ask that You begin to heal my stress response, heal the areas of my life that have taken a toll on my health. I pray that You begin to breathe new life as I learn to take Your peace and live in the safety of Your love.

May the power of Your love have an impact on my body, right down into the cells of my being. I thank You for the promise that I can live free from the influence of fear, in Jesus name, amen.



6

How Fear Gets Our Attention

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ave you ever been minding your own business, shopping in the grocery store, when suddenly, you feel an urgent anxiousness that makes you want to leave the store and head home? How about when driving down the road, you suddenly feel a swell of anxiety building inside of you? Maybe you wake up one morning with a sudden storm of fearful thoughts that cloud your mind with a dreadful outcome.

It seems the impulses of fear arrive out of nowhere. As though it suddenly pounces upon us for no reason at all. Although this can seem true in the moment, we need to get more to the “why” in understanding how fear has an influence in our thoughts and emotions. There are actually some important reasons why fear gains a greater megaphone in certain situations.

But what are those reasons? Looking at these will help us gain greater leverage as we get armed to overcome.

FEAR IN THE FAMILY

Most of our fears begin early on, going back to our childhood experiences. But most people don't realize their trail of fear goes back even further, into past generations. The family tree carries many of the fear related issues that keep the family in certain patterns. It's been my constant

observation that the most challenging fears people wrestle with have been running in the family line for many generations.

More research is confirming that certain thought patterns can be inherited in our genetics. In one particular study, children of holocaust survivors were shown to have increased stress disorders, compared to Jewish families who were living outside of Europe during the war. More and more research is showing that even specific thoughts can be passed down in the generations. This insight is further revealing how the enemy is seeking to compound fear in families, in order to disable them from living in peace and confidence.

This problem is worsened in too many families because there is very little discussion around vulnerable issues. Therefore, many family members are raised with little equipping to overcome fear. When a child struggles with a certain fear issue, it is often suppressed, rather than brought out into healing and loving conversation and prayer, so that generations can overcome together. Because this doesn't happen, too many are left thinking their struggles are odd, no one else has these battles and something must be deeply wrong with them.

OBSERVING YOUR FAMILY

Studies show that you are only born with two fears; the fear of loud noises and the fear of heights. These are probably built in protection mechanisms so that even a baby can be aware of a loud disturbance and children can make sure they don't fall off a tall ledge. Any other fears you were born with are most likely the ones that have been traveling in the inherited family line.

For example, many people I work with who've had struggles with anxiety, share how one of their parents had a similar issue. The parent either didn't get help or didn't know how to process the struggle. Quite often, previous generations had a hard time sharing the mental and emotional struggles they wrestled with growing up. Many families don't talk much about their personal problems anyway, so these fear related battles often get shoved down under the surface.

But they get passed down in our family line regardless. The fear patterns get stored in DNA until a life event triggers the release of this fear-based mindset. The good news is that if we can find healing and overcome

certain fear battles, we can grant future generations a new and healed inheritance to stand upon.

OUR PARENTAL EXPERIENCE

It has been my observation that there is little instruction and training in most homes on how to deal with fear related issues. Many children stuff down their fears in shame. They grow up without the necessary equipping to face fear and overcome. Therefore, the traumas and dramas allow fear to have a deeper imprint that follow them in life.

Most parents just say, “*don’t be afraid,*” “*get over it*” or “*stop thinking that way*” without nurturing the child in *how* to walk free. The problem is too many parents have not faced their own fear issues, so they feel ill equipped to help. When in reality, if a parent works through their own areas of growth, they position themselves to better help their children.

Many parents send their children off to counselors and therapists to the detriment of their own investment in helping the child. When in reality, the parent is the most important voice and presence to equip their child than anyone else. Professionals and mentors can help, but at the end of the day, there is no better presence than a loving parent who trains their child to overcome.

TRAUMA

Traumatic moments have an incredible influence on how fear effects people. A trauma is any sudden negative event that catches us off guard. We don’t have the ability to take thoughts captive or gather our emotions. The suddenness occurs before we can even process it.

A trauma can be something as simple as being yelled at, being embarrassed or experiencing some kind of abuse. Everyone has certain negative experiences that are traumatic, opening the door for fear to enter.

What gives fear power is the avoidance it trains us to live in. We become driven by the thought of avoiding anything like that negative event, ever again.

A person who has been traumatized is left vulnerable and fear takes advantage of this. In fact, with traumatic experiences, fear gets right into the very cells of our physiology. That is why we often need a helpful process and time to allow our nervous system and stress response to recover. Our

body needs nurturing back to a sense of safety. Otherwise, fear that has erupted because of traumas can sit below the surface and rise up at really inconvenient moments.

An extreme example of trauma is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), where trauma involves a severely painful experience. The event is replayed continually in the person's memory and is reinforced with intense fear, dread and/or terror in relation to that event. This can be clearly observed in soldiers who have fought through intense battles and come home replaying the negative events and live in torment over them. It can happen to someone who ends up in a tragic accident or any kind of intense event that creates mental or physical trauma.

PHYSICAL CONDITIONING

The problem with fear's effects is that it conditions our physiology. That is why we often respond to something with anxiety before we even have a chance to think it through. The programming of fear hits our neuropathways, but also our emotional centers, like the amygdala. These fear references become stored and can only be healed by facing them and creating new patterns.

Otherwise, fear will cause one of two reactionary pathways: *avoidance* or *displacement*. A person under the influence of a specific fear will often do anything to stay away from that situation. If they are found caught in that very scenario, fear conditions them to flee immediately. For the most part, a person who fears rejection will stay away from public speaking. Those who fear being in crowds will stay at home. Those who fear the future will never do anything risky. Those who have a phobia will never be seen close to their phobic stimulus.

The biggest problem with this response is we spend too much time avoiding what we don't want while not moving towards what we really want. In fact, fear trains humanity to live very passive, where instead of facing what we fear, we take the safest route possible with as little risk.

FOCUSED FUFILLED

The biggest thing to know is that fear wants your attention. It seeks to hold your focus captive. Once it has your listening ear, fear can become a major driving force in many areas of your life.

Fear has a way of sabotaging your mind's ability to focus. It will quickly train you to have a narrow focus on what could go wrong. Instead of living present in the moment or anticipating the good that is ahead, fear trains us to zoom in on an unpleasant future.

If we spend our lives focusing on what fear says, it can eventually become a part of what we experience. Before you freak out, let me explain. Because fear brings such a narrow focus on an issue, one becomes obsessed with it and eventually lives out the very thing once feared. When this ensues, the problem escalates because fear has now become reality, thus leaving a foundation for the next fear to stand on. This proves President FDR's statement when he said, "*all we have to fear is fear itself.*"

For example, many who fear rejection end up feeling rejected anyway. Those who fear the future end up having some tough breaks, especially because they spent so much time obsessing about what could go wrong, rather than what could go right. Meanwhile they were missing out on the great things of life, never realizing that the majority of what they fear, never even happens.

GETTING HONEST

The more we honestly search our hearts on this subject of fear, we begin to see how we have been deeply programmed to think and act out of fear, rather than out of power, love, and a sound mind. I find that getting honest about how fear has affected us in the past can be a pivotal step in exposing fear's operations.

As you can see, fear will find any open door it can to gain influence. It can start with simple worry that builds into a massive daily fear of the future. A trauma of abandonment as a young child can give room for fear to bring pressure and stress regarding emotional safety and security. Performance-driven homes condition young people to perform under the pressure of fear.

For too long, fear has held the hearts of millions captive and has prevented them from their eternal destiny. During this process, I am praying that God would begin to show you the path to freedom and give you a touch from His hand that heals your heart on a daily basis. As we continue, I invite you to pause and give God an "all access pass" to your heart so that He can bring illumination and truth.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What fear issues do you notice run in your family?

2. What is your earliest memory of experiencing fear as a child? How did that begin to form your perceptions and thought patterns?
3. Have you noticed experiences in your life that were traumatic and made you more vulnerable to fear?
4. What areas are you avoiding because of fear? In what ways have you become passive or neutral because of fear?
5. Where do you need to become more honest about how fear has influenced your life?

PRAYER

Father God, help me to get a clearer picture of how fear has had inroads into my thinking, so I can gain more leverage over its attacks in my life. I desire to live fear free, but I need Your help and strength to do this. I humble myself before You, so that You can teach me to overcome fear. Give me the discernment I need, so that fear no longer has the influence it used to have. Let me see the battle with greater clarity, so that I can gain victory with greater precision. I thank You for Your wisdom, but most of all, Your perfect love for me. In Jesus name, amen.



7

Fear is a Terrorist

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errorism has become a growing threat in the world and its influence well depicts how fear works. The impact of terrorism is more than just the violent acts that take place, but the intimidation it infuses into the hearts of people. It's an armored version of the neighborhood bully, who gains influence and power by threatening the community.

September 11, 2001 was a traumatic date for the United States that gave room for fear to grow in greater measure. Our sense of safety, security and peace was threatened and the fear continues to build. Surveys have shown that since 9-11, Americans do not feel much safer. The trauma that hit our country, combined with our constant fear-filled culture has contributed to a society that is not at ease and lacks internal peace.

Fear has a terrorist nature to it. By definition, terrorism is “*the systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion.*”^[5] In other words, terrorism uses anxiety and panic to manipulate and oppress people and nations. The fearful anticipation of potential attack can be terrorism's greatest threat. This is what fear seeks to become, a terrorist in your life.

FEAR HAS TORMENT

Fear involves torment... 1 John 4:18

That is what fear does. It's very nature is to keep you in torment, focusing on something that could go wrong in your immediate or distant future. God's nature builds power, love and a sound mind in our hearts, while fear's nature is nothing but torment.

The "torment" of fear inflicts continual punishment and intimidation in a person's life. The manifestation of this torment may not be physical beatings or Chinese water torture, but it is felt inside. In fact, many people are living under fear's torment, but you couldn't tell by looking at them from the outside.

The mental anguish that fear delivers shows its terrorist-like work, driving people to narrowly focus on potential threats. Fear will continue its tormenting work, until someone takes a stand to the bully and says, "enough is enough."

HIJACKING OUR FOCUS

Fear sabotages our ability to focus. Our brain cannot focus on multiple things at once. So, when you are locked into a fear focus, you won't be able to see anything else. Worry and anxiousness will own the narrative.

Whatever you focus on will become what you give your resources to. If your focus becomes dominated by fear, then the tapestry of your perspective will always be tainted with a fear-based perspective.

The language of fear pulsates a continual barrage of thoughts, keeping the mind spinning and out of peace; thoughts like:

What about my finances?

How am I going to be able to make it?

If I don't do well on this I am sunk.

What if I never find a job?

When am I going to settle down and get peace?

What if I never marry?

If this would just leave me alone I would be ok.

What if this anxiety never ends?

I am going to end up poor and alone.

You need to become more aware of how fear influences your mundane, everyday thoughts. Otherwise you'll continue to go with its flow each time. Fear often starts subtle and builds to more intense levels. The quicker we catch it, the more fruit we will see in breaking free.

FEAR'S WEAPON: "WHAT IF?"

"*What if*" is the favorite beginning phrase of fear. Each time such words invade the mind, there is a specific intent to bring a mental projection of doom, gloom and failure. "*What if I get a disease?*" or "*What about my low bank account?*" and "*What if I can't pay my bills this month?*" are examples of this kind of talk.

Any room of insecurity is used as a window to incite questions of doubt and uncertainty, thus making a positive outlook nearly impossible. The "*what if's*" point to a scenario that can *seem* realistic to the individual. Yet as folks begin to get victory over fear, they will recognize that the weapons of fear are all simply a spectacle of fireworks, smoke and illusions.

Fear only has power when we listen to it and give it validation. Most of what fear points to never happens and the small percentage that can happen, we are able to face with God's help. The problem is that we are so used to living with fear as a driving force, we know of nothing else.

There is nothing helpful about the torment of fear. It is only realistic if we give it that validation. We are only the victims of that which we fear anyway. If fear is allowed in, it will have an increasingly punishing effect as the slippery slope of growing anxious thoughts and worries do their job—torment.

ARGUING WITH FEAR IS A TRAP

Arguing with fear by using logic alone doesn't always drive out its work. Otherwise most people could say to themselves, "*stop thinking this way*" and the fear would cease. Everyone reading this knows it's not always that simple.

Attempting to debate fear away simply causes it to find another angle from which to attack. If one thought doesn't get you into fear, then another fearful thought will arise on a different subject. Debating each fear-based thought can over time exhaust you.

According to fear, it doesn't matter which thought works, as long as you're focused on the narrative that steals your peace. Fear will continue to find any subject that will captivate your attention and keep you held in its grip.

When uncertainty is in your life, fear will work overtime to claim that ground in your heart. It seeks to immediately plant toxic weeds to choke the life out of your peace and keep you drowning rather than sailing with trust during uncertainty.

But if we're not willing to dig out the weeds, we are left trapped. I have witnessed so many who have been deeply programmed into fear's way of thinking that simple loving truth could not penetrate. I have been there, so I know what it's like. The negative *what ifs* and non-stop uneasiness were dominating their minds. They had been influenced by fear for so long that all they talked about was fear-based outcomes.

When gripped with fear's thoughts, we often become obsessed by what it says and miss out on receiving the wonderful possibilities of the day. Then when blessings do arrive, we cannot enjoy them because we're focused on the next thing that could go wrong.

THE "WHAT IF" SOLUTION

Many countries have a policy that they will not negotiate with terrorists. As an overcomer, you will need to take on that policy yourself, regarding fear and the thoughts it brings to your life. There is no need to negotiate with fear. The only option is to do what only defeats a bully—stand up to it and refuse to give into its demands.

Jesus took it even further when He said, "*do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*" (Matthew 6:34) Fear is always broadcasting its propaganda 24 hours a day, seven days a week; seeking to drive us to worry and fret about the cares of this world. But Jesus promised us a divine peace as we release ourselves into the Father's care and simply focus on the work of today.

It's important to be aware of the negative *what ifs* that capture your attention and begin developing a new focus today. Instead of focusing on tomorrow, why not live present in the here and now? For most, fear has stolen the ability to enjoy the present moment and engage the beauty of

what's available. Instead of wasting your life projecting what could go wrong, make an intentional decision that you will be present with what is in front of you.

The Apostle Peter gave us one of the best exhortations regarding fear, “*Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:7). His love and care is the antidote to the torment that anxiety, worry and stress all try to bring into our lives.

Jesus commands us *each* day to *not* worry about tomorrow and Peter reminds us to continually cast our daily cares upon Him. The word *cast* in this passage does not speak of one action, but a continual practice of daily casting our cares upon God. Just as a fly fisherman repeatedly throws his line out into the water, we as God's children have the privilege of continually casting our concerns and worries into the refreshing waters of His love.

This is not something that automatically happens with one attempt. Remember, we have been conditioned by fear and have to develop a new training. Becoming focused on the present and less care-filled about tomorrow is a muscle most people have not exercised. So, we have to see this as a daily habit of focusing on the joy in front of us and casting the interfering cares upon God. I find this is a moment by moment, hour by hour exercise that will lead us into a whole new way of living.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. In what ways do you find the terrorism of fear seeking to grab your attention?
2. What are the negative *what if's* that capture your attention and focus?
3. What things in the present do you miss out on because you are focused on the fear and worry regarding future events?
4. What would you enjoy more if you cast your cares upon God and remained focused on what is in front of you?
5. Where do you need to stop negotiating with fear and take a firm stance against it?

PRAYER

Father God, I thank You that You have given me courage and boldness to stand up to fear's tactics. There is no need to be afraid when I am with You, so thank You for Your abiding presence.

I recognize where fear has had a work of terrorism in my life. At times, I have listened to the bullying work of fear and I don't want to any longer. Give me the courage and strength to begin standing up to fear, because I know more victory will manifest in my life. I make a decision to no longer serve fear as a way of thinking any longer. I thank You that You will give me the power to overcome. In Jesus name, amen.



8

Letting Go of Our Survival Tactics

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ou were meant to thrive, not just survive. Yet when we listen to fear, we automatically move into a lifestyle of survival mode, stressing our minds and bodies in ways we don't need to. When in survival mode, our goal becomes barely making it through the day, rather than experiencing the overcoming life.

The complaint of so many is that they are emotionally just “*getting by*.” They long for more, but fear has contained them into a life that has imprisoned them.

On the other side of fear is often the adventure we were made for. Yet there are some tactics we hold on to that trap us in survival mode. They keep us living as slaves to fear rather than conquerors, who know that facing fear and overcoming is where the freedom lies.

There are many survival methods we can carry, but I am going to focus on four main ones that keep people operating in fear and not breaking through.

SURVIVAL METHOD #1: AVOIDANCE

If you are looking for the easy way in life, then fear will work overtime to wear you out, so you'll remain passive and avoid discomfort. It often gets the upper hand because today people are more concerned about comfort than they are facing their fears and reaping the benefits of freedom.

We spend so much our energy moving away from pain and running towards comfort. We don't like to be stretched. One of the quickest ways to begin breaking through anxiety, worry and fear-related issues is to become more ok with discomfort for seasons. The focus needs to be more on moving towards what you fear rather than avoiding any pain or discomfort.

We often pray for God to deliver us from fear, not so we can overcome, but so that we can live in comfort. Our primary concern is "*get these uncomfortable feelings off me*" more than facing what we need to face. Yet it's important to know that God's number one concern is not your comfort, but your transformation. And a major component of you experiencing transformation is not letting fear get the upper hand and drive you into a passive life.

Too many people are *sitting on their biscuit, never having to risk it* . Fear has disempowered so many people from their God-given destiny, keeping them from taking risks and rising up. Yet at the same time keep in mind, you are often one huge step "*of facing your fears*" away from a major breakthrough.

SURVIVAL METHOD #2: EMOTIONAL WALLS

Whenever we are hurt we often put up walls in an attempt to protect ourselves. Those who do this believe these walls are for protection. Yet over time we fail to see the walls have become prisons.

We also struggle with shame. As a result, we wear masks, so we can feel we belong and protect ourselves from being hurt. When anxiety is a battle, shame tells us to hide this issue.

One wall we put up is relational masks. This offers a barrier when interacting with people, concealing a person's true identity, while projecting a false one. In short, this mask keeps people from seeing the "real you."

The lie spawned by fear is, "*If they see who I really am, and they do not like me, I am all I have. I've got nothing else to show them, so I will be sunk if they reject me. I must protect myself.*" This lie becomes so hard wired that

for many, the ability to “turn on” the mask becomes effortless and without conscious initiation.

I present these popular masks for consideration:

- *The “I don’t struggle with anxiety, even though I do” person.*
- *The incredibly spiritual person.*
- *The smart and intellectual person.*
- *The successful person.*
- *The “I don’t have any problems” person.*

What drives most of this is a fear of rejection. Deep inside are severe wounds and fears, but the mask keeps us thinking that no one knows we’re posing. Because so many are not comfortable in who they really are, putting on a fabrication seems to be more appealing.

As the pattern continues, people are conditioned to believe that this modality is actual working. Meanwhile, destruction and dysfunction are brewing behind that facade. While the masquerade party is in session, the real identity suffers underneath. For those who use the relational mask to protect themselves, the problems continue and the pain festers underneath. Most of all, the mask keeps people from seeing the most powerful person they can be—themselves.

SURVIVAL METHOD #3: BUSYNESS

It’s easy to avoid dealing with fear issues by staying as busy as humanly possible. This is connected to avoidance. *Hustle* has become a familiar practice in people who push themselves to work longer hours, accomplish more tasks, and keep multiple plates spinning; all in the name of work ethic.

It is also a lure to numerous folks because society admires extreme hard work. Yet at the root, drivenness is based on a fear of not feeling good enough, not making enough money, and not being able to face the real person behind the mask, who many times is broken and afraid.

Those in the church world are not exempt. Intense religious service and obsessive activity are often admired and celebrated, even if it is at the expense of the person’s heart health and wholeness. Believers struggle to slow down and sit quietly before God because of the buzz that a stress and fear-based life has produced.

It's easy to fall into constant Christian service with a hope that God will be pleased with us because of our religious activity. Receiving His unconditional love is a challenge, so the temptation to overcompensate for that emptiness with constant *doing* is easy. The drivenness springboards off a lie that our value and worth is proportionate to our productivity in this world.

The discomfort and anxiety continues, but many just keep going and moving, usually without stopping. I find that many people ramp up their activity to match their internal anxiety. Most of the time, the pattern continues until one day the person ends up in the hospital or realizes he cannot maintain sanity with the pressure that has built up.

SURVIVAL METHOD #4: UNHEALTHY VOWS

We can make unhealthy vows out loud or internally in our hearts. These declarations often seal us into further dysfunction, rather than set us free. Words are spouted out in the midst of pain that declare, "*I am going to make sure that I am never hurt again.*" This is where walls are put up which do not allow loving relationships to develop.

Unfortunately, this person becomes unavailable for intimate connections because the lines have been cut, and the vows keep them from being spliced or reconnected. Yet the antidote—love from God and other people—lies outside their closed-in heart. Because of a distorted outlook, love in its truest form is feared and avoided. Although a person who makes protective vows may see themselves as being free and secure, they have actually just checked themselves into an emotional Alcatraz.

LETTING GO OF SELF-PRESERVATION

All these coping mechanisms attempt to create a sense of safety on our own, apart from God and even apart from healthy relationships. They keep us from facing our pain and fears. Strong words of hurt are spoken such as, "*If they don't care about me, I'm going to have to do this all on my own.*" Fear takes this a step further by telling us to run away.

I've learned that I wasted too many years trying to protect myself. I exhausted my resources and increased stress by over-anticipating any potential hurt. Meanwhile, it kept my heart trapped and didn't allow people to connect with me. At some point, I had to let go of self-preservation so that I could finally live as myself and connect.

To someone who struggles with anxiety and stress, the things that they should enjoy the most are no longer pleasurable, because the torment of fear has robbed them from being able to engage the simple delights God created for their enjoyment. Worse yet, people around do not have the person's full attention or their full capacity for love. God has a design for us to be free from torment, but it will involve us laying down our survival tactics.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Of the four survival tactics listed, which one do you find yourself falling into the most?
2. Are there any tactics you would add to that list?
3. When it comes to living in more freedom from fear's influence, what would it look like if you let go of your survival tactics?

PRAYER

Father God, I am seeing how fear can keep me from being myself and connecting with people authentically. Fear is wanting to steal my ability to live with vulnerability.

I ask that You help me to see where I have become too guarded. I don't want to shut myself off from relationships that could be really healthy and empowering.

Today I choose to lay down the survival tactics that actually imprison me and keep me from experiencing fruitful relationships. I renounce the fear in my life that keeps me walled up and living in self-preservation. I give my wounds and my brokenness over to You, Father.

I ask that You give me the strength and wisdom to let my heart engage a new level of freedom. Give me the courage to be myself, even as I am in process on learning what that means. In Jesus name, amen.



9

You Are Not Alone



One of the worst feelings, on top of the torment that fear brings, is the sense of loneliness that comes along with it, where we feel disconnected from love and safety. In my worst days of debilitating anxiety, I felt like I was watching the world through a Plexiglas window. I could see it, but I could not participate and feel engaged. It's like I was watching everyone go on without me. The fear and lack of peace made us feel cut off from the rest of the world; isolated in my distress. If you're not currently going through it, look around. Scores of people are neck deep in it.

What made these feelings worse was the shame I felt. *“What is wrong with me? Why can't I get it together? When is this ever going to end?”* These hopeless thoughts led me into spirals of depression. I remember days where I did not want to live anymore. The torment seemed unending and it appeared as though everyone else was going on with their life just fine. I believed that I was the only one going through these kinds of battles.

As I began to learn about healing of the heart and overcoming fear-based struggles, I started to share my story of overcoming with others in my church and community. At the time, I was a staff pastor at a fairly large

church. As I began to reveal more of what I was going through, people's mouths dropped for two reasons.

The first reason is they couldn't believe someone who was a pastor had these kind of struggles. Some may have sat back in judgment, but everyone I talked to was relieved to know that spiritual leaders wrestle with the same issues they do. Secondly, many of them responded by saying, "*Yes Mark, I have had the very same battles that you are talking about.*" People started pulling me aside, requesting help for themselves, wanting insight and details about what was helping me.

The more I shared my story, the more I felt shame being broken off of me. Not only was I helping others, I clearly saw that I was not alone in this battle. Masses of people were struggling with the same kind of fear-based issues.

As time went along, my heart began to grieve when I observed that the majority of the church was gripped with fear, anxiety, stress and worry. Up until this point, everyone was just good at hiding. As I shared my journey, more and more people came out of the shadows to realize they could get free as well. They didn't have to hide anymore.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Take a moment and look around at the relationships in your life. Consider the people you are connected to. Maybe you are in a coffee shop reading or sitting in an airport. Pause for a moment to consider what others are going through.

Allow me to let you in on a little secret: *everyone around has a cluster of fears they struggle with in their life* . Some of them are right on the surface, tormenting them at every turn. Yet many are suppressed way down deep and are creating lots of tension in their life. Most are fighting with everything they've got, but they haven't received the tools they need. Others are just wishing it would all go away.

Hopefully by now, everyone reading this book can at least admit they have some fears they need to deal with in their life. It would help so many if we all put down our masks and recognize that fear does not discriminate. It wants to work on anyone and everyone.

So let's stop playing games that we have it all together. Can we vulnerably admit we all have to do business with fear? Some people

manifest it more outwardly, but this doesn't mean they are weaker or less intelligent. Often those who have very obvious struggles with anxiousness, panic and phobias have very sensitive hearts, meaning they know how to connect with life and engage it with great emotion. This is a great trait, but one the enemy has attacked to make one vulnerable to hordes of fears.

LITTLE ROOM FOR WEAKNESS

Most people who come to me for help regarding anxiety or some anxiety disorder feel so shameful they have this struggle to begin with. Christianity has historically taught us that we should never have struggles with fear. We read the stories of those in the Bible where God said, "*Do not fear*" and we interpret it as though they never battled it. This is ridiculous, because every person who has overcome has had to face tremendous layers of fear.

In the past, I often compared my battles to what I thought everyone else's lives were like. Boy was I wrong. Everyone's got issues. The difference is whether we live vulnerably about them or spend our lives hiding.

Most people live an act every day. Others end up comparing their backstage mess with someone's front stage display of perfection. This lack of transparency and vulnerability is discouraging people left and right.

We don't give much room for processing though fear. Most of culture just tells people to "*get over it*" which leads them to hide further in shame. In that darkness, they never get the help they need. Meanwhile, the struggle becomes deeper and more challenging.

Our church presentations are often very shiny and spotless, with little room for weakness. Even the very sign of fearful insecurity is not considered acceptable. When someone starts shaking in public, we don't know what to do with that. If a person is speaking from a microphone and shows nervousness, it's considered weakness and non-acceptable. We only want to see polished performances. No wonder we don't know how to process through anxiousness and insecurity. No one modeled it for us.

For the most part, we shove down and suppress our fears, rather than confess them to safe people and get the help we need. Coming into the light of God's love with our battles is the best place to live, but it needs to be experienced in the context of our relationships. The problem is that most

people do not have the safety to process through the fears that work against them.

The enemy loves when we are pushed into shame and hiddenness. In the isolation, he knows we'll struggle to find our way into breakthrough. It will keep us from the relational connection we need to gain more freedom.

Isolation is often a symptom of anxiety and deep fear. Yet at the same time it is a cause. Isolation can enhance anxiety and keep you from stepping out into the breakthrough that is needed. It will keep you in an endless loop of hopeless thoughts and loneliness. This is where many people are living today.

THE COMMON ENEMY TO ALL OVERCOMERS

It is important for you to know that everyone has to face fear in their life. Anyone in history, who has done great things has also had to face great fear in tremendous ways. In fact, if you are not facing some sort of fear in your life, chances are, you are probably living stagnant. Life always has a way of leading us into new challenges and opportunities to grow.

Genesis 15:1: *"Do not be afraid, Abram"*

Numbers 21:34: *"Moses, do not fear"*

Joshua 8:1: *"Joshua, do not be afraid"*

Daniel 10:12: *"Fear not, Daniel"*

Matthew 1:20: *"Joseph, fear not"*

Luke 1:13: *"Fear not, Zacharias"*

Luke 1:30: *"Fear not, Mary"*

Luke 5:10: *"Simon, fear not"*

Acts 27:24: *"Fear not, Paul"*

We can see the call for so many to face fear. We read the stories of what people had to overcome, but we often don't take in the process of what is involved to overcome. We forget about the seasons of wrestling, the dark nights of loneliness and the overwhelming fear that never seemed to stop.

When you are having your toughest battles with fear, these trenches are an invitation to experience transformation and fruitfulness like never before. At the same time, fear wants to shove you into a deep darkness of

hopeless loneliness, leaving you to think you are the only one battling this and freedom will never come.

PERMISSION FOR PROCESS

In the loneliness, I gave myself permission to grieve and to weep over the pain I was feeling. I allowed myself to go through a process of healing, rather than beating myself up as to why change was not happening overnight. Being kind to myself was incredibly helpful to the effectiveness of breaking through.

It is important that you stop waiting for everything to change by tomorrow and let yourself go through the process of daily learning new levels of understanding for freedom. Everyone needs to settle into their personal process of facing fear and overcoming.

When you go through the process, you have something to offer others who are going through the same struggles. If you got free by a quick prayer with little effort, what would you have to offer those who are deeply wrestling fear-based battles? It's the process of overcoming that really forms us and gives us the ammunition to help others. Because of this, I can look at people square in the face and honestly say...*I've been there.*

AN ARMY OF OVERCOMERS

Today, there is a great need for more people to step up and talk about the fears they are facing. The masses are battling in darkness, and few are breaking through the shame. The first time I shared my story publicly, so many in the room were deeply moved and identified with my battles. It made me think, "*why did I live with such shame over these issues?*" To this day, the biggest feedback I receive is, "*thank you for being real. I relate to your struggles. You've given me hope to overcome.*"

Because of this, what I have overcome and continue to overcome is now my ministry. I'll never forget what it was like to feel like I was drowning in fear on a 24/7 basis. In fact, I never want to forget. I've broken though so much, but I also have more to grow. Yet in the process, I am sobered and humbled by what God has helped me work through.

When you go through layers of healing and freedom, those victories become a gift that you deposit to others. Who you are in God is exchanged with them. Your victories lay out a framework for generations to build upon.

For most, their main struggle with fear is seeking to prevent them from their destiny. Fear is often standing in front of the hearts you will reach and the impact you will have on others. You are often one big decision away from facing fear and touching the hearts of those God has called you to reach.

EVERYONE HAS FEAR TO FACE

Everywhere I go, people are being hindered and held back by some form of fear. It can manifest through anxiety, panic attacks, chronic worry or simple day to day avoidance. As I dig through layers of heart issues, I often find that people are incredibly discouraged and filled with great loneliness. They feel so isolated in their battles and condemned that they are the only ones going through something like this.

Interestingly, all the people I meet with have similar battles. They often come down to a handful of themes everyone is facing. Yet the very nature of their struggle pushes them into an emotional island. I find myself saying, *“If I could get all these people in the same room together, they could really get encouraged, because they are all facing the same thing.”*

But that is what satan loves to do, make us feel that we are crazy and alone. I need you to understand that your battle is very real and many others are going through it as well. As you start sharing your story, you will find more and more people coming out of the woodwork to say, *“yeah . . . I struggle with that too. Thank you for sharing, because I thought I was alone in this.”*

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. In what ways have you felt isolated in your battles? What steps can you take today to move out of isolation?
2. In what way does shame try to beat you up regarding the battles you face?
3. What is a great way you can share your story in a way that can bless others, even though you are still in process and learning to overcome yourself?

PRAYER

Father God, I know that You do not shame, condemn or humiliate me in my struggle. You are right here to help me through this battle. I ask that You help me to see myself with kindness as I work through my process, knowing that many others are going through similar battles themselves.

I accept myself, even in the struggles I am facing. I choose to take my peace, knowing that its ok to learn and grow, day by day. I give myself permission to engage the process of healing that God has for me.

Father, help me to get out of isolation and break free from the shame that holds me back. I also pray that You put people in my path, who I can share my journey with and be a blessing to their life. May everything I have gone through be used as encouragement for others to overcome. In Jesus name, amen.



10

The Need for Safety

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everyone has a need for personal safety; a sense of relational connection with protection in their life. Fear is aware of this and will always seek to unravel our sense of experiencing safety. When safety in our hearts is compromised, fear gets an upper hand to condition us in avoidance and displacement.

The majority of people I work with who have any anxiety or worry related struggles have a “lack of safety” as a major theme in their personal history. They are attempting to overcome fear as best they can, but are often unaware of their unmet need for a greater sense of emotional safety in their life.

A lack of safety in love is the number one place of vulnerability that fear attacks. With this safety net compromised, fear can lead us into many unhealthy patterns. It may convince us to find safety through control in relationships. It can also make us feel immobilized, unable to take action freely. Most of all, fear will seek to separate you from the safety found in the love of God and in healthy relationships.

FEAR VS LOVE

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 1

John 4:18

Many people think the battle is between fear and faith. Though there is some truth to this, the foundational war going on in people's lives is between fear and love. The root antidote to any fear issue is love. Nothing is more powerful than love, for it sets the context by which all powerful relationships are formed.

The reason we struggle with fear is because our connection to love has been compromised in some way. Love brings the safety we were designed for in knowing that we are protected. It lets us know that whatever we face in life, we can handle with God's help. Love lets us know that someone has our back. It's the foundation that faith stands on to empower our life.

Every place where fear enters is a place where perfect love has not penetrated yet. Show me anyone who struggles with stress, anxiety and worry at increased levels or even low doses and I will also show you someone who is missing love in a certain area of their life. There is a personal history of not being loved, covered and nurtured properly in some kind of way. Because of this emptiness, fear seeks to take advantage.

Most of our fear issues lead back to our days of childhood. It is at this period of our life that we can be incredibly vulnerable to fear, especially when we need love and nurturing as a part of our foundational development. The vulnerability to fear grows when love, acceptance and covering are absent. If a child is not given the proper training to talk out and process through struggles with fear, they are often pushed down and suppressed. Later in life, grown adults are scratching their heads, wondering why they have certain fear issues and can't seem to connect the dots.

Our home and upbringing set the footprint for how we will initially deal with fear in our life. Many homes are filled with overt problems of rage, strife, and quarreling, leaving a wide-open door for fear to pull in and initiate its tormenting oppressions. Other homes can seem loving and safe, yet underneath the surface carry a hidden undercurrent of performance pressures, drivenness mentalities, and perfectionist ambitions. These excessively high standards, if pushed with too much intensity and pressure, can create fountains of potential distress and anxiety in the lives of family members. The point is, fear always looks for an area where nurturing love is absent, so it can utilize its weapons.

In working with scores of struggling marriages, I have found that way too many are not safe relational environments. Couples are not trained on how to have honest, yet healing conversations with each other. Therefore, deeper intimacy is not discovered and quite frankly, most couples live more out of fear towards each other than love. My first priority in marital coaching is often re-establishing safety that is needed to process wounds and destructive patterns in an atmosphere of love and grace.

HEARING THE WORDS

One of the powerful ways we experience love is by hearing it. When shared in a timely moment, the words, “*I love you*” add a sense of safety, care and empowerment like nothing else. The hearing of love is most meaningful when it comes from our parents, who speak over our lives. No matter how old you are, the weight of what your parents said and did NOT say still follow you.

For the multitudes struggling with fear, many have few memories of being told “*I love you,*” especially from their father. It may have even been absent from the mother. These three words spoken frequently and backed with loving action builds an internal compass to ward off the threat of fear’s attacks. Unfortunately, the number of people who do not even understand this blessing in their life is multiplying. No wonder anxiety, worry and stress are increasing. Love has not had its work in the hearts of people.

Whether or not we realize it, as a child, we all cling tightly to the words our parents speak to us. We soak in their actions with a great deal of receptivity. The initial experiences impart values and foundations that are laid down to build a growing future. When love is largely absent or conditional, it can create a deep-seated wound where fear can become a greater factor.

Most people who have experienced this lack in their life tell their world that “everything is fine.” They live with a tough exterior in attempts to fool others that they are “*over it.*” While deep in their heart is a brokenness that desperately needs to be mended. It is at this place where the healing work of God’s love can mend undercurrents of brokenness which keep men and women in bondage—especially to fear.

CREATED TO BE LOVED

God created human relationships, so we could have a visible, tangible representation of His love and care for us. He is a relational God who determined to reveal His identity of love through human interaction and heart to heart connection. So, when you grow up receiving love from your earthly father, you are shown a tangible image of your Heavenly Father's love. In tandem, when love, nurture and care is bestowed on you from your earthly mother, the nurturing of the Lord is revealed and established through an earthen vessel. As one develops and matures, the framework of learning to give and receive love in relationships is developed.

The father relationship is critical because God is a Father. In addition, Father God *is* love. He doesn't just *have* love. He *is* love. God is the very essence of love. When you see or experience love in this world, you have witnessed Father God.

Let us make sure we get something straight and clear. *You were designed and intended by God to enter into a world where you are loved, accepted and cherished.* Anything other than that is a counterfeit and not God's desire. He is not the author of relational destruction. In fact, it hurts His heart to see harm and injustice brought upon His children. These dreadful experiences are the result of people making wrong choices, while giving into a system of thought that is contrary to the knowledge of God.

WHO'S GOT YOUR BACK?

Our leverage against fear often comes down to a simple question: *Who's got your back?* The answer to this question will lead you into fear or the safety of love. It all depends on what your reference is.

Most people live believing they are all on their own. Their personal history is covered with fear-ridden experiences that caused them to believe that no one, including God Himself, has their back.

Our parents are the first reference in our lives that help answer this question. They are not meant to raise us in a bubble, but to establish our initial reference for walking in confident love. Their covering helps us navigate through tests and trials, while eventually releasing us off our training wheels so we can independently maneuver through life with confidence.

Although our hope is truly in God alone, He uses these earthly relationships to help us gain references for what His love is like. Knowing

that God *has our back* is first discovered through how people represent His love to us. When that is not properly demonstrated, our view of love becomes distorted and fear takes advantage of this vulnerability.

This is why we must recognize that any area in our life that is vulnerable to fear, is an area that needs perfect love. Having a reference of love in your heart sends clear signals that there is nothing to fear.

Most of our problems stem from not understanding and receiving the love of God. Having chronic fear is not an intelligence deficit, but a “love experience” deficit. Of course, receiving His love is not simply a cerebral process, but one that must be engaged with the heart. As we give permission for God to move in our heart, healing can take place as His love drives out the power of fear.

To begin the process, we need to be intentional about receiving . . . receiving love from God but also from healthy relationships. In the process of opening ourselves up to what love means, we position our hearts to be healed and strengthened against the influence of fear. Yet in order to connect to the love of God, we also have to possess a healthy understanding of who He is as a Father.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What does it mean for you to feel relationally safe? In what ways do you struggle to remain safe in your thoughts?
2. Growing up, when did you lose your sense of safety?
3. As a child, do you remember hearing your father and mother speak words of love to you on a regular basis?
4. In what way can love begin to have a work to displace your fears?
5. At the end of the day, do you feel the confidence that someone has your back? What would it look like if you did?
6. In what way can you position your heart to receive the love that God has for you? What about the love other people have for you?

PRAYER

Father God, I know that fear comes to challenge my sense of safety, to keep me separated from experiencing and living in the power of Your love. I ask that You help me receive the power of Your great love in my heart.

I want to know what it means to live confidently, knowing that You love me and have my back. I want to take my stand against fear, but I know the power of Your love is what will really destroy fear's influence. Today I make a decision to receive Your love. Help me to learn how to receive it. I thank You for Your love and open my heart to experience it more each day. In Jesus name, amen.



11

The Love that Makes the Difference

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hen making the decision to overcome fear, there are two approaches we all need to possess. The first action is a bold and strong stance against fear. It involves standing in such a way that we do not let the bully of fear intimidate us or hold us back. Therefore, developing our spiritual and emotional muscles to face fear is critical to the journey.

At the same time, we must also be aware of the second approach we need, which is actually more important than the first. It involves the power of resting in God's love, which has the power to cast out fear. The presence of His love literally displaces the work of fear.

God's love is a safe covering for our hearts, but experiencing His love needs to be connected to who He is as a Father. The greatest identity that God carries is one of being a perfect Father. Connecting to His love as a Father invites us to receive the invitation in Christ to be His child. It's the simplest, yet most powerful position we can stand in.

In the New Testament, we are given permission to connect to God our Father as "*Abba*." This Aramaic word gives us an invitation to reference

our God in a personal and intimate way. Translated in English, Abba can speak of, “Dad,” or “Papa.” “Father” is a formal term to use, as when we pray, “Our Father.” But “Dad” or “Papa” speaks of an intimate expression, where you can feel safe and protected as God’s son or daughter.

God intended for all His children to know Him, not only as Father, but as a Dad. One is more formal, the other more intimate. Connecting to *Abba* is one of the great privileges we have as children of God. Yet this is one of the most challenging subjects facing believers today.

DAD GIVES JESUS STRENGTH

Abba is used three times in the New Testament. Each placement gives us a fresh revelation of who God is as a Dad to His sons and daughters.

One use of this word *Abba* is found in the gospel of Mark, where Jesus is facing great tension in the garden during an hour of tremendous need:

He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.”

Mark 14:35-36

If Jesus Christ needed to be able to call upon His Dad in His greatest time of trial, then each and every one of us as God’s children must recognize our need to have an *Abba* connection. In that moment of tremendous agony, Jesus called out to His Dad to help Him through His most trying experience. Because He had a solid relationship with the Father, Jesus was able to draw the strength He needed to submit and remain faithful to the redemptive plan that He was sent to fulfill.

With this *Abba* revelation, we learn that Dad has our back. It becomes personal and heart-felt. The day I began to know God as Dad, His love was no longer head-knowledge, it was heart connection. The greatest power any believer can engage is the love relationship we can have with Dad that will drive out, cast out and displace the work of fear. There is nothing to fear when you are loved. Dad’s got your back.

A NEW WALK AND NEW VIEW

Of all the messages I have taught over the years, the *Abba* revelation has the most resistance around it. Believers have created spiritual habits that

cause them to focus on Jesus while avoiding the Father. It's easy to create certain theological frameworks that protect us from addressing our pain.

The real truth is, we are not all comfortable with the word *Dad*. Plain and simple. So it can be uncomfortable to address God in that manner. We are often trained to see Him in a way that is not accurate to His loving nature.

This leaves us with broken hearts that have become vulnerable to fear. Masses of well-meaning believers carry this sense of distance from God's love. The greatest reason is because they do not know who He is as a loving Dad.

When you have a broken heart, it's difficult to just get over things, no matter how many times people tell you to. You can go to counselor after counselor and conference after conference. If your broken heart is not addressed regarding who God is as Father, as a Dad, you'll keep hitting walls that don't budge. Father God needs to heal your broken heart.

God wanted you to be protected and covered in His love. His design was for you to see His love through Christ and the people He has put in your life. The broken references we have in relationships often need healing, so we can freely receive God's great love.

As a part of this healing process, you need to let Dad heal your brokenness. For many, the phrase *Dad* in reference to God does not compute in their hearts. This is a sign that your heart has been broken in this area.

For me, I had a hard time with this concept, because I was shown that God is holy and perfect, but to the extent where I could not approach Him. My reference was based on religious condemnation and not loving relationship. His holiness was emphasized to such an extreme measure that I always felt distant from His love. This kept me from knowing that I could jump into His arms and receive His loving embrace. Everything changed when I allowed the *Abba* revelation to become a part of my life.

ABBA BREAKS THE WORK OF REJECTION

The second use of *Abba* is in Romans.

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." Romans 8:15

The counterfeit to adoption is rejection. It makes you feel and believe that you do not belong, you are not accepted and you will have to earn any love or approval in your life. Rejection does all it can to keep you from resting in what your Father in heaven says about you.

In breaking free from the clutches of fear, it's important to disconnect ourselves from a rejection mindset. Rejection partners with fear to keep us in a place of bondage; never feeling embraced by the power of God's love. If we remove rejection, we can more confidently walk in God's acceptance of us. I have dedicated an entire book on the rejection mindset that can help you discover the amazing healing found in getting free from its lies.

ABBA TEACHES US TO LIVE IN SONSHIP

The third use of Abba is in Galatians:

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Galatians 4:6

Second to experiencing God's love, the greatest manifestation of an Abba relationship is when we walk confidently as sons, not slaves. One of the ways you can know you are confident in your sonship is when you are able to relate to Father, Abba or Dad in a way that is empowering. Sonship means you are comfortable sitting at the table with your Father and connecting to intimacy.

Most people are not comfortable, so they relegate to performance-based living in attempts to earn their relationship with God. This usually perpetuates a never ending religious cycle of serving, intended to earn God's love and approval, while still feeling unworthy to receive His love. Abba's love teaches us how to live in a posture of receiving, not trying to live *for* love. He shows us that we are not slaves, we are sons.

BUT HOW DO I START?

I believe this *Abba revelation* is for every believer who is willing to know who Dad is. Yet the simple question kicking around in many minds is, "How do I begin?" Although each person's journey is unique, there are some important things to keep in mind:

- Open up your heart. This seems very simple, but it is many times a closed or guarded heart that keeps God's love from penetrating. Ask Him to help you in this.

- Begin learning what it means to receive love. Everything changes when we learn to receive. Position your heart to say yes to the love that God has for you.
- Allow God to heal the poor references you have of Him, which goes back to your earthly father relationship. Give God permission to heal those unhealthy references.
- Start by addressing Him as your Father. Jesus came to show you the Father. He is the way to the Father, so begin connecting to who He is as a Father and Dad. Ask Him to show you how to connect to it.
- Instead of running from pain and avoiding it, allow God to love you in those areas where you hurt. Trust Him to lovingly work in your heart.
- Be open to the people God sends into your life. These connections can become catalysts for healing. Many times, when we ask for His love, He will send someone who will love us. Be open to that possibility.
- Practice thanksgiving regarding the love that God has for you. Gratitude can open up your heart to love like nothing else.

For those of you who have not experienced this kind of love, let me first say to you that I am sorry. I am sorry you did not hear those words, “*I love you*” on a regular basis. I am sorry for those of you who did not hear it at all. I am sorry that you were not shown love, but were made vulnerable to fear.

Yet God says with a heart of compassion,

“that is not Me. I am not like that. I love you with an everlasting love and I am so pleased to call you My child. Nothing you can ever say or do will make Me love you more or any less. I want you to be confident in living as My child. I want you to sense my arms wrapped around you, giving you the comfort that says ‘I will never leave you.’ I am performing good things on your behalf. Would you open your heart to receive? I love you so much, I sent my Son to die for you, so that you could join the family. I am your Father, and I am asking you to live as my dearly loved child. Will you accept my invitation?”

Let His love heal your broken heart. It will set you free from fear and will give you a security like you have never had before. It is in this love of the Father that we find our true identity, as we will see in the next chapter.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word, father? What about dad? What kind of references come up in your mind?
2. What makes it difficult to relate to God not only as a Father, but as Dad?
3. If you were 100% comfortable with God as your Dad, what would that do for your life?
4. What block keeps you from engaging Father God as a loving Dad?
5. Is there any area where you need to forgive your parents for not showing you the love of God and giving you an example of His nature?

PRAYER

God, You are a Father, and I acknowledge who You are as a Father today. I ask that you help my heart to experience the depth of Your love and goodness towards me. Heal the places in my heart that are damaged or that lack an awareness of Your love and goodness. Break open any hard areas of my heart that have not been softened by Your love.

Heal my broken heart and help me to experience Your great love for me. You are a Good Father. Heal me in what it means to relate to You as a Father. You love me and I want to receive that love today. I thank You that from today forward, I will connect to Your love in a new and fresh way. In Jesus name I pray these things, amen.



12

Developing an Empowered Hope

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ear works relentlessly, so that over time, your ability to see your future with hope is worn down. For the many people who have sat in my office or poured their heart out to me on a phone conversation, the anxiousness, worry and pressure has worn them down, to the point that their sense of hope has diminished.

I often ask people the question, “*if fear was not in the equation, what would you be doing?*” I ask this to get a clearer picture of their vision. I am also looking to get a sense of how strong hope is in their life.

THE NECESSITY OF HOPE

Hope is the picture of how you see your life. It involves the divine perspective you have on your journey and future. If love is strong in your life, then hope will be solid, because hope is built on love. When you have a strong hope, faith has a solid substance to grab onto in order to take action.

Yet for many, their sense of hope has been slowly worn down and even shattered. They cannot see anything through a lens of confidence. Fear has taken their painful past and projected it onto their future. This is what leads many who have anxiety issues to eventually develop chronic depression.

Anxiety in the heart of a man causes depression...

Proverbs 12:25

The first antidote to healing ourselves from fear is to receive the power of love that casts out fear. Our next assignment is to rebuild our daily perspective and hope. Fear will do all it can to keep us locked in a prison of despair, discouragement and hopelessness.

DISEMPOWERED THINKING

What we give attention to in our thoughts will grow. The power of what we think about and focus on is incredibly important. In fact, when we struggle with fear, it is usually a result of what we have been spending our life focusing on. Fear loves to have the loudest voice in our thoughts, with the intention that we will pay attention and listen to it continually. Meanwhile, we end up losing sight of an empowered hope that is available to us.

Our thoughts either empower our growth and transformation, or they disempower us. Many admit that the majority of their thoughts are negative and disempowering. Thoughts add confidence or take it away. Thoughts train us to live as victims or overcomers. One of those disempowering thought systems is fear. It seeks to disarm you from walking in confident hope every step of the way. The more we listen to it speak, the more it will frame our perspective.

The problem with discerning fear is that at first, it's thoughts are preventative and helpful. Fear can keep us from falling off a steep cliff and other dangerous situations. Yet it doesn't stop there. Fear wants to gain as much ground as possible, keeping us in a constant state of uneasiness and apprehension.

The level of hope we live by will determine how much fear we listen to. Biblical hope involves a joyful expectancy, yet one of the manifestations of fear's presence is a lack of joy. Instead of living like a kid who is excited about what presents will show up on Christmas day, most people live with an apprehension of the future.

EMPOWERED THOUGHTS

We can identify "God thoughts" better when we connect to thinking that is based on faith, hope and love. Everything God does is built on those three precepts. They form the foundation of sanity and peace.

God's thoughts are very empowering. In other words, when He speaks, He releases a grace for us to take what He says and walk it out. His thoughts empower us to break off the chains that bind us, to face our fears and overcome situations that seem insurmountable.

The hope that God delivers never disappoints, because His hope is based on His love for us. That's why if we have a hope that is anchored in Him, we can rely on His faithful presence to work powerfully in our lives. We build our confidence each day in this by filling our minds with a God-filled perspective.

I have noticed over the years that many people have a very disempowering relationship with God. They keep asking Him to rescue them, while ignoring the fact that God's power is in them to rise up and overcome. Many believers have a hope that is based on circumstances changing more than walking in personal change on the inside.

True hope from God is always based on the love of God. Love says that you have what it takes in God to overcome. The work of Christ is available in you to empower you in every situation. Biblical hope is always joyfully anticipating what God is going to do next. In addition, the hope that God gives us is always action oriented. It welcomes faith to act on what is seen in our hearts so that great things begin to manifest.

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Whatever hope we carry is the story that we live by. It is an inner narrative that combines where we come from, where we are at and where we are headed. The narrator of our personal story paints the picture of how we think our life is going to turn out. Our story also gives a focus to our thoughts, establishing what we ponder on and look for. Unfortunately, most people live with a very disempowering story.

If you process your personal history with a lot of unresolved fear, then your story will be filled with apprehension, dread and negativity. Fear will capture the negative experiences of the past and project them onto the future. It will immobilize you from entering new chapters or opportunities.

Most people are vulnerable to fear-based thinking because the story they live by is filled with fear. Therefore, in most situations, they find themselves gravitating towards a fearful perspective. Overtime, fear becomes their best friend. They hate it, but know of nothing else.

The good news is that you can become more in charge of what story you are going to listen to. The prophet Isaiah said, “*whose report will you believe?*” (Isaiah 53:1) Everyone has a decision as to what report in life they are going to listen to. It will form and determine the health of our future.

When I made a decision to start overcoming fear in my life, I made a choice to change the story I was listening to. I decided I was going to face fear rather than run from it. I was not going to let fear dictate my life anymore.

Day by day, I kept chipping away at what fear had taught me and began to establish a new story; a new report on what I believed God can do in my life. It was all about the narrative I was listen to. It changed what I focused on, what I looked for and what I anticipated. Instead of the anxious guy who dreaded each day, I became the excited kid who just cannot wait for Christmas morning, so he can open his presents.

CHRONIC NEGATIVITY

Breaking free from a fear-based story also detoxified my heart from a lot of negativity. Most of my life, my thoughts leaned towards that which was negative and defeating. Whenever projecting into the future, I would plan and anticipate the worst. And when something negative happened, it gave me justification for my negative thinking.

That is why I began to practice negativity fasts, where I would spend 3 days, 10 days, 30 days or 40 days purposefully detoxing the influence of negativity. It helped me address where I would easily fall into disempowering thinking. It showed me how negative my thoughts really were and empowered me to start making changes.

You may want to consider today moving into a negativity fast, to drown the thoughts of fear and establish a new hope based on what God says about you.

CHANGE YOUR “WHAT IF”

Fear has a way of conditioning us, so it does take time to cultivate renewed pathways. One of the ways we can do this is by creating empowering “*what ifs.*” As I mentioned earlier in this book, fear’s favorite phrase is “*what if?*” It starts with a “*what if*” and ends with a disempowering conclusion.

When we build our thoughts on faith, hope and love, it develops empowering “*what ifs.*” When my wife and I pastored, we would encourage people to stir up their hope by saying, “*Why not us?*” We’d dream about what God could do and we’d say, “*why not us?*” Turn your “*what if’s*” into empowering expectation!

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Where have you noticed that past disappointments and painful experiences have formed your perspective on the future?
2. What is the current condition of your hope? How has your outlook been distorted or infected by disappointment?
3. In what way can hope be rebuilt in your life?
4. What is the story you carry about your life that is disempowering your future?
5. Has negativity infected your perspective? In what way can detoxing negativity help you empower your perspective?
6. If you change your “what if” to an empowering question, what possibilities would open up?

PRAYER

Father God, I come before You with my whole heart, asking that You rebuild and strengthen the hope that I carry, so that I can live in the perspective that You have for me. I recognize that I have negative, disempowering and hopeless thoughts that infiltrate my life. I do not want those thoughts to rule me, so I invite Your love and hope to be the dominant perspective I focus on. Give me Your heart so that I can see with greater confidence.

Father, I give You the disappointments of my life. I give You my heartache, pain and sorrow, so that You can heal my heart and give me a fresh perspective. I allow myself to process through those areas with You so that I can find a new hope that is empowered and victorious. I thank You for the confidence I can have in my future because of You. In Jesus name, amen.



13

Faith that Destroys Fear

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n any given moment, two forces are seeking to become the dominant influence in your life—faith and fear. Both portray a particular focus and point to certain outcomes. Yet they are worlds apart in what they lead to. One is based on a dreadful outcome, the other on a victorious future.

Fear and faith both operate from unseen realities. You cannot see them, but you can perceive them in your thoughts. Fear works diligently to pollute your ability to access faith, or to even know what faith looks like. So much so that many people believe they are living by faith, when in reality, fear is the driving force.

As I began to get clearer on the nature of how faith works, I was able to separate it out from what fear was saying with greater clarity. It left me with an important decision that I believe you will need to make yourself. *“Was I going to be held back and pressed down by fear or was I going to enter into the power of activating my faith?”*

I remember the decision being made, as I drew a clear line in the sand. No longer would I be tossed about by fear’s nagging pressure or its impulses to run and hide. I firmly resolved to divorce myself from the agreements I had with fear and learn to embrace a new life of faith.

This didn't change everything overnight, but it positioned my sails into a new direction. Over time, the thoughts I listened to changed. My thoughts and feelings slowly came into alignment with a new resolve that I wasn't going to let go of. Decisions became firmer and the direction of my life much clearer.

The ceiling on what was possible made way for a new hope as my confidence increased and boldness grew. I learned to take on impossibilities with a more victorious perspective. This firm faith decision taught me to look at my struggles with an overcomer's attitude. Everything can begin to change when we make the decision that we are not allowing the voice of fear to be our counselor any more.

THE SUBSTANCE

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

To overcome fear, faith needs to become a trusted ally. It is the word *pistis* in Greek and speaks of a divine *conviction, reliance and assurance*. It is everything fear is trying to steal from you; the conviction of who God is inside of you, a reliance on His love for you and an assurance of His consistent presence in your life.

Faith takes hope and makes it substance; a living reality. Without hope, there is no fuel for faith to move. Faith captures hope and acts on it. Therefore, if you have any amount of hope, then faith is waiting to take action.

For so many, it seems that faith has little to grab onto because hope has been dwindling. It feels like hope is lost. When hope is alive, faith has room to operate. But when hope has been compromised or constant disappointment has infected our hearts, our spiritual eyesight is more tuned into the substance of things *not* hoped for.

THINGS NOT HOPED FOR

Fear is a counterfeit to faith and points to outcomes *not* hoped for. The focus and expectation are on everything that could go wrong. Fear hijacks your ability to imagine, causing you to project worst-case scenarios into the future. It wants those thoughts and feelings to be so strong, you become convinced that fear is accurate about your future. Over time, hope gets clouded over with dread, negativity and apprehension.

Your loving Heavenly Father seeks to build your faith so that you see your future as being filled with a good hope. Fear wants to remind you of your painful past, while projecting it onto your future. It will condition you in patterns of hypersensitivity, overcautiousness, paranoia and worry. Fear demands that you become oppressed every day, so that you lose your peace and stay out of the rest of God.

Your freedom over fear is going to greatly depend on what kind of thoughts you pay attention to. One way that we can discern the voice of fear and the voice of faith, is by recognizing that faith *leads* us, while fear unleashes forceful *pressure* .

THE PRESSURE OF FEAR

Whenever fear is in operation, it will create one of two responses—one being *fight* and the other *flight* . The **fight** response induces pressure, that hurries us into a striving lifestyle, where we exhaust our resources under busyness, hyperactivity and constant hustle.

Faith is about leading . Fear is about pressure .

I find that God's faith has a unique way of *leading* us, not adding pressure to us. God does not pressure and force us. He leads us into paths of righteousness and empowerment with His great love.

Fear has a way of driving you, pushing you, and relentlessly hurrying you to do all you can to survive, strive and escape. Fear is all about pressure and stress. It wars against the rest of God, which is the most powerful place for a believer to live.

Most of the "hustle" we observe today is coming out of a place of fear and not confident rest. Our culture has conditioned us to strive in everything, where we are constantly busy and overburdened. When under the pressure of fear, we live with a weight that "*all the pressure is on us.*"

That is why one of the first steps of freedom from pressure is to release your works to God and surrender the results of situations into His hands. It's not about stopping our labor, it's about changing the motivation behind what we do. Entering into rest also involves letting go of the works that do nothing but add more stress, anxiety and frustration. For most people, you could probably let go of 30% of what you are doing and it would only be a start. We are way overburdened and its making way for fear to have easy access.

Many who struggle with fear have a really tough time discerning the voice of God. Too much pressure has been placed upon them to weed through all the voices that clamor for their attention. I believe that by unveiling fear's tactics, you can move from being pressured by fear into being led by the Spirit of God. This will take some time, practice and renewal, but it can be done.

God's Holy Spirit does not pressure us, but leads us. Fear pushes and drives incessantly from the back seat screaming, "*Common let's go! You'd better do this now! You'd better hurry! Go! Go! Hurry! Hurry! Worry! Worry! What if? What if? What are you going to do now?*" With all those impulses and bombardments, too many people end up exhausted and burned out at the end of the day. They drain their resources and wonder why they are fried, tense, stressed out, depressed and sick.

When I served on a large church staff, I had all sorts of projects that I strived through. Many times I justified that drivenness and gave credit to God for all of it. Now I certainly do not take away from the wonderful ways that God used me during those seasons. There were certainly some awesome things He did through me.

Yet in retrospect, He just wanted me to rest in Him more; not add more meetings and perform more tasks. He wanted my extra time to be filled with rest, enjoyment, and fellowship with His presence and His people. He desired for me to lay down all my dead works and let His Spirit lead the way to bring about supernatural increase.

I wanted to please Him with my efforts, yet He was already pleased with me. He just wanted me to rest in Him. I am not teaching against working hard or being diligent. Life is hard work. Discipline and effort are great traits to develop, but we need to let go of the pressure that torments us day and night, never letting us be still and get refreshed. Let's be honest, most of our striving and unending hustle is based more on fear's influence than God's leading.

THE REST OF FAITH

Faith is wrapped in a world of God's rest, where we yield to His perspective and act on it. Healthy faith will ultimately produce a life of rest, where what flows out of us draws from a refreshing inflow of God's energy

and power. God is a faithful Father that desires to take us by the hand and lead us into places that hope points to.

Psalm 23 is a wonderful example of how God leads His children along in life. It says that He “*leads me beside the still waters.*” It is important to notice here that God is shown in this passage as a Shepherd, One who has deep care and concern to watch over the sheep. A good shepherd will go to any length to insure the safety and health of the flock. His desire is to lead the sheep into places of restoration and rest. As long as the shepherd is there, everything is going to be OK.

The word *lead* in the original language actually means “*to run with a sparkle, flow, protect, sustain, carry, feed, guide, lead (gently, on).*” God is saying that He is *running with a sparkle*, probably because He loves us so much. It gives the picture of a Dad who is excited at our existence and potential. He is protecting us, sustaining us, carrying us, feeding us, guiding us, and gently showing us a place of rest.

Psalm 23:2a could read, “He *causes* us to lie down in green pastures.” That is what God will do for His sheep, His children! It is God’s desire for you. If only we would release ourselves to let God do just that.

In Hebrews 4, God proclaims His call for His people to be led into the place He refers to as “rest.” It is where every believer belongs. Power in the Kingdom operates through rest. Yet this is not a passive position, void of activity. Rest does not mean sitting on the couch all day waiting for things to happen. It’s an active position, without the pressure, while stepping out with growing confidence over fear.

FEAR AND PASSIVITY

The second response to fear is the **flight** response, where we avoid and withdraw. It’s one of the most debilitating influences on people today—the bondage of passivity. Many people proclaim they are living in rest, when in reality, they are actually serving fear by living passive.

The deception of passivity often hides under the guise of “*I am waiting on the Lord*” or “*I am not worried. . . I am simply trusting in God.*” Meanwhile, they are operating more in avoidance; not dealing with the issues they need to face. What many call “resting” is often a world of denial. Situations all around them need their attention, but they have been trained to tune it all out, as they sit in a spiritual and emotional slumber.

In fact, spiritual passivity is unleashing destruction in more homes, churches and communities than anything else. Fear keeps millions of people from taking action on what is possible because it haunts them with fear of failure and fear of rejection.

TAKING ACTION

The only way to break out of passivity is to begin taking action. You will probably still feel fear's influence, but you take that step of faith anyway. Learn to do more things afraid, because it is in the process of stepping out that fear gets driven out.

The power of faith works best when we take action. Even if we have anxiety, insecurity and worry screaming in our being, taking steps towards what we are afraid of is the greatest way to disarm fear. Many times, I have learned to do things, while still feeling afraid.

Faith knows that breakthrough is not found before we step out, but usually after we take action. Most of the time, fear is simply keeping you from taking the next step.

Taking action involves courage, yet you cannot wait for everything to fall into place to step out. As you continue to act in accordance with what faith says, you begin to build or in many cases rebuild your confidence levels. For many people I have worked with who have anxiety issues or fear that's holding them back, the journey of overcoming involves rebuilding their confidence, one step at a time.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Don't overwhelm yourself in this process. For most, you are probably one big decision away from everything changing. Don't make life complicated. Once you make the big decision that is being held by fear, everything else comes under the domino effect.

What you really want is actually on the other side of fear. But if you don't make the firm decision, you'll remain in double mindedness and be taken by every wave that comes your way. Your victory is right around the corner. You just need some encouragement to build your faith muscles again and kick out the invasion of fear.

. . . this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.

1 John 5:4

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What would faith look like in your life, if it was based on a really strong hope?
2. What actions would faith take in your life if fear was no longer a driving motivation?
3. Where in your life have you lived in a pressure-filled way and not in rest?
4. Are there areas of passivity that are held captive by fear? What would it look like to take action and move forward?
5. What is the one step you can take today to move from faith to fear? What is the one decision can you make that could lead to a domino effect of change?

PRAYER

Father God, it is my heart's desire to live by faith and maximize my potential in life. I do not want to be held back by fear any longer, nor do I want it influencing my life the way it has. I desire to live in the confidence of faith, built on a strong hope that is secure.

I ask that You empower me to walk by faith in greater power. Give me clarity on where I need to step out and trust Your love for me in a whole new way. Even though I may have fear giving me thoughts, I do not want to serve its ways.

I make a firm decision today that I will not serve fear as a driving motivator anymore. I draw a line in the sand, as I will not be held captive any more. I declare that I will rise up in faith and God will empower me, each step of the way.

Father, I thank You that You have my back and are walking with me each step of the way, no matter what I am going through. "Yeah, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me." (Psalm 23:4) In Jesus name, amen.



14

God is Not Trying to Torment You



od gets the blame for more problems in the world than anyone else. Too often, it's assumed that everything that happens in life is just a part of His plan. People can easily slip into believing that every loud thought and impulse originates from God or when it comes to tormenting thoughts, He simply *just made us to think that way*.

These mindsets can leave believers under a world of confusion and little empowerment to fight the battles they face. We will be powerless if we don't realize that the torment of fear comes from our enemy, not God.

If you don't recognize the invisible war going on all around, you may end up thinking God authors the troubling thoughts you have. In the midst of fear's assault, we can often ask ourselves,

God, where are You in this?

Are You putting this fear on me?

Where is this fear coming from?

How do I get free from this?

In the depth of my personal struggle with anxiety, I cried out to God for answers. I prayed so much, I often wore my voice out. The problem was, I

was begging Him to relieve me of anxiety, instead of getting myself equipped to fight the battle Jesus gave me the tools for.

We so easily forget that we were born into war, a battle in the heavenlies that shows up in our thoughts. The tension of the confrontation revolves around what beliefs and perspectives you and I will give our attention to. The more room certain thought patterns have to flourish, the greater they can limit our potential. The enemy knows this and works relentlessly to infect our thinking.

Without a warfare perspective, it can be easy to forget about the thief we wrestle against. He is responsible for stealing, killing and destroying, not God. Yet one of the enemy's biggest tactics involves wreaking havoc in the lives of people, while convincing us that God did it. If He can't convince us that God authored it, he will lead you to believe that God did nothing to help.

So, when fear arises, many people do not know where to place God in the midst of their struggle. They may think everything that happens in their life is a direct assignment from Him. This creates a lot of confusion when it comes to discernment and gaining wisdom.

In my deepest struggle with anxiety, symptoms would rush through my body so strongly, I would lose my appetite and have this nauseous pain in my gut. I would feel an overwhelming tightness in my chest that would not leave.

No one mentored me on recognizing that the enemy uses fear against us. I just didn't know how to discern my thoughts. Therefore, I was left perceiving that the intense promptings were from God. *Maybe He was trying to tell me something.*

So, for years, I always followed my gut. I began to think that every loud thought and feeling was God's way of getting my attention and signaling me. This can be an incredibly unhealthy way to live, but it's all I knew to do. When we don't have a grid for understanding where thoughts come from, we can label "God" on almost any thought that comes our way.

FIRST STEP TOWARDS SANITY

The power to overcome fear's influence dramatically increased the more I became aware that not every thought I heard was my own. You and I

can receive a thought from God, but we can often receive thoughts from the enemy, without being aware.

When the veil came off my eyes, the spiritual war regarding my thoughts became so much clearer. It helped me to see that I wasn't crazy. I wasn't losing my mind. I simply had an enemy giving me thoughts.

Over time, I was no longer shocked or taken back by troubling thoughts that would come my way. I was awakened to the fact that I am a warrior in the midst of a battlefield. I was sobered to realize how the enemy will send any counterfeit and destructive thought my way, especially if I will listen to it.

I was no longer taken off guard when anxiety was pulsating through my being. The bodily symptoms were a signal of fear's influence and reminded me to keep arming myself to cast down fear-based thoughts and to grow in the perfecting love of God.

This awakening led me into years of learning and discovering the power of thoughts. It awakened my life in a tremendous way and empowered me to decide which thoughts would have my focus and attention.

In this season, the Bible came alive to me like never before.

For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:7

I read that verse a thousand times, but one day the simple truth awakened my heart: *God has not given me this tormenting fear. This anxiety is not from Him. He is not sending me a panic attack. This fear is not His way of communicating something to me.* This simple precept opened up a swell of fresh air into my being. What a relief to know that when fear is knocking on my door, it's not from Him.

As simple as it seems, I find that many are still wondering where their anxious and tormenting thoughts comes from. Your first line of defense is empowered when you can say with great assurance, *"These tormenting thoughts are not from God!"*

Father God is filled with how much He loves you, not by how He can sadistically torment you. Yet many are still perplexed on this matter. It's understandable, as decades of condemning preaching and unloving perspectives were communicated, regarding God's nature. All the while,

this made us more afraid of Him, rather than safe to approach Him in freedom.

God does not use tormenting fear to speak to His people or motivate them. In fact, using fear to motivate is a manipulative action and God will not manipulate you in relationship.

Your enemy is the one who uses fear as a spiritual attack. The assault takes place in your thinking. Because so many have not been equipped to obtain victory over a spirit of fear, they can think their brain is just messed up or they don't have enough intelligence to overcome. Worst yet, many can wind up believing, "*this is just how God made me*" as they look at the fears they face and the anxiety that plagues them.

God is not the author of evil, nor does He tempt humanity with evil. God loves the entire planet. Before we ever loved Him, He loved us so much that He sent His Son to die. It is imperative that we do not disgrace His character by blaming fear and anxiety attacks that come our way upon God.

He may lead you into places that cause you to face your fears, as He is a Father who stretches us in our growth journey. But He doesn't author tormenting fear in your life.

It is also important to remember that God has certainly placed us into a spiritual battlefield to establish His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. As a part of this battle, fear presents itself as one of our foes. The good news is that God through Christ Jesus has given us the spiritual weapons and artillery to stand up against this adversary and defeat it. Father God does not take delight in seeing any of His children in hopeless torment and He has a better way. I plead with you to not blame Him, because those calamities are not a part of His ways. God has a divine plan to set you free and bring back that which fear has stolen from your life.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

There is a "fear of the Lord" that the Scriptures speak of, but it is a completely different fear that produces different results. The fear that does not come from God produces torment. The fear of the Lord produces an overwhelming awe and respect for the glory of God. This healthy awe will enhance divine hunger within us to know God more and draw near to His presence.

The fear of the Lord is not intended to send us running away in terror and avoidance. In fact, it will stir up a seeking heart of worship that not only receives His love, but yearns for a deeper touch of His presence. The fear of the Lord keeps us humble, leads us to repentance and reminds us of the splendor and wonder of God's majesty. This biblical fear is not the kind of fear that I am talking about. The fear I am speaking of in this book is what the Bible calls a *spirit of fear* .

WHAT COMES FROM GOD?

While fear always produces torment and a lack of peace, God's voice produces power, love and a sound mind. The more our thoughts are grounded in how God thinks, the more love, power and soundness we will experience. Power does not mean fear is absent, it means we rise up to manifest God's miraculous ability despite what fear is saying. When we rest in what God says, it provides the greatest amount of soundness, peace and sanity in our minds.

Instead of power, fear produces immobility, passiveness and timidity. Rather than soaking in love, fear drives you to escape, panic and isolate. When fear is in operation, you can forget having a sound mind, because it will never offer it. Torment, terror, anxiety, dread, worry, panic, and insanity become the atmospheric conditions. When fear is in command, there is a struggle to even have strength and motivation.

Power, love and a sound mind represent the Godhead well. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit all have a place in helping you overcome the work of fear. Power comes from the Holy Spirit, who endues us with dynamite boldness to face fear and triumph. A sound mind is found in Jesus Christ, who is the Living Word, who breathes life and soundness to our thinking. Love originates from the Father, who possesses all the love we need to cast out fear.

I can remember time and time again, as I was learning to defeat anxiety and panic attacks, I would remind myself, "*This is not from God and this is not me. This is from the enemy.*" Fear had come against me and I was determined to win the battle over it. I would repeat this until I understood fully in my heart and mind that it was true. With this practice, I gradually began to build an arsenal that would eventually avalanche the fortress of fear. God is not tormenting you, but He is calling you to face fear and apprehend your destiny that is on the other side.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. In ways do you go along with your thoughts and feelings without asking, "Where is this coming from?"
2. Where do you find that fear sneaks into your thinking without you even realizing it?
3. When it comes to power, love and a sound mind, which of those three areas seems to be the one where God is building you up in the most?
4. In what way does it help you to know that tormenting fear does not come from God?
5. What insight is God revealing to your heart in overcoming fear at this stage?

PRAYER

Father, I thank You that tormenting fear does not come from You. I am grateful that I do not need to be afraid of You, nor do I need to hide from You. You have given me the ability to overcome and I receive Your love, a sound mind and power.

You have destined me to shine as an overcomer. So, when fear knocks on my door, I will know that You are not tormenting me with it, but You are with me to empower my victory. No matter how dark or intense fear is speaking to me, with You by my side, I can face anything. I receive that today. In Jesus name, amen.



15

FEAR IS NOT YOU

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any who have written to me or received personal consultation have often asked, “*Am I crazy?*” or “*Is my brain broken?*” They’ve been under so many unrelenting thoughts, they wonder if they are going to lose their mind. Being bombarded on a day to day basis with a deep lack of peace can easily cause someone to fall into condemnation, thinking, “*what’s wrong with me?*”

I remember that feeling very clearly.

It is important to know that tormenting fear is not from God. You also need to know that tormenting fear is not who you are.

You are not crazy.

You are not a lunatic.

You are also not the only one going through this. I know that many have told you to “get over it,” yet you have not been able to. You are not beyond hope. In fact, I know what it feels like to be hopeless with anxiety and unending panic attacks. You can get through this and overcome, while learning some amazing things along the way.

Fear not, for God is about to do a new work of freedom in your life that will set you on a course. It may take some persistence, work with new habits and mindsets, but I believe with all my heart that you can do it. If I can come out of years of oppression, you can too. I'm not a genius. The key to my success was that I simply did not quit.

DEFINING WHO YOU ARE

The first step to discerning fear is recognizing that it does not come from God. The next stage is for you to recognize that tormenting fear is not you. Being bound up in fear is not just who you are. You may have fear working in your life, but you are not fear.

Living in chronic fear is not just the way you are. I have worked with many people who have been exhausted by their fear issues with little progress. They conclude that "*this is just the way I am.*" Others will take it a step further to say, "*God made me this way*" as if to say that God hard wires people to be anxious all the time. Why would he tell us to be anxious for nothing if He made us to be anxious people?

Rebuilding your life in a way that overcomes fear will need to include removing fear as a part of your identity. Everyone has fear issues they wrestle with, but God did not create us to have identities built upon chronic fear.

This means that you are not fear. Chronic tormenting fear is not a part of your design. Occasional fight or flight from stressful situations are what your body was designed for. But a continual lifestyle that lives under the work of fear is not what you were made for.

This is not a word to condemn, but to set free. Part of my personal renovation came about by defining what God says about me and separating out what fear says about me. As I did this, I realized how much of my thoughts, choices and even my personality was formed by fear.

GOD'S EXHORTATION: "FEAR NOT"

From beginning to end, the Scriptures clearly reveal God commanding His people to "fear not." In fact, the Word of God tells us specifically to "fear not" about as many times as there are days in a year! It is one of the predominant phrases that is repeated in the Bible. It was often directed towards people whom God wanted to use greatly.

Almighty God knew we would have to face fear, so He commanded us repeatedly to *not* give in to it. He gave people the call to climb enormous mountains—they just needed to keep in mind to not cave into fear’s influence. It’s actually through the journey that God trains us to face fear and develop muscles that overcome it. God will call you into all kinds of amazing journeys—we simply need not fear.

RECOGNIZING YOUR DESIGN

God does not see you as a fearful person. His vision of you from the foundation of the earth does not include fear as a part of your personal blueprint. His plan and design is for you to become conformed into the image of His Son, while viewing yourself as a joint heir with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:16-17). Your identity is a son or daughter of the Most High God. He is your Father and Dad. Out of that identity, He desires for you to freely live, without fear holding you back.

God’s plan involves us overcoming fear and stepping out into our spiritual destiny. As we align ourselves in this truth, our objective turns to seeking to be who God wants us to be, not what fear has programmed us to be. In fact, stepping into what God has for us, leads us into a journey of refining our identity to what He says about us.

When fear is kicking up in any shape or form, remember that it is not you! This might seem too simple of a concept, but for many, fear has shaped and designed their personalities. We will end up describing ourselves in terms of the fears working within us if we are not spiritually discerning.

You are *not* made to be a fearful person, an anxious person, or a worrier. You are not designed to be timid. You may have struggles with it, but it’s not your God-given identity. Sometimes in order to figure out who you are, it’s important to separate out who you are not. When we remove fear from the equation, how we see ourselves and our lives will change dramatically.

FEAR’S NATURE

The very nature of fear is sin. Now before you start freaking out and condemning yourself, the Bible says that whatever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23). Every way that God operates has faith built into it. This means two things. First, God knows that fear opposes everything that He

seeks to establish through faith in your life. Second, God sees you in faith being set free from your fear battles.

Understanding that fear is of sin actually helped set me free. Because God did not create me with sin. Sin joined me at my conception, it seeks to replicate it works in my family line and manifest through my members, but it's not a part of God's original design for who I am.

Paul the apostle helped clarify what wars within us that is not of God.

Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. Romans 7:20 (NIV)

Paul clearly states that when he's doing something he does not want to; *it is not him doing it* . There is another presence at work through him. He personifies the work of sin as a being, showing us the reality of a presence that influences our thinking and perspectives.

This body of sin desires desperately to work in his life. When he is not doing the good he wants to, sin takes opportunity to manifest. In recognizing this, Paul was able to be freed from condemnation, because he came into connection with who he really was in Christ, as God designed him to be.

So, this should not condemn, but actually free you from being hard on yourself. Take a deep breath and relax. *Fear is not you* . It is of sin and of the devil. The truth is, fear may be working *in* you, but it is not *you* , and it can be removed. You are not fear. Fear is not you. So, let it go as a part of your identity and personality. It is not a part of your nature in Christ Jesus.

It can be difficult in daily application, because when fear speaks, it sounds like its coming from our own thoughts. In fact, the voice sounds like our own voice. The thoughts of fear mask themselves by communicating in first person.

I need to be afraid.

What if . . .

I am anxious

I'm not gonna make it.

I need to worry.

Fear is from another kingdom and as a believer, you have the power through Jesus Christ to execute death to it and live freely.

When fear manifests itself in your body through anxiety, stress, worry, or panic, too often we assume the problem is *you* . But if you look at fear through the lens of Romans 7, you will start to see that fear is *not you* . Although it may be working *in* you, fear is not you. This can be tricky because the symptoms of fear are manifesting in your physical body through rapid pulse, hot flashes, or sweating.

For too many, when fear strikes at their door, it comes as a strong thought along with feelings of panic, anxiety or terror. The deception takes place when fear portrays itself as a thought that came from your own identity and thought process.

When we understand that fear is not from God's Kingdom but of sin and the enemy, it helps to create a sense of separation in our thinking and living. With this understanding, we can now separate it from what God sees us to become, while breaking agreement and turning away from fear's devices.

This revelation has led me to get on my knees in repentance to a loving Father and say, *“Father, I’ve given in to something that is not of You. I first of all ask You to forgive me for thinking You were involved in making me fearful at all. You have actually commanded me in Your Word to not fear, but to trust You. Father, forgive me for letting fear be my voice instead of You. I repent for giving into fear’s devices and I renounce fear in every way. From my heart, I give You permission to fill those areas that have been polluted by fear, with Your love and power. I receive Your grace to live in victory, and I ask You to fill me with a greater understanding of my identity apart from fear.”*

Most people do not know who they are because fear has conditioned how they see themselves. I pray that as you separate out fear from how you see yourself, it will revolutionize the potential you see for your future. May it help you to face your fears and discover what fear was trying to keep you from.

GETTING CLEARER ON WHO YOU ARE

One of the greatest reasons we struggle with being intimidated by fear is because we are not clear on who we are. A strengthened identity is an

incredible force against the onslaught of fear. At the same time, areas of insecurity and identity struggles are clear targets for fear's attacks.

As you seek to overcome fear, see it as an invitation to grow in who you are. One of the biggest things that helped me stay in the fight was realizing that I was made for more. I developed a vision of who God made me to be and I kept that in my sights. Even in the midst of my worst days, where I did not want to even live, I knew in my heart that *"there must be more than just this."*

Getting clear on who you are in Christ is a major piece of armor against fear. But I often find I have to help people strip who they are NOT, in order to get clearer on who they really are. Too much of who we think we are is cheap fabrications, masks and construction of a false self. In fact, too much of how we construct what we present to the world is motivated by fear, especially the fear of rejection, the fear of failure and the fear of painful exposure.

As you face your fears, a new identity will begin to form in your heart. When you face fear instead of running from it, your greater potential will begin to present itself. Fear is actually keeping you from seeing the power of who you really are.

ESTABLISHING YOUR HEART

As you get clearer on who you are and the power of who God made you to be in Christ, it's important to establish your intent as you fight the fight. I remember when my wife was pregnant for the second time. We suddenly found out we lost the baby when going for a routine ultrasound. Like many couples who have gone through this, we were devastated.

As we worked through the grieving and healing process, soon after, my wife Melissa was pregnant for a third time. I rejoiced in the anticipation of a new child, but this time, fear was knocking on my door. It was using my previous pain and disappointment as leverage to mess with me and create unease about the birth of my daughter, Abigail.

Fear was attacking me relentlessly and I couldn't shake it. Yet at the same time, I knew the power of establishing my heart and direction. Sometimes when you have done all to stand, you just need to keep standing.

So, I cried out to God and said, *"Father, You know that fear is knocking on my door and attempting to steal my peace about the birth of my next*

child. I know this is not from You. And I know You see me struggling. But it is not my heart to serve this fear. I do not wish to listen to it or give it any room in my life. I may be shaking a little bit inside, but it's not my desire to serve this fear at all, so I give it to You."

From that day forward, I took my peace back. Many times in your battles, you need to get clear on what your heart's intent is. Sometimes just saying, *"This is not who I am. It is not my heart's intent to serve this fear"* can kick back the accuser's power from tormenting us.

Remember, just because you have a thought, does NOT mean you are that thought. You will have millions of thoughts cross your path in a lifetime. Masses of them will come from the enemy. Getting clear on who you are will involve realizing those thoughts are not who you are and you don't have to entertain them. Declaring and establishing who you are and your heart's intent is a good step towards solidifying who God made you to be.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. In what areas of your identity has fear conditioned how you see yourself?
2. In what way has fear limited your ability to see your greater potential?
3. In what ways do you play to fear in how you present yourself to the world or allow your personality to be formed?
4. What aspect of your identity have you labeled under a fear-based perspective, thinking, *"this is just the way I will always be."*
5. What would change in your life if you saw yourself as fearless and took action against fear?

PRAYER

Father God, You have called me to be a chosen priesthood, a person called out of darkness, destined to proclaim Your praises boldly. You have called me to stand firmly, with boldness and confidence. That is who You made me to be and I make a decision today to come into alignment with who You say that I am.

I may have fears working in me, but I am not my fears. I do not have to align my identity with the fears that come against me. I am beginning to see

more clearly that these fears are only seeking to prevent me from apprehending the identity and destiny that You have put on my life.

So, I take a stand today in a new and fresh way, against the snares and lies of fear. As I shed the ways of fear, I know the identity You have placed on my life will shine brightly and powerfully. Thank You who for You made me to be and for the power You have given me to overcome fear. I am not fear.

Who I am is an overcomer. In Jesus name, amen.



16

THREE LEVELS OF ADDRESSING FEAR

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o gain a clear strategy for overcoming fear's influence, you will need to understand the three arenas of battleground where fear influences our lives. First is the spiritual arena. The second is in your mind and the third, your physiology. Whether you sense it or not, fear affects you in all three areas. The more you get equipped to fight it effectively in each of them, the greater improvement you will see in how you take back your peace, confidence and boldness.

THE SPIRITUAL BATTLEFIELD

Engaging the spiritual battle is not an option for any believer. It's what you were born into. Mostly importantly, the largest dimension of battle that you face is heard between your two ears.

Every day, a barrage of thoughts are seeking to have your full attention. Many of them are fear based. Although this battle shows up in your mind, the war is very spiritual. The Bible reveals there is actually an invisible war waging over the thoughts and beliefs that motivate your life. This battle is spiritual and its very real.

If you want to overcome fear's influence, you will need to recognize the spiritual battle that is up against you. All spiritual warfare comes down to one main issue: *which thoughts will have the greatest influence in your perspectives, actions and relationships?*

There are many practical habits you can apply to combat fear. But I have found there comes a point where you can only go so far battling fear with natural tools and abilities. Sometimes you just need to know you are up against a spiritual attack.

If you don't realize you are at war, then you'll easily fall into condemnation against yourself when anxiety or fear-based thinking arises. You'll walk around beating yourself up for all the emotions you struggle with. Guilt and shame will cover your inner world and make you feel that you don't have what it takes to break free. You'll just think your brain is broken.

Let me remind you that you have an enemy and fear is one of his tactics. Even though satan will use fear against you, the way he brings it can often be subtle and covert. He finds ways to sneak his oppressive thoughts into your inner dialogue so that you will not take notice of his deception.

He first relays a thought that sounds like your own; it may come across as your own voice in your mind. If he can get your attention, he can then find agreement. If he can find agreement in your thoughts, then the bondage begins.

THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE OVER YOUR THOUGHTS

The Bible calls fear a *spirit*, and does so to help empower our war arsenal. The Scriptures give us "snap shot" glimpses into the spiritual world to help us see where our battles lie and who our enemy is. Living victorious in our spiritual battles does not need to be spooky or left only for those who wear titles of spiritual superiority. It can actually be very practical as well as effective; especially when we understand what is taking place in our thought life.

There is a spiritual nature to fear, formed to create torment and bring about systems of thought and action that are contrary to God's ways. You cannot see it, but you can perceive it by paying attention to the thoughts and emotions that come your way. Allow your mind to sit passive for too long and you can find yourself going down some rough trails of thought.

When Ephesians 6 tells us we *wrestle* , this is not two people slapping each other. It is an all-out hand to hand combat with an enemy that you cannot see, but you can perceive. Every thought that can have access to your life will be thrown your way. And you can count on the fact that fear will be at the top of the list. Once the enemy can get you afraid, he gains the upper hand. Remove the fear and you have now disarmed many of his tactics.

THE SPIRITUAL WEAPON OF FEAR

A person who is fighting fear of any kind needs to come to the realization that their battle is *first a spiritual one* . Otherwise we would not need the spiritual weapons of warfare that God gave us to fight. Our main battles do not originate in the physical. They first begin in the spiritual. I've spent a lot of time reminding believers of this, because we so easily forget and lose sight of the invisible war taking place.

That is why we need to first engage the spiritual tools God has given us to fight fear. The trap occurs when people listen to fear every time and act on it as though it came from their own intellect and judgment. Meanwhile, God's Holy Spirit is wooing us to stay out of fear's traps, to be anxious for nothing, to have no worry in our life and to trust in the Father's goodness, love and protection.

A SPIRITUAL BATTLE PLAN

Fear is a spirit and must be dealt with spiritually. We first need to know how to discern when fear is speaking, often by recognizing the thoughts and emotions we feel that are stealing our peace. Once we can identify that fear is giving us thoughts, the first action is to cast down those thoughts and imaginations that are giving room to fear's voice.

If that thought is taken captive and tossed down, you move on and focus your attention on thoughts based on faith, hope and love. The problem is that fear has access in a way that takes many off guard. It uses past traumas, disappointments and insecurities as leverage to keep speaking. I have even observed that certain vulnerabilities travel down generations, where the fears that father and mother faced repeated in the next generation.

If a simple casting down of a thought or taking a thought captive does not bring about breakthrough over time, then a higher level of spiritual action needs to be engaged. This involves "breaking agreement" with fear,

which is actually the work of repentance. We take the specific fear issue, bring it to God and shred the agreement that it has on our life.

I even have a written prayer that I used to break the agreement. In the early stages, I used it over and over again, to get the heart of the repentance into my system. Breaking agreement is not a one-time event, but a process of moving from one way of thinking and into another. That takes time. I also had to learn to develop my spiritual muscles to take a stand against fear and command it to leave my life.

THE BATTLE IS REAL

When you have used everything you know to fight off fear, you may just need to remember that you are fighting a spiritual invader. I've had numerous sessions where people have come to my office for help and cannot even sit still, because the fear is so troubling. They are riddled with panic attacks, anxiety or some kind of fear-based oppression.

After a few moments of seeking to help them, I often find they cannot even pay attention. Some are so deep in panic attacks they ask me to stand up and pace back and forth. The fear is so overwhelming.

I don't do this all the time, but quite often, I will stop my pathway of discussion and ask them to look at me.

"Tell me how bad the anxiety is right now. On a scale of 1-10, ten being the worst."

I often hear back, *"It's at least a nine."*

I will say, *"Ok then, I want you to pray this prayer to break agreement with this fear. Are you ready?"*

Ye s .

I then proceed to walk them through a 2-minute prayer for breaking agreement. Nothing special, just some specific repentance and renouncement.

After they are done praying, I will command, in a calm voice, for the fear to lose its hold off the person's life. I don't make a scene. I don't make a circus out of this. I command fear to leave in the name of Jesus.

After a couple minutes of prayer, I will look at the person and ask, *"tell me the level that you are at now."*

To this day, I have never had anyone say anything higher than two.

Once they give me that response, I share with them, *“You need to know this enemy is real. The peace you are feeling now is also very real. This moment of peace that you are feeling is a taste of what you can live in all day long and more. But you need to get armed up, because this fear wants to keep working in your life. I want you to use this moment as a reference for your spiritual life that you can return to this peace and keep growing it, but you need to build up your spiritual strength.”*

When I first started pushing fear out of my life, I realized that my spiritual muscles were quite weak. I wanted God to remove my struggles and avoid anything that was hard. I needed to learn to stop asking Him to relieve me of fear when I actually needed to face it, utilize my God-given authority and command the invading thoughts to leave. My journey of overcoming anxiety was my introduction to developing the muscles of an overcomer.

RENEWING OUR BELIEF SYSTEMS

The next level is also important to understand. Fear not only has a spiritual influence, there is also a psychological effect. This involves the domain of the soul, where our mind, belief systems, memories and perspectives dwell. It is important that we do not get so focused on the spiritual work of fear that we lose sight of the day to day mind renewal that is so important in this process. The realm of the soul needs renewal; and the best way to experience this is to address the deep belief systems that influence our thoughts and behaviors.

We not only have to fight the spiritual battle; we need to develop strong daily habits of renewed thinking, focus and belief systems. Establishing what thoughts we will focus on and what thoughts we will cast down is one of the most important muscles to exercise. When we renew our souls, we are not only removing thoughts that are fear based, we are filling ourselves with new beliefs in God’s love, a hope that is firm and faith-filled action.

Addressing fear involves recognizing where it has infiltrated our thoughts and belief systems. It takes some time and honest inventory to acknowledge where we were living behind a false safety, rather than a place of trust, faith and confidence. When thoughts from fear get involved with our soul, it can become a regular way of life. Many of our past hurts find

agreement with fear to protect ourselves. We feel temporarily safe, but then can't seem to break free in the long run. If you are going to experience the freedom you are capable of, you will need to confront your limiting belief systems that are based on fear.

HEALING THE BODY

The third arena that fear influences is our physiology. Once someone has been conditioned in the ways of fear, it can take some time for the body to reverse and heal. A whole new way of engaging our body needs to develop, where we take time for peace, learn to practice stillness and train our physiology to live in confidence. Most of all, our bodies need to get the full signal that we are coming into alignment with a new way of thinking.

Do you know that just as your mind needs renewing, so does your body? I find that when working with people, I need to help them train their body to live in peace and confidence. It's easy for the body to get locked under the programming of not feeling safe, so patience in the healing process is needed.

When fear comes upon you, there is an entire physical programming that goes along with it. At the same time, when you are engaging God's way of thinking, you need to be intentional about telling your body to act in agreement.

A PIN-POINTED ATTACK ON FEAR'S EFFECTS

The good news is, with this understanding, we can start attacking issues of fear in our lives with greater purpose, power and accuracy. It is time that we stop allowing ourselves to be victims of fear's power, but take our rightful place of authority and freedom through Christ Jesus. The backseat driver that has been playing games with God's children needs to be removed and its tactics need to come to an end in our generations.

I am very passionate about this point, because the enemy would love to see a spirit of fear inflict torment on those who desire to do great things for God. He did it to me for years, and I have seen it happen over and over again to those have become ignorant of satan's devices. Satan and his kingdom would love nothing more than to see a spirit of fear bind us from taking any risks and stepping out in faith. He would love to keep us from operating in supernatural power and from knowing firmly who we are as God's children.

That is why I have such zeal to attack fear. It is the very thing that is keeping many from a life of freedom, boldness and empowerment. It tried to trap and destroy me, and it failed. Now it is time for recompense as we proclaim the battle cry of freedom!

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Where do you need to be more spiritually aware in regard to your thought life? What about when it comes to fear?
2. What belief systems in your life have been influenced by fear? How can you begin renewing your thoughts towards faith, hope and love and away from fear?
3. In what ways can you begin standing up to fear today?
4. What habits can you cultivate to help your physiology get out of a fear-based response? What practices would help your body heal and gain refreshment?

PRAYER

Father God, I recognize that fear is a spiritual issue and must be addressed spiritually. Thank You that You have given me authority over fear. I do not need to be afraid, nor do I need to listen to what fear has to say. I take my place to stand against the spiritual assault of fear. I renounce agreements I have made with fear and make a firm decision to move in faith towards the confidence and boldness You have formed inside of me.

I choose to renew my mind with greater tenacity and intentionality. Give me the grace and discernment to choose Your thoughts and to cast down those thoughts that have contaminated my walk. I ask that you wash my mind with the power of Your word, so that I may experience the renewal that my mind needs.

I ask You today to heal my body and allow it to recover from the influence of fear. Heal my stress response, adrenals and energy levels. Give my body a reboot so that I may live in a new physiological response. I tell my body that it need not fear. My Father is with me. I am safe. I am loved. I don't need to be afraid.

Thank You for this, in Jesus name, amen.



17

Taking Action

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Receiving powerful insights and understanding regarding your battleground is fantastic. Yet many are still asking, *but what do I do now?* People from all over have contacted me, looking for help in their struggles. They're blessed by my personal story and want to know the insights that helped set me free.

Their basic question is, *"Can you help me?"* and more specifically, *"Can you show me HOW to overcome?"* The number one frustration that comes my way is, *"I have had a ton of teaching, attended a million conferences and read through many books. I get the theories, but HOW do I do this? What does the application look like?"* If you feel the same way, you are not alone.

Even though we have more access to information than ever before, we are not manifesting what the knowledge points to. We are so inundated with information and teaching, but it is not making its way into our daily application. If your strategy for overcoming does not include specific daily habits, action steps and relationship application that stretches you, then you will find yourself running in circles.

TWO THINGS TO STOP DOING TODAY

Before we get into the process of overcoming fear-based thinking, I need to exhort you on some things you need to stop doing, as soon as possible.

1. Stop asking God to take away your fears.

My biggest frustration arose when I kept asking God to take anxiety away from me. Although this is an understandable request; it kept me from the growth and learning I needed to engage. For God to simply make fear, anxiety and worry go away defeats the process in which we need to grow. Fear is something that needs to be faced. When I changed my mindset from “God take this away” to “God arm me to overcome,” it changed everything.

God did not put this fear issue on you, but He also wants to raise you up as a victor. He is here with you right now, to back up your steps of faith to face what you are battling. What you learn in the overcoming is priceless, unleashing a boldness and confidence that no one can steal.

If you are constantly asking people to pray your fear struggle off, you may have the wrong mindset. It’s like asking God to remove a thief out of your house for you, when in reality, *you* need to kick him out.

I want to encourage you to pray for the grace and power to overcome. Position yourself for the learning. Set your heart in a place to receive the love that casts out fear. For years, we have been training believers to have the wrong mindset. We pray for God to rescue us, while we retreat with great timidity. Instead, ask for grace to learn and apply what needs to change for the “new you” to rise up.

2. Stop looking for the quickest way out.

We love to take shortcuts in our transformation process. But no matter what anyone tells you, there is no shortcut for your journey. Ironically, people who are always looking for a quick fix or short cut from the process actually end up adding months and years onto the process. If they’d just settle in and allow the process to take as long as it takes, they’d see more fruit.

You cannot fast forward the journey, as everything in transformation happens in process. If God just took all your fears off of you, you wouldn’t know what to do with yourself, because most of your life and thinking has been built on fear. It takes time to rebuild, relearn and renovate the inner life.

The quicker I came to peace with my personal process, the journey became way more fruitful. I remember the day I said to God, “*I’m going to take my peace with the process. So, I am willing to let it take as long as it needs to take.*” Interestingly enough, when I made peace with process, the speed of breakthrough actually increased!

So, with that in mind, let’s get into some important stages of your process that are needed to overcome fear’s influence.

STAGE 1: ESTABLISHING THE “WANT TO”

First, you have to begin believing like never before that victory is possible for you. No one can possess this conviction more than you do. It is important that a fire be lit in your heart to go after whatever it takes to overcome. I had to climb some really difficult hurdles to land into greater freedom.

It is important to establish the “why” to your freedom and connect to the motivation that gets you up every day to overcome. Are you just looking to get comfortable? Or do you have a fire to see yourself and others free from the clutches of fear? If the latter is your motivation, then you will have more effectiveness in the process.

Everyone’s journey will have unique aspects to it. But one thing is for sure, we will all have our tough moments. It’s your determination to get free and your focus to lock into your personal process that is so incredibly important. There *is* a pathway to victory. God has not left us to fend for ourselves, but has given us tools to repel and vanquish the onslaughts of fear. But before you engage the overcoming journey, you have to establish: *no one can want this more than you do.*

STAGE 2: HONEST RECOGNITION

For most, humbly admitting where fear has had its work is the best place to start. For freedom to begin, the excuses and false justifications need to end. We must get honest with ourselves, not in guilt and shame, but in sobriety. No more games or hiding. If you want to be free, you have to be honest about where freedom is needed. The less defensive you are, the better.

It’s so easy to defend our fears and push back; not admitting that we are listening to plain old fear. With this recognition, it is time we call our

constant “concern” what it really is—fear. It is time that our “carefulness” and “nervousness” and “drivenness” be called what it needs to be called—fear rooted. In that recognition, we approach God from a place of honesty and humility that allows Him to move in our hearts with great power.

Application: Take a moment right now and document some of the main fears that you see working in your life.

STAGE 3: BREAKING AGREEMENT

One of the great gifts that God has given us that Satan cannot defeat is *heart-felt repentance*. Repentance involves having a change of mind and turning into a new direction. Satan and his kingdom work through agreement. When we eliminate that agreement through repentance, combined with recognizing our spiritual authority, we make room for God’s sanctifying power to deliver us. The power of the cross comes into effect to break the chains of sin and bondage when a believer comes to a place of heartfelt repentance. True repentance occurs when we turn from fear and walk into a new direction by His grace.

If the subject of repentance makes you feel terrible, then condemnation needs to be removed as an influence. Repentance is an amazing gift, because it empowers you to establish what you will agree with and what you can remove.

This must be understood with the love of God as a foundation. God is not beating you on your head to repent. It is His goodness that brings about this turnaround. Repentance simply means breaking our agreement with fear and turning away from what fear has taught us to do. Of course, repentance is only effective when it truly comes from the heart.

Maybe the words of this prayer can be helpful. Don’t just read it as a formula, but make it your own. It can also be extremely profitable if you have someone there with you to pray and agree with you.

Father God, I am Your child. You love me. You are a loving heavenly Father who has good gifts for me. I come before You and recognize that I have been listening to fear. I have been operating under fear’s thoughts. They

have affected my belief systems. They have influenced and at times dictated my thoughts and perspectives. Today I make a decision to take responsibility for my freedom. I break agreements that I have with fear, especially in the area of _____. I repent for coming into agreement with the fear of _____ and for being motivated by that fear. I renounce any connections to fear's ways. Cleanse those areas that have been under the influence of fear and fill them with Your loving peace. I ask for Your confidence and boldness to flood my heart. Fill my heart with Your perfect love that casts out fear. I thank You for it, in Jesus name, amen.

STAGE 4: TAKE AUTHORITY

Remember, since fear is a spiritual enemy, you must take your stand against it. This does not need to be weird or some *hocus-pocus* kind of moment. It's simply exercising the authority that we have in Christ Jesus. Breaking agreement through repentance and renunciation gives you the authority to break free. Now we need to stand up and kick the unwelcomed intruder out!

Many people think of "taking authority" as someone praying for you and commanding fear to be broken. Although it is always helpful to have someone pray with you, I want to equip you to be able to stand for yourself. Most of the time, when we are in the midst of our battles, it's often just you, God and the devil. Those are the moments you need to stand the strongest.

I encourage people to get into an empowered posture. You want your physiology to match up with your intent. You may feel a little awkward at first, but I want to train you to begin taking action with the power God has given you. Remember, fear wants to strip you of this power.

I'll share with you what I have done many times. It's helped me to get out of some really tough spots, where I knew I was under a spiritual attack and needed peace.

I like to stand up tall and take in a deep breath. I get my voice firm. I don't scream, because many times, that's a fearful reaction. I speak calmly and firmly. I don't wait for my body to feel better. I repent and break agreement, then I stand tall with my shoulders back and speak with authority. I simply command this fear to leave in the name of Jesus. I speak to it specifically with a determination to hold my ground.

In the name of Jesus, I take a stand, against this fear of _____ that has been working against me. I take responsibility today for my freedom. I command this work of fear to be broken and removed off of my life. I command this fear to leave right now in the name of Jesus. I speak peace over myself, love over myself and a new hope over my life. I receive that right now.

Use the prayer, but also be yourself. Stand firm in your words and let your inner man receive the power of what you are saying. If you don't feel anything change in your physiology, do not worry one bit. I often find that this process takes some time, but it sets the wheels in motion for long term victory. You didn't get here overnight, so it will take some time to move into a new direction. Allow yourself to engage the process.

I found that I had to practice this over and over until it became ingrained in my being. I had to move from just saying it to actually declaring it from my inner belief system. It takes time to move from theory to possession, so give yourself time to use this practice as a way of daily walking away from fear's influence.

As I am removing the influence of fear, I can now move into establishing what it is that I will be focusing on and giving my attention to. This is what we will cover in the next chapters.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Of the things I mentioned to *stop* doing, which one do you find relates to your journey?
2. How can you utilize the power of repentance more in your life?
3. In what way can you take a stand to face fear rather than retreating and living passively?

PRAYER

Father God, thank You for giving me the power in Christ Jesus to overcome fear, anxiety, stress and worry. I thank You that the cross of Jesus Christ positions me to stand with victory. Yet at the same time, I am learning that this is a journey and a process. Each day, I desire to walk more free from fear's influence and experience the power of confidence and boldness in my life.

I ask that You walk with me so that I can experience more of Your love and receive the peace that surpasses all understanding. Lead me into rest and help me experience the life and freedom You designed me to possess. I take my place as a soldier, knowing that I am also empowered as Your child to overcome. I thank You for this, in Jesus name, amen.



18

Strengthening Your Mind

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reaking agreement and commanding fear to leave doesn't change everything overnight. We also need to renew our hearts and minds into thought patterns that are established on how God thinks. All transformation must have renewing of the mind as a key component, directing us to live more in faith, hope and love.

The quality of our journey comes down to our thought life, so we cannot experience transformation effectively without revolutionizing the way we think. And don't assume that just a few bad thoughts need to be adjusted. I often find we need a renovation of our thinking rather than a little patchwork, if we are going to move from where we are to where we want to be. But don't be overwhelmed. God works on this layer by layer, as He is a very patient teacher.

When people express their frustration with renewing of the mind, it's often because of a few reasons. The first, is most do not realize the spiritual war component involved with their thoughts. They think every thought they have is their own and have few tools to practice in the spiritual battle.

The second reason is many do not realize how highly conditioned our minds are. When we become used to living under a fear-based mindset, it

becomes deeply ingrained into our thinking. We act in those pathways without even consciously being aware of it. Renewal involves bringing these faulty mindsets to the surface and shifting the conditioning we've been under.

The third reason, is we have become so used to listening to whatever thought comes our way. We have not learned to develop strong "taking every thought captive" muscles. We wake up and listen to whatever thought rises to the surface, with little work in developing what thoughts we will pay attention to.

OVERTURNING FEAR'S GAME PLAN

To put it very bluntly, fear seeks to communicate that God is not trustworthy. It wants to condition you into believing that you are not safe and love is far away. It proclaims that God has forgotten you and will not be there to help in the time of need. The bottom line message that fear communicates is that God is not capable of being trusted with issues that we concern ourselves with. Fear says, *God will not come through in your life and will not protect you in your circumstances.* Fear calls God a liar and tells us to take matters into our own hands. It works to convince you that the obstacle or problem in front of you is greater than the God you serve.

5 AREAS OF RENEWAL

When it comes to renewing your mind, there are five areas you will need to address.

1. What are you focusing on?

What you focus on grows, so you must become more aware of what you pay attention to. Whatever gets the majority of your focus, gets you. Keep in mind, the reason the enemy uses fear so much is that it can easily grab your attention and focus. The good news is you can choose what you will focus on. It may take some work to carve out new patterns, but it can be done.

2. What is the narrative you are listening to?

Everyone has a story that lives in their thoughts; a narrative that creates the backdrop to their daily life. In this story are the themes that you see in your life. Fear loves to take our past and project it onto the story of our

present and future. If you change your story to no longer be based on fear, you'll open your mind to a whole new world of thinking.

3. What do you look for?

In every situation, you carry an expectation. You have a radar for what you notice and what you look out for. There may be 99 great things to notice in a given situation, but you will highlight the one fearful perspective, if that's what you are conditioned to look for. Renewing of the mind involves shifting what you look out for, because that will be what your mind marinates on.

4. What do you talk about?

Our language reinforces what we think about. If you want to shift what you are thinking about, the best way to do that is to change how you talk. When you speak out loud, your mind has to pay attention to the subject your words are addressing. So, if you want to shift your thoughts, start talking a new talk that will open up new grooves of thinking.

5. What actions are you taking?

Are your actions fear-based or grounded on faith, hope and love? I find that at first, most of the people I talk with do not realize how many of their actions are fear-based. It keeps them living in a way that is limited; their full potential is not realized, because fear has held them captive.

How much fear drives our lives depends on whether or not we act on what its saying. I like to encourage people to see their environment as a personal laboratory for renewal. True renewal doesn't take place until you activate new thoughts into experience on a regular basis.

TAKING EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE

To develop these questions and empower our thinking, we need to first set up our spiritual security system. It's pointless to practice certain habits without establishing a healthy guard around ourselves.

There is a built-in security system that God has given you to take charge of your peace. It's called *taking thoughts captive* . Every single one. We are not called to take only bad thoughts captive, but all of them.

...casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of

Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:5

This means that even if you receive a thought from God, you have permission to give it a litmus test. Your main guide is God's Word, but the council of mature believers is also needed to guard your sanity. God's voice will not violate His Word and He often puts helpful council in your path to refine your thought life.

God is not insecure and will not become offended if you take His thoughts captive. The thoughts of God are filled with so much love and power that as we grow in Him, we won't be able to miss Him when He speaks anyway! In fact, as you walk out of fear, you will learn to become more accustomed to hearing and knowing the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Many believers get lost in this whole concept, because they believe every thought that rushes in like a wave *must* be from God. Many times, impressions will arrive that seem so real or true, but are infused with lies. I have found that so many thoughts we attribute to God actually compel us to panic decisions and added pressure.

AN UNDEVELOPED MUSCLE

Taking thoughts captive is a muscle that most people have not developed. They listen to every thought that comes their way, making them vulnerable to all kinds of disempowering thinking.

I had to admit that my thought life was very weak. For example, just about every fearful thought was able to penetrate my thinking and gain my attention. I reacted to fear, rather than cultivating a strong thought environment.

Too many people are very passive in their thoughts. They wait for thoughts to come their way, rather than setting the tone. If you walk into your day with a neutral posture, fear will take you out. You have to decide if you will be a thermometer or a thermostat. One reads the temperature, the other sets the temperature. Taking thoughts captive means you will set the temperature on what your daily focus will be.

The good news is that God is patient with you. He knows that we can only learn how to do this in process, so you have to give yourself permission to practice this every day. Start right now. Check out the thoughts you are listening to. What's the story you are paying attention to

regarding your life and circumstances? What are the fear-based thoughts that keep sneaking in?

I teach my children the art of taking thoughts captive by saying it's like changing the television channel. They understand what it means to change the channel to a show they want to watch. They quickly realize that they are in control of what they think about. At first, they would come to me and say, *"I can't help thinking this way."* I'd help them by saying, *"That's a lie. You are in charge. Just change the channel. What channel is a better one to listen to?"* Over time, they learned to practice it and develop strength in their thinking.

You can do this too. Practice taking thoughts captive for 30 days. Take a healthy inventory of the thoughts you pay attention to and where you need to create new thoughts. Every time a fear-based thought or feeling arises, say "no" and change the channel. Don't expect miracles in one attempt. But if you practice it for 30 days straight, you will see some fruit. God made us to manifest the health of this, so go for it.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. In what ways do you get discouraged when it comes to taking thoughts captive?
2. What do you typically focus on in any given situation?
3. What is the story of your past that is infecting you from having an empowered story about your future?
4. Have you considered a 30-day challenge of taking thoughts captive? What would that look like for you and how can you include someone in your life to keep you accountable?

PRAYER

Father God, I thank You that You have given me the ability to watch over my thoughts and choose which thoughts I will focus on. I make a decision to focus my attention on thoughts that are built on faith, hope and love, not fear.

I give You the story of my life. I pray that You empower me to renew the story of my past, present and future; that I would live out of the report that You have given me, not the report of the enemy. I choose to believe Your

report. I choose to frame my story around the love and hope You have given me.

Today I choose to take thoughts captive and no longer allow fear to keep speaking to me. Thank You for empowering me to give my focus and attention to Your love and the power You have over all darkness. I align my heart with You Father. Thank You for having my back and walking with me each step of the way. In Jesus name, amen.



19

Taking Charge

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As you approach freedom from fear, it is important to note that a backseat approach will not bring about breakthrough. You cannot live solely with a defensive posture, only reacting to fear when it strikes. You must also establish an offensive strategy as to what you are going to think about on a daily basis.

As a believer, you have a responsibility to take charge of what happens in your thinking. *In other words, you need to make a determination of what you are going to think about.* Thousands of believers need to end the habit of waking up each morning in passivity, waiting for what that day presents as a foundation for their thinking. That is a defeated pattern and a sure setup for discouragement. Instead, choose to face every day with a resolve to establish your thought life. This is not something that you can depend on someone else to do, but it must be personally developed.

WAKE UP AND TAKE CHARGE

My greatest problem was that anxiety was pumping through my body before I completely woke up. I'd start the day anxious before I even knew what day it was. I ended up hobbling through the day emotionally, at times making some progress in the late afternoon.

I couldn't live like that. I knew that how I tackled the morning would determine how the rest of my day went. I developed a morning routine that set me up for the greatest amount of success; which is something I encourage everyone to do. In fact, it was so helpful that over time, I went from being a night person to becoming more of a morning person.

Interestingly enough, my morning routine did not begin in the morning. My preparation began the night before. I would take a moment and give God my worries, fears and cares. Out loud, I would declare peace over my sleep and that I would wake up strong and courageous. I would often go to sleep listening to music or helpful teaching that would add peace to my heart.

I also got myself an alarm clock that had the ability to play music. I would program it to play some of the most jamming upbeat music at wakeup time. This would trigger my mind to not get into defeat about anxiety, but to praise God and to start the day off strong. I also have a small list of declarations that I like to start my day off with, which positions my thoughts into the right direction.

I don't know what the start of your day needs to be, but whatever you do, take initiative. Be intentional. Stop living passive to fear and instead, take action to cultivate the kind of day that is empowered and filled with victory. Train your mind and body to act, even while fear is still speaking.

In becoming less passive and more active, you'll need to give yourself time to move into what you know, while how you feel is in conflict. You need to give your feelings time to catch up with how you want to think and live. In my struggle of getting my emotions to line up, I would just keep reminding myself, "*I'm heading in the right direction. My emotions will catch up.*" Just because your emotions are still showing fearful symptoms, doesn't mean you are not growing. Keep cultivating the new ways and give your body time to come into alignment.

RENEWED EXPERIENCES

One of the big areas of growth will be how you approach moments that trigger you into fear. As you approach certain experiences, fear will project the anxiety you had the last time and keep you apprehensive. Anxiousness, hot flashes, panic and worry will all try to kick up and tell you that you will never get free and are in complete bondage again.

It is critical that during this time you practice what I call a “renewed experience” where you actively work to develop a new reference over the old occurrence that invoked fear. Cultivating a new mindset before the experience can be helpful. Then, when you walk through the encounter and see progress, you can keep building upon that.

For example, I’ve worked with a number of people who have had intense fear related issues regarding driving. After some foundational work and coaching, they eventually take a step to have a renewed driving experience. I walk them through how to prepare themselves and engage the experience with a new perspective. Once they get on the road and find themselves having confidence and peace, it creates a new reference for their mind to build on.

It is through practicing God’s truth in circumstances like this, combined with the knowledge of His love, which will bring you to a new place of triumph over fear. Renewed experiences give you small wins that tell your brain that you are safe and imbed the healing work into your cells.

MAKE NO ROOM FOR DEBATE

When dealing with fear, *do not debate with it* . You do not need to. If you try to rationally fight it, fear will find another crack to invade. Do not engage in arguments with the enemy, but develop renewed patterns of thinking to replace those old recordings of fear that are attempting to creep up. This is spiritual training that takes time, but will build a new you that puts away the old man who was bound with fear.

Choosing *not* to engage with the voice of fear does not mean living in denial either. Those who live in constant denial never truly deal with their problems and dysfunctions. What I am saying is that we need to face our fears and walk through them, without debating with fear about the future.

Beating fear involves no longer engaging with the nonsense that it has been spewing out. It is time for us to make some drastic changes and for a spiritual paradigm shift to come into our relationships, workplaces, homes and churches. When we stop listening to everything fear says, you will see people with more power and boldness rising up to take some awesome risks for God. The tables will be turned on what fear was trying to do all along.

REFINING THE “GUT” VOICE

In making decisions, too many, including Christians, get driven by their “gut” or pure instincts. This practice involves making decisions based on that abstract arena of feeling, hoping that it will prove itself faithful in the end. All it takes is for that “gut” to prove itself correct once, and many will obey its promptings continually. For believers, we may attribute our “gut” to God’s voice or the Holy Spirit, which may not always be true. It can be a dangerous foundation for making decisions.

There are many voices clamoring for your attention, so developing a discernment to know when the voice of fear is speaking can be helpful in developing strength and maturity. You may need to refine what it means to “listen to your gut.” In doing so, please understand this reality: ***fear often has a very loud voice!*** With the volume turned up, it communicates a sense of panic and urgency that must be focused on immediately. With adherence to this voice can often come panic decisions, impulsive actions and even unwise living.

THE RIGHT THOUGHT IS NOT ALWAYS THE LOUDEST

Just because a thought is “loud” doesn’t mean it’s the right thought to listen to. Many interpret the strongest voice they hear in their thoughts to be the voice of God. But this is not always true. The Bible speaks about the voice of God being a still small voice, but it can also shake the mountains and move the earth. But through it all, He speaks to His beloved through love relationship, as a Father would guide His children.

God’s voice brings with it authority, clarity and confidence, but there is a stillness to it like none other. His voice adds to our faith and brings us comfort. His words bring a true godly peace that leads us on a journey into righteousness. Even when He is correcting us, there is still something very loving and special about that voice.

I have learned that God doesn’t try to compete with the other voices that clamor for your attention. He will have no other gods before him, and if fear is your god, it will override what God is saying in many situations.

GETTING A VISION FOR YOUR PROCESS

Renewing our thoughts and actions may seem like a lot of work, but it will become more automatic as you allow yourself to practice renewal regularly. We have all had so many areas that were conditioned by fear, we

often have to address them *one by one* , layer by layer. That's all we can really handle anyway.

If all our fears were magically taken off of us, we wouldn't know what to do with ourselves. That's why we need process. Do not be discouraged by process. It is one of God's greatest methods of renewing us into His way of living.

TUNING THE PIANO

During setbacks, you have to remember that renewing of the mind is like tuning a piano. When you tune piano strings, the inclination over time is for those strings to loosen back to the position they were in before being adjusted. That is why consistent re-tuning is necessary, and this applies directly to your spiritual life as well. You need daily spiritual tuning, until your mind becomes used to the new way of thinking. This keeps the strings of your mind moving towards an ever-increasing spiritual capacity.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. In what way can you get out of passive mode and be more proactive with your thought life?
2. What one habit would help your morning routine, so that you begin your day more empowered?
3. Where have you recognized that you followed "your gut" or the loudest voice, only to realize that you were being driven by fear?
4. What would be a helpful experience where you can renew a fear-based perspective and turn it into an empowered one?

PRAYER

Father God, I thank You that You have empowered me to live as a warrior to overcome the ways of fear and stand firmly in who You made me to be. I pray that You help me to break out of spiritual passivity, to wake up the passive areas of my heart and stand, so that I can live courageously with boldness.

I recognize at times I've listened to the loudest voice or just my gut, not realizing that I was listening to fear. So today I choose to renew my thoughts, my mind, and my perspective so that I can move from fear-based perspectives and into faith, hope and love.

I ask that each day You continue to teach me how to move from fear and into the thoughts that You have for me. I take my stand out of passivity and into an active posture. I know that You will give me the energy, peace and power to overcome. In Jesus name, amen.



20

Kicking Out The Five Friends of Fear

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have assembled a concise list of enemies you need to be aware of when overcoming fear. These friends of fear are not *your* friends, but they will certainly attempt to court you. Putting these thoughts on notice will only help you further gain victory over fear-based thinking.

FEAR FRIEND #1: A REJECTION MINDSET

The most fearful place to live is the place where we feel separated from love, especially the love of God. I find it is one of the top cries in the hearts of people today. They feel distant and disconnected to the dynamic power of the Father's love, leaving them in a world of rejection.

A rejection mindset will seek to make us feel separated from God's love and dilute our ability to walk free from fear. In fact, rejection partners with fear. Romans 8:15 talks about a spirit of bondage again to fear. It is the opposite of adoption, which is what God offers to us. It's the enemy's counterfeit.

When you feel separated from love, fear is an automatic intruder. Rejection plays off areas where we have been broken hearted; keeping us bound to the pain of the past or in denial that any pain exists. Fear and rejection will push us to use survival tools that keep people from hurting us again. We end up living as performers and slaves, rather than as sons and daughters. As time moves on, we become more trapped than protected, because deep down, we are afraid of ever experiencing rejection.

FEAR FRIEND #2: DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS

Nothing will help you more with overcoming fear than becoming single minded in your decisions and actions. It's incredibly powerful when you make a decision, move forward and do not look back.

Double-mindedness is a colleague of fear, because it fuels hesitancy that steals our confidence in decision making. The Scriptures teach us that severe instability will surely follow the person who is not firmly single minded in his decisions (James 1:8).

If you want wisdom, one of the ways you can welcome it is by becoming single minded (James 1:5-8). Make a decision and stick to it. Jesus pointed out the severity of double-mindedness when he said in Luke 9:62, "*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*" Part of your spiritual fitness is connected to firm decision making, knowing that God has your back and will be with you in every step of faith.

FEAR FRIEND #3: GUILT

Guilt causes an emotional and mental spiral as you end up focusing on how "guilty" you are, as if standing before a legalistic judge. Most of the time guilt will point to an issue that should not even be brought to the surface. It can lead people to believe they are not forgiven, leading them to strive in religious activity, all in the attempt to feel better about their standing with God.

Many organizations and even churches will use guilt as a way of motivating people into religious activity or contribution to a cause. Unfortunately, it can be very successful because guilt can certainly motivate a crowd. Yet there is little freedom in that way of living.

Look around and consider, how many of your relationships are built around guilt? Are you motivated by compulsive obligation more than

loving decision? Guilt is a deadly force that is used in relationships worldwide. The uncomfortable feelings it produces keep people tied to dysfunction and unhealthy relationship patterns. Take a step away from guilt and you'll notice that fear will want to slap you back into line. Yet when you break out of that bondage, guilt-free relationships are the most refreshing to live in.

FEAR FRIEND #4: CONDEMNATION

Second to rejection, a challenging barrage of thoughts to cast down are the ones that condemn us. Even though Jesus did not come to condemn, many believers feel the thoughts of condemnation all the time. It is the enemy's way of accusing us, using every tactic possible to disqualify us as believers. It is a counterfeit that communicates disapproval from God, based on our flaws and past.

Condemnation's number one priority is to keep you from connecting to the power of being *in Christ* and standing on the righteousness He paid for. It wants to block you from personally embracing and experiencing the power of grace.

I have worked with numerous people who have a deep passion to do what is right and to honor God's standard of right and wrong. They often carry very sensitive hearts, so their conscious is often hyper-assessing the choices and decisions they make, leading them to become vulnerable to condemnation.

With condemnation, it puts a heavy weight of burden to do everything perfect. It takes advantage of that sensitive heart and conditions a person to live in religious performance. I've spent a great deal of time helping people to settle in the grace of God and rest in God's unending love. It's one of the most freeing experiences I have had in my own life.

As you recognize the voice of condemnation and cast it down, you'll disempower more of fear's work in your life. The solution to condemnation's voice is learning to stand on the work that Christ paid for in His death and resurrection, while allowing God to rebuild our foundation on His love and grace.

FEAR FRIEND #5: SELF-PITY

Odds are if you've struggled with any fear-based issue, you've fallen into a pit of hopelessness. In that pit, self-pity meets you. It will not allow

you to move forward because it acts as a quicksand; locking you into your past and creating an inability for you to gain freedom. It causes you to believe that you are hopeless and will never be able to move out of your dysfunction and bondage. Self-pity wants to condition you into a place of long-term defeat.

I have found it difficult seeing men and women transformed when self-pity is constantly at work. But the truth is, self-pity is something that *you* must recognize in your life.

You can discern the quicksand of self-pity in your life when you display a consistent habit of not receiving the words of encouragement from others who seek to help you. This is when you have to ask yourself, *“Do I really want to be healed?”*

A good example of self-pity is well illustrated in John 5 when Jesus came to the pool of Bethesda and asked a man with an infirmity for 38 years, *“Do you want to be made well?”* The sick man’s answer is astounding, because He doesn’t reply to the question, but instead, focuses on his problematic story.

In verse 7 this man’s response is narrowly fixed on the reasons *why* he thinks healing has not occurred, even though his Solution is standing right in front of him. The sick man answered Him...

“Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.” John 5:7

Major breakthrough can arrive to the one who will not let the enemy deceive them into feeling sorry for themselves, for that only leads to greater depression and hopelessness. Victory is around the corner for the one who *repents* of that pity and stands strong in spirit to pursue wholeness. I cannot break this for you. It must be broken through a heart-felt decision to stand and receive the power and love from Father God and others around you.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Are you aware of areas where you have felt separated from love? Where has a rejection mindset influenced your thinking, thus leading you into fear-based perspectives?
2. When has double mindedness influenced your thoughts and ability to decide?

3. Are there areas where guilt has been a driving influence? What would your battle over fear look like if you never went on a guilt trip?
4. Where are you seeing that condemnation needs to be broken off your life?
5. Do you find that in your struggle with fear, you fall into self-pity, self-loathing or victim thinking? What would your mindset be like if you kicked those ways out?

PRAYER

Father God, I pray that You give me discernment to see where mindsets that partner with fear seek to separate me from the power, love and sound mind You have for me. I ask that You give me discernment to overcome rejection, double mindedness, condemnation, guilt, and even self-pity.

I pray that You help me to see where these mindsets hook into fear and keep me from living an empowered life. I thank You that You have given me the tools and power to overcome anxiety, worry, stress, and all fear-based thinking.

I take my stand today against any thought that lures me into fear and keeps me from living in the peace and rest that God has designed for me. I thank You God that Your thoughts lead me into greater peace and help me to experience love. I thank You that You are love and I received that today. In Jesus name, amen.



21

The Power of Stillness



One of the most noticeable changes in my life, as I have learned to overcome the ways of fear, has been the value I have made for stillness, quiet and rest. This flies against every pattern I followed when anxiety was a driving force in my life. One of the most significant lifestyle changes I have made is that I love and cherish the power of stillness.

To live outside the influence of fear, the importance of stillness needs to increase. One of the greatest callings in the Bible is also one of the habits that is not practiced, “*Be still and know that I am God*” (Psalm 46:10).

Now before you think that I just sit around in a quiet oasis every day, staring into the sky, you couldn’t be more wrong. I have quite a full life. At the time of this writing, we have two young children and a pretty active schedule. In order to develop a value for stillness, I’ve had to work at it. You’ll discover this too.

The only way I was able to make room for stillness was when I realized that I needed stillness in my life like I need oxygen, food and water. Without it, my life turns into a lifestyle of constant busyness and unending pressure. But I find that the more I make time for stillness, the more my

mind and body come into a better place to hear God's leadings. I can even take thoughts captive with greater effectiveness.

You were not designed to live in the constant pressure cooker that the world lives in today. So, expect resistance when you decide to make room for stillness. But I have found that getting free from fear is challenging without this needed habit in your life.

PRACTICING STILLNESS

Christians often dismiss the practice of stillness. We know how to live very busy lives, but we have rarely been equipped in the power of getting still. Therefore, it seems uncomfortable, even excruciating for many.

At the same time, we were designed to give our mind and body a chance to get perspective and to rest in the love and provision of God. Getting still is the very thing your heart craves. We cannot ask God for the fruit of what stillness produces without practicing it. Many things only happen when we learn to pause on a regular basis and soak in the beauty of peace and quiet.

Allow me to share with you some genuine benefits of practicing the habit of stillness.

1. Stillness can make room for you to hear God's voice.

You have thousands of thoughts and voices clamoring for your attention, many of them leading to a more stress-filled, overburdened life. Even though getting still can be tough for some at first, the practice begins to train your heart to lean into the frequency of God's voice. His words are not stressed, in a hurry or under pressure. God is in complete rest and confidence. Yet He won't scream over the other voices that beg for your attention, so leaning into stillness can train your heart to connect to the empowerment His words bring. The more you can get comfortable with stillness, the more you can connect to who God says that you are.

In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. Isaiah 30:15

2. Stillness develops and enhances your ability to focus.

Your mind needs a regular reset. In fact, many of the troubling thoughts you have simply need to be put into perspective. Practicing stillness can do just that.

When you get still, it can strengthen parts of your brain and harness your ability to focus. It can help rein in a mind that is all over the place. The

more you exercise stillness, the better your mind will be at handling unwelcome thought patterns.

3. Stillness allows you to regroup.

When things get tough, stillness can be a powerful way to gain the perspective you need, to get back into the battle with new resolve. It's like having a spiritual and emotional "time out," so you can regroup and get a clearer perspective on what you are facing.

I encourage many that I work with to develop a personal "home base," a daily pit stop, where they can regroup, collect their thoughts and get empowered for the rest of the day. Too often we approach stillness way after we have been burning our engines too hot for too long. When in reality, we need it on a daily basis.

4. Practicing stillness can allow your body to heal.

Many reading this have been under the effects of stress for a long time. The standard modern life makes little room for stress recovery and most people live under the constant toll it takes. Because of this, the body can get really worn out. Many are under the influence of adrenal fatigue or exhaustion and don't even know it. Regular stillness is a powerful way for you to restore your stress response.

5. Stillness can harness the power of your words.

Stillness can harness the power of meditation, which the Bible speaks of. In Psalm 1, the word *meditate* is applied by the godly man in his continual hunger to ponder and think on the Word of God. Yet the meaning goes even deeper.

Meditate , as used in the Old Testament, speaks of *a muttering or groaning* . This paints the picture of someone pacing back and forth, mumbling precepts and thoughts from Scripture out loud, until it becomes firmly settled within.

Truth takes root when we give it our focus and process it out in our life. I have always found that it takes a little mumbling and wrestling to get there. Through "muttering," revelation has an opportunity to take shape in a person's life. In order for that to happen, one must develop a lifestyle of biblical meditation, where we use our words to direct our thoughts, focusing our attention on who God is and gaining His perspective on our lives.

True godly meditation is not just thinking about memory verses, it's about truth becoming ingrained into who you are. Don't hurry this or expect results overnight. Breakthrough arrives through intentional and consistent habits of stillness, combined with activating what we gain in those quiet moments.

CHEWING THE WORD

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. Psalms 1:2

Biblical meditation is well illustrated in the way certain animals process their food through what is known as "chewing the cud." Certain ruminant animals, like cattle, have a process of digestion that is unique. For example, cattle have one stomach, but four chambers within it. This allows them to eat certain foods that would normally be non-digestible, by regurgitating food back up from the first section of the multi-chambered stomach to be re-chewed.

In this state, the regurgitated food is referred to as "cud." Once the food has been slowly masticated for a time, it is then sent back down to the stomach section for further digestion. This process takes place in graduated and repeated cycles.

For the believer, "chewing the cud" is a spiritual process, which if understood and faithfully applied, will bring you to new heights of growth. Too many today want God to touch them quickly and remove all their problems in a flash. We look for God to microwave our fears away and give us a nice drive-through car wash of cleansing. We must not despise the "crock pot process" of growth where God teaches us through times of stillness.

NOT INTROSPECTION

Introspection involves turning up every stone and pulling back every issue of the past, obsessively searching inward and focusing solely on what's going on inside. I have found that this can lead to more guilt, condemnation, self-pity, regret, and fear.

There are a pocket of people who need to receive this: *Introspection needs to cease in order for you to achieve greater sanity and wholeness.* Introspection is a tool of the enemy because it promotes an incessant habit of inward observation. You are looking in, while ignoring the world around

you. Through constant navel gazing, you end up hyper examining your own emotional state with little progress. Your intent may be good, but introspection trains you to obsess on all the issues you think need fixing. You'll end up paying more attention to your junk than the gift of how God sees you and the people you can reach.

CHOOSE TO REMEMBER

I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands. Psalms 143:5

Your armor against fear will be strengthened when you choose to remember God's work in your life. Your powerful history with God can focus your attention on that which is possible in the future. Meditating on this builds your faith to know that God can and will do it again.

Remember, fear projects doom and gloom into the future and uses the past many times as a reference. Turn the tables by bringing up the works of God in the past that showed His faithfulness and love. Move forward with faith and boldness, knowing that God will bring you into victory.

David did this when He approached Goliath. Amongst all the doubt, unbelief and fear that was in the camp of God's people, David stood up and declared his testimony that made way for his next level of victory.

David said moreover, "The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine . . ." 1 Samuel 17:37

David chose to remember the past victories which became spiritual launching pads, propelling him into victory against his next giant. This was his pattern of living, even in the most difficult of circumstances. David made a solid determination to meditate on the Lord's ways to change His perspective and cause a greater level of courage and boldness to be unleashed in his life.

What is your past victory? What do you have coming against you? Remember the works of God and the wonders of His hands, for He has not left you stranded, but is there in your time of need. Let it be a part of your continual reflection and meditation, as you move forward.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Are you able to practice the habit of stillness in your life?
2. Where do you find yourself struggling to engage the power of stillness?
3. In what way can you make time to practice stillness and make it a part of your regular routine?
4. Take some time to document what God has done in your past. How can you remind yourself of this for your future?

PRAYER

Father God, I thank You that You are a God of rest, a God of comfort and the God of peace. I am so grateful that You are not the author of confusion. You lead us into greater rest and confidence. I pray that You help me to cultivate a greater sense of peace in my life.

I choose to make room for stillness, for meditation so that I may focus on who You are, what You say, and the love that You have for me. I thank You that You lead me beside still waters. You are a God who restores my soul.

Today, I choose to enter into Your rest. I choose to live in a lifestyle of rest. I choose to let go of the yokes, burdens and pressures that take me out of rest. I decide today that I want to live in more of Your peace every day. Thank You for this. In Jesus name, amen.



22

Utilizing Your Words

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n equipping you to overcome fear, I want to encourage you to recover the power of your voice. You may have allowed fear to keep you in silence, waiting for someone else to speak on your behalf. Or you may find yourself constantly magnifying fear's narrative by how much you talk about and spread the gloom of it.

It is important to remember how powerful your voice is. Your words were meant to accomplish God's eternal purposes, from moving mountains that stand before you, to building up those who will listen and receive.

Those who battle fear often stand back and withhold using their voice. Fear has pushed them against the wall and suffocated their power. At times, when words are able to come forth, instead of speaking a confident and hopeful future, their words bring emphasis and validation to the workings of fear, doubt, unbelief, anxiety, stress and worry.

Much of our talk is fear-based. It can be a healthy exercise to ask, "*what is the greatest motivation behind my words?*" For all of us, there are areas that can be adjusted, where our language has been motivated by fear's influence.

For those who have sat in silence, it is time to rise up against fear by speaking life and building your confidence. For others who talk with endless fear-ridden declarations, it would be incredibly effective to move into more empowered speaking.

But I want to make this clear: no where am I saying that you should stop sharing your struggles, or vulnerably talk about fears you are facing. I would never want to promote suppressing of emotions or living in denial. Confession is a healthy exercise, where we can confess our struggles and find nurture in the multitude of safety in relationships. However, I want to break you out of mindlessly being influenced by fear in your words.

It is one thing to confess a struggle with fear, yet a completely different thing to establish the value of fear in our ongoing communication. When I listen to many people talk, it seems like all they listen to is fear. I understand that it can take some time to change this, but we can begin by shifting our words, one at a time. It can make a huge difference in the trajectory of our lives.

USE YOUR RUDDER

Your mouth is a rudder, so quite often we can usher in a change in direction by using our words for a good purpose. You can actually start today by directing your voice towards empowering expressions and hope-filled speech.

What you do with your words is your choice, so it's important that you make an empowered decision. As you approach each day, I would encourage you to take charge of it with your mouth. Most people make the mistake of waiting for the day's thoughts to present themselves, rather than making a firm and godly declaration as to what you plan to think and act on.

Make a decision to stand firm with your words, no matter what storms come your way. With that habit in action, you become less of a victim and more empowered. Let your feet hit the ground with power by speaking edification to yourself.

It can be really helpful to develop a habit of memorizing certain Scriptures that attack fear, anxiety, stress and worry. There are multitudes of

relevant passages in the Scriptures that deal with all of life's issues, so use it to your advantage.

Fear wants to put a choke hold on your ability to speak love, life and liberty to your environment. Breaking fear involves stepping forth and speaking anyway, even when fear is knocking. Use that power to increase your victory and your territory by speaking the Word of God and the praises of God loud enough so that the devil, the hosts of heaven and all of creation hear it!

LEARNING TO TALK TO YOURSELF

One of the treasured habits I have cultivated over the years is the art of speaking to myself. I find that I can talk myself into places of love and hope, because my words can redirect my focus.

David encouraged himself in the LORD his God. 1 Samuel 30:6

In the Scriptures, King David knew how to encourage himself in the Lord, and through this practice, he would speak in such a way that ushered change into his life. Fortunately for us, he recorded many them in writing. An example that has really impacted my life is in Psalm 42, where he expresses his passion for God's presence and yet at the same time, recognizes his struggles and hindrances to be free in that. In blatant honesty, he begins to talk to himself.

*Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.*

Psalms 42:5

He gets honest about where he is at, but he doesn't stay there. In response to the question, his next thought is a strong message of exhortation to himself: *Hope in God*. David spoke truth to himself so that his inner man would mobilize and move away from hopelessness and heaviness into a place of confidence.

In my deepest fears, I didn't know how to encourage myself. I was so taken back by oppression and negativity, I didn't know where to start. But I did find if I could get myself talking in a good direction, I could steer myself out of fear's domain and into a more empowered hope.

With David talking to himself, he encouraged the life of his heart. His words encouraged him to move away from despair, sorrow and inner chaos.

The word “disquieted” speaks of chaotic, loud, tumultuous, and/or clamorous noise; causing trouble and war within.

With this habit of talking to himself, he knew that God would help him take back his peace and joy. The hope of God now became his focus. David was a man who continually allowed his intimacy with the Lord to change his perspective, remove the heaviness and despair, and bring encouragement to his life.

Paul the Apostle not only promoted *speaking* to yourself, he even advocated *singing* to yourself as a way of experiencing encouragement. In this, we see the power of praise and worship as an active tool of breakthrough when we cultivate an atmosphere for God’s presence to work in our lives.

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:19

In the Old Testament, the praises of God were used as weapons. Even choirs were sent out into the battlefields on the frontlines. Many conquests were not even won until the proclamation of the Word of God was sung or shouted.

Even if you do not have a great singing voice, step forward and make melody in your heart unto God. Fill your home with the praise and worship of God. I would even suggest regularly playing music in your home that cultivates an atmosphere of worship and sensitivity to God’s presence. This promotes an environment where God is welcome and where fear is *not* . Praise and worship will remind you of how big God is and how small the devil is.

THANKSGIVING

Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:20

I have learned that I cannot be fearful and fully grateful at the same time. There is something about a grateful heart that drives out the power of fear. It is simple, yet a constantly overlooked virtue.

Thanksgiving fills a person where fear loses its power. This is because fear focuses our attention on what we do not have. Thankfulness and

gratitude focus on the blessings that have been provided by God; proving that He will be faithful in the future.

This takes away the ability for fear to sting you with dread about the future, because you are so focused on how grateful you are. Cultivating a thankful heart will keep you focused on all that God has done. Fear will always try to cultivate discontentment.

In order to experience the power of gratitude, we need to practice it verbally and regularly. I exhort you to let the words of thankfulness and gratitude be an ever-present river flowing from your mouth, for it will shower blessings on your life and bring refreshment to dry situations. A thankful heart is focused on the simple blessings of being alive; like having food on the table and friends to fellowship with. A grateful heart is not focused on future gain or survival, but contentment and appreciation.

The Apostle Paul even applied this principle of thanksgiving to the prayers that come out of our mouth to combat cares and anxiousness.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. Philippians 4:6

The command is to have anxiousness over *nothing*, but instead in every situation and area of your life, develop a spiritual habit of praying from a thankful heart that is grateful for what God has already done. From that vantage point, not only will you chip away at fear, anxiety, stress and worry, the peace of God will also rest in your heart.

. . . and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:7

With this peace residing in you, there is a spiritual guard set in place, designed to bring protection and safety to your heart and mind. The peace of God will guide you as you align your heart and words with Him.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. When you think about the words you speak on a daily basis, how much of it is fear based? How much of your conversations involve looking for ways to validate what fear is saying?
2. If you began shifting just a few areas of your talk to more hope-based perspectives, what would that do for your day?

3. In what way can you begin speaking to yourself in a way that encourages and strengthens your heart?
4. How can you begin cultivating a lifestyle of gratitude in your life?

PRAYER

Father God, thank You for giving me a mouth and the ability to speak words that can empower me. I recognize that at times fear has used my words to reinforce its assault on my life. I see that many times fear has kept me from using my words to empower myself and others.

I make a decision today that I'm going to use my voice with greater intention. I recognize that my words are like a rudder in my life and will direct me into better places. I make a decision to speak life to others, but also to speak life to myself.

I choose to speak words that empower me, encourage me and direct me into places of freedom. I choose to speak to myself with greater kindness and not beat myself up. I choose to speak words of encouragement so that I may experience the life that You have for me.

I choose to express gratitude; that each day I'll use my words to cultivate a grateful heart so that fear will no longer have room in my life. I praise You for this and I thank You for equipping me in it. In Jesus name, amen.



23

Getting Honest About Stress

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hat stresses you out?

What causes a great sense of pressure in your life?

What seems to steal your energy the most?

Here is the truth: find your greatest stress points and you will most likely find your biggest fears. Stress is actually a modern-day word for the fear and pressure we live under. When we say we are *stressed*, something is triggering pressure in us. The very nature of fear involves pressure, so of course fear causes stress. Therefore, confronting the fear factor also involves releasing the factors that contribute to the pressure we live under.

GOOD AND BAD STRESS

You might be surprised to hear this from me, but there is a positive stress that is good for you. Without it, we could end up sitting on the couch eating Doritos and doing nothing. Small doses of stress can actually be healthy. It creates a reaction in your mind and body, where you can focus intensely to deal with a situation in an effective manner. Positive stress, on a healthy level, gets us moving and can help us stay motivated and focused on what is important.

Moderate stress comes on people from time to time. These are momentary or short term, where the person comes back to peace fairly easily. This kind of stress you can recover from and move forward.

Then there is toxic stress, which most people live under on a day to day basis. In this mode, the “fight or flight” stress response is being tapped out. Instead of coming back to peace, your body has adapted to long term and chronic stress living.

Long term stress is a sign that the body is not in a proper rhythm of peace. Your physiology has a way of signaling that something needs to change—either the environment you are under or the internal factors that add pressure. The fact is, the body was not designed to live under the stresses that we often allow. It’s like driving a car with the emergency brake on. Things don’t work the way they should.

THE COST OF STRESS

Most people know toxic stress is bad for them, but we keep rolling the dice, thinking we can beat the odds, while ignoring what a stress filled lifestyle is doing to us. It usually takes a real wake up call for people to make the changes they need to. I know I had get sober about what my life would be like if I didn’t make some major changes in my lifestyle and habits. You will also need to come to terms with what is at stake if you do not change your stress related patterns.

1. A Loss of Health. Constant stress can actually cause premature aging to the cells of your body, up to 10 years, leading your body to become run down and worn out. Chronic stress pulls on the resources of other body systems, making your physiology more prone to sickness and disease. Look at just about any disease and you can find that stress can be a major contributor.

In Philippians 2, Paul mentioned a man name Epaphroditus, who basically got sick from stress in the work of ministry. Like many pastors and ministry leaders, the work they were doing for God got to them. I have read more stories about ministers being under such deep stress, but not doing much about it. One well known pastor in particular would have to drink down Pepto-Bismol before each service when he would preach, to cope with ulcers and acid reflux, coming out of deep toxic stress in his life.

Stress accumulates in your body until it is released. For most people, their unaddressed pressures have built up and are damaging their health. Stress doesn't just disappear on its own. Therefore, engaging healthy stress release is critical. But we cannot expect to experience physical health while ignoring our stress issues.

2. Chronic Agitation, Irritability and Anger. Quite often the people who receive the brunt of your anger are those who are closest to you. This includes friends and close family members. The anger starts off as frustration, but over time, it gets unleashed on others. There becomes this air of tension, where they have not learned to let go of pressure and burdens. They become resentful about their tireless work. We can often carry burdens like we are martyrs, even though God has not put these pressures on us.

3. Can't Hear from God. In the constant busyness of stress, we lose the ability to stop and hear what God is saying. The buzz of stress has created an overtone that tunes out the promptings of the Holy Spirit. We feel guilty for not spending time with God, but we drown out the subject with more chronic busyness.

4. A Loss of Perspective. This is the biggest effect that chronic stress has on me. When I allow pressure to climb up into my thinking, I can become more prone to discouragement and a negative viewpoint. Sometimes the best thing to do is get a good night's sleep or step away from the situation, so I can get a clearer picture of my circumstances.

5. Vulnerability to Addictions Skyrockets. One of the byproducts of stress-filled living is that we lose our sense of self-control. Built up stress needs to be released. But for many, instead of stillness, prayer and exercise, people opt for sex, food or some type of drug to numb them out and give them relief from their pain.

Stress driven people often run to pleasure to help them cope with pain and the pressure they have allowed themselves to be under. In fact, statistics show that during times of great stress over a nation, the cinemas and local bars receive an influx of attendance.

6. Loss of Identity. When under the work of stress, we give ourselves over to the demands and pressures, while often losing sight of who we are in the process. It hinders our relationships and stifles our ability to live in

emotional health. We become driven by fear to please other people and make sure that the demands of others are fulfilled, to the detriment of our own identity.

7. *Loss of Relational Wholeness.* When under stress, relationships are not as important as they should be. What we really need is to stop and allow relationships to connect to the deep places of our hearts. Instead, we end up being relationally isolated, except when going about our stress related activity.

As if experiencing the other six issues wasn't enough, this one is saddening, because no matter how much people want to connect and help, a person who lives in stress keeps going after the same patterns like an addict goes after a drug. They look for the "high" they get in the noise and busyness of stress. In fact, most people get a dopamine rush from the stress life they live under. They gain an opiate-like response in their body. To leave stress would mean to leave their addiction.

8. *Burnout.* Fatigue and adrenaline failure are in the recipe for those who don't make major changes. At this point is where the enemy works to render us ineffective. If we cannot maintain our sense of wholeness, then how effective are we for the Kingdom?

STRESS TEST

It's very easy to detect your levels of stress. Take a few moments to see if you can get quiet and sit still; with no phone, agenda or to-do list in front of you. See how long you can last and feel comfortable in that posture. For most, the exercise is maddening to them. Many will struggle to sit still without a bombardment of thoughts pulling at them heavily.

Yet nothing will change until we soberly recognize how our lifestyle is affecting us. Slowing down and facing these stressors is important, because it's usually where our greatest healing lies. Addressing them will help us adjust and change the dangerous narratives we keep falling into.

My biggest aim in this chapter is that you will get real about what is inflicting tension, stress and pressure in your life and invite God to heal you of the fear-ridden motivations that keep you living in this vicious cycle. In the next chapter, we will look at some helpful application.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Where do you need to come to terms with the stress factors in your life?
2. What is causing you stress? Write it down. What action step needs to happen for you to take your peace back?
3. Where is the voice of fear keeping you in a pattern of stress living? Where can you break agreements with that fear and establish new agreements?
4. What is one step you can engage today to decrease the influence of stress in your life?

PRAYER

Father God, I recognize where stress has become more a part of my life. You have not called me to live a life of stress, so I make a decision to move into a new direction.

God, You have called me to live a life of peace, confidence, and boldness. Stress has drained areas of energy and has taken a toll on my physiology in various ways.

So today I decide to live a new life that is not based on the pressure of stress, but a lifestyle that is based in rest. Father, I know that this world lives in a system that is stress based, which allows fear to have a work in many areas of their life.

I choose to go against the grain of stress that has been run by fear and pressure. I choose to take a stand against it, so that I live a lifestyle that is more stress-free. I know You will walk with me through it. I thank You for this. In Jesus name, amen.



24

Ten Mindsets for Stress Relief

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am not going to share anything that I have not processed in my own life. This is not just theory, but actual mindsets that will help you rid your mind and body of the effects of stress that fear wants to keep in your life. But it will do nothing in your life unless you are willing to make shifts in your thinking and lifestyle.

For many of you reading this, your health and sanity will continue to suffer if you don't make changes regarding stress in your life. Living outside a life of stress takes effort, but you can go against the grain of how the rest of the world lives.

MINDSET #1: FACE YOUR ROOT FEARS

What pushes you to be so hyper-driven and tense? Why do you constantly stay so busy? What's the deep fears that drive you incessantly into the lifestyle that you live?

It's time to get honest and address the root fears that motivate your dysfunction and keep you in stress. Until you get honest, you'll justify your fear-motivated lifestyle and remain in the pressure of stress.

Remember, no one is making you live the way you live. You are responsible for your mindset and how you choose to live out your day. When we get honest and take responsibility, we can allow God to heal the place that fear has held us, so we can move forward without fear driving our day.

MINDSET #2: EMBRACE THE FATHER'S CARE FOR YOU

Stress builds up in us because of the cares that we hold in our mind and body. God never designed for you to carry on your shoulders the weight of problems and concerns. He tells us to cast our cares on Him. Every day, you are to toss up your problems to heaven, being fully aware that God cares for you. (See 1 Peter 5:7)

Jesus has a yoke for you to join. It's the yoke that is easy and light. (See Matthew 11:28-30) When you cast your cares upon God, you enter into a lifestyle of rest. But it's a daily mindset. Yet the power of casting your cares is only going to manifest in power when you realize that God is a Father to you. Until that revelation sinks into your heart, you'll be lured into holding onto all the stresses that life brings.

MINDSET #3: REALIGN EXPECTATIONS

Most people admit that the pressure they carry is not necessarily put on them by others. Much of it is self-inflicted. The pressure trains us to live as slaves, people pleasers, perfectionists and overall performance driven people; all seeking for results that in the long run do not satisfy.

Every day, I find myself having a discussion with someone, where their stress levels are high because they are so hard on themselves. A single mom beats herself up because she has to work three jobs and is not able to be as involved in church activities. A dad with a special needs son beats himself up because he is not able to pursue the business idea he has. He has made a decision to sacrifice for the sake of being available for his child's needs. But at the same time, he's not being kind to himself regarding the circumstances he's in.

All stress comes down to the expectations you are allowing to be put on yourself. No matter what other people say, the choice comes down to what you expect. Few people know how to step back and take in the amount of things that have come their way. You are expecting yourself to live like

superman, but you are not being kind to yourself in your current circumstances.

I believe that our high achievement and success driven culture has done a lot to torment people. They compare themselves to others, feeling they are never good enough, because our identities are wrapped up in how well we are performing.

Are you aware of the season that you are in? Maybe you are a mom who is stressed because you had a great career and now you are raising children. If you don't recognize the season you are in, you'll beat yourself up that your career is drifting off into the galaxy without you.

In releasing stress, we need to get with God and get clear on (1) the season we are in and (2) the priorities that we have in that season. This sets the stage for the right expectations, because we are putting our energy in the right places.

MINDSET #4: LEARN TO LOVE YOURSELF AS GOD LOVES YOU

There is a woman I bump into, who works in the administrative department at her office. Every time I see her, she complains about her foot pain. Her work has her on her feet for long hours and the pressures have taken a toll on her. When I first heard of it, I asked her if she had ever considered getting some great inserts for her shoes.

Her response, *"Yeah I don't really have time for that."*

Every time I see her, I ask her how her feet are doing, and she tells me the same thing. What she really means is, *"I don't love myself enough to take care of myself."*

Masses of people are living as false martyrs by letting their health go by the wayside. They eat horribly, don't exercise and work endless hours. The reality is, they've not learned to love themselves the way God loves them. Until you get to the point where you learn to love yourself, you won't give yourself the patience and kindness that God designed for you to live in.

MINDSET #5: SAY "NO" A LOT MORE AND HAVE STRONGER BOUNDARIES

Saying *no* has become a lost art, yet healthy people spend most of their day saying *no*. It's easy to say *yes* to every demand and pull, but it will kill

you in the end. When you learn to love yourself, you will begin to see that saying *no* and having healthy boundaries are critical to your health.

Let me be honest, people will use you all day long if you let them. You are in charge of whether or not you say yes or no. You cannot keep saying yes and then weep as to why you are so stressed out and overburdened.

One of the best ways you can have great boundaries is by first establishing who you are and what your values are. That way you are not pulled into what other people want you to be for them.

So, begin today. Start practicing saying *no* . You don't have to give a long explanation. You will be better off for yourself and others if you practice this.

MINDSET #6: RECOVER AS MUCH AS YOU OUTPUT

Burnout occurs when our output exceeds our input for a long period of time. You were designed to live in a rhythm of pouring out, while giving ample time to receive, refresh and recoup.

Everyone has a different rhythm in this area. For example, because of the deep emotional nature of my work, I have to make extra time for refreshment. My writing, teaching material and personal sessions involve painful wounds of people's past and issues of deep brokenness.

So, I have to make room for refreshment. No one will give it to me. I have to give myself permission to do that. You need to find your own rest and recovery cycle that works for the life you live in. You may need to incorporate a nap in your day (without feeling guilty) or make sure you have a quality day-off each week. The way you can tell it's working is when you have the energy and excitement to get back into engagement.

MINDSET #7: MANAGE ENERGY, NOT JUST YOUR TIME

Everybody has the same amount of time in a day. But not everyone has the same amount of energy. I have found that managing my energy is the best way to make use of my day. Too many people look at the hours in the day and cram in as much as they can. I've learned that I have to become aware of how much energy certain activities will take from me.

I have learned to schedule my day by recognizing how much energy certain activities will require of me. This helps me to keep a good deal of margin and extra space for the time I need to get refreshed. It also helps me

to make sure that I am giving my best energy to my wife and kids, not my left overs, like we often do.

MINDSET #8: RELEASE CONTROL

One of the ways we attempt to feel safe and certain is to control. This habit gets out of hand for so many, as fear has put controlling mechanisms into high gear. Anyone who is controlling has a great deal of fear. They are often the most stressed, worn out and burnt out people. Yet letting go of control is only going to happen when they address their fear issues.

Releasing control needs to happen in every area of your life. Husbands and wives, let go of trying to change or control your spouse. Parents, release your children to God and let Him lead you in your parenting. Remember, God loves your children more than you do, if you can imagine that. Pastors, release your controlling patterns to God. Bosses, where do you need to let go of control, so your employees can actually be empowered to excel? Releasing control takes a heart-felt decision, but it is one of the most freeing practices we can cultivate.

MINDSET #9: FORGIVE AND RELEASE ANGER

One of the top ways we can experience stress, fear and torment is to hold onto resentment and unforgiveness. Matthew 18 tells us that we open ourselves to the tormentors when we refuse to forgive and release others.

One of the best ways to release anger is to have healthy conversations with safe people on a regular basis. This involves people you can share with and let your frustrations out without being judged or analyzed. It creates the setting for nurture that our hearts need to calm down and recognize that we need to forgive, let go and move on.

Millions of people just let it all get pent up inside them. This erodes their thinking and damages the cells in their body. Have you even considered that you may need to forgive yourself as well?

MINDSET #10: REFRAME FEAR BASED PERSPECTIVES

What you tell yourself during anxiety, worry or stress is really important. Sometimes issues stress us out because we have a fear-based association that needs to be renewed. You may need to learn to get excited about something that you normally would get anxious about. Many times,

the anticipation of excitement can feel similar to the anxiety of a dreaded situation. The only difference is how we frame the situation.

I remember I used to get so anxious before a public speaking event. I couldn't wait for it to be over. Over time, I began to say to myself, "*Wait! This is what I love to do. Why am I letting fear steal the joy of what I am passionate about?*" I decided to reframe my perspective to get excited and use that energy to bless people with my whole heart. Fear makes us hold back, but I turned the tables by creating a new association. Instead of saying, "*I have to do...*" I changed it to "*I get to do...*" This turned my dread-filled avoidance into joyful anticipation; like a kid on Christmas Eve.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. In looking at the ten areas mentioned in this chapter, which one is God speaking to your heart about the most?
2. What is one action can you apply today to enhance a more stress-free life?

PRAYER

Father God, as I seek to overcome the influence of stress in my life, I ask that You'd help me face the root fears that keep me in cycles of stress. You are a good Father and I choose to join in with You today to realign and reset the expectations in my life, so that I see things the way that You see them.

I ask You to help me love myself as You love me so that I do not put extra pressure and hard expectations on myself that keep me bound in the yolk of stress. Give me the power to say 'no' and to make my 'yes' stronger. Grant me wisdom for healthy boundaries in my life, that I may have a rhythm to recover and restore areas that have been broken or influenced by stress.

I pray that You'd help me to manage the energy in my life and to release control. I also pray that You would help me to be a forgiving person, to release anger and learn to take areas that were dominated by fear and turn them into places where I can joyfully anticipate the good work that You're doing in my life. I thank you for this. In Jesus name, amen.



25

Habits for Fear-Free Living

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abits are what keep us in daily pathways of freedom. You need day to day habits that will empower your movement from fear into faith, hope and love. I have spent most of my life dissecting routines and actions that are helpful, practical and doable. This chapter is a basic summary of the practices and helpful routines that have helped so many walk into greater freedom from fear's influence.

After years of helping people, I have found there to be some very simple practices that we often overlook when it comes to walking in more peace and less fear pressure. Sometimes we can look at things so spiritually, we neglect the very practical, day to day blessings of healthy living. I am a firm believer in a 360-degree approach when it comes to overcoming the fear factor.

Each of these have been found to be very beneficial in my life. Some of these points have been mentioned before in this book, but I will now give some practical application. Don't feel pressure to implement them all at once. Allow God to enhance each one as He leads you.

1. CREATE A DAILY "TIME OUT" FOR STILLNESS

Everyone needs daily “pit stops,” where they can pause and refresh their heart and mind. We often wait until we are at burnout to get still and refreshed, yet wonder why it takes so long to recover. The fact is we need daily stops to get still and reflect on who God is in the midst of our lives.

Routines can be incredibly helpful for your overall victory and stillness needs to be one of them. Cultivate this habit long enough and when things begin to get overwhelming or challenging, you can easily return to it and experience restoration.

But this didn’t start off easy for me. During the worst of anxiety-ridden days, I couldn’t stop and “take my peace” for longer than five seconds. Maintaining any ounce of rest and stillness in my heart was nearly impossible.

But one of the best gifts I gave myself was the space to work out a process of growth. Instead of falling into defeatism, I allowed myself to make incremental steps for change. Instead of waiting for everything to manifest overnight, I said to myself, “*its ok. This will take as long as it takes.*”

With that in mind, I built into my day, moments where I would stop, put my hand over my heart and receive God’s peace. I would say out loud, “*Father, I take your peace right now.*” I would take in that peace and hold onto it for as long as I could.

In the beginning, this lasted for about five to ten seconds. Later, it became 30 seconds. Soon after, I could hold my peace for 3 minutes. Then 9 minutes. After a while, I could hold my peace for about 20 minutes!

The power of momentum is incredible. Once I was able to hold my peace for about 20 minutes, my mind and body began to show the fruit of it. I gave myself room to learn and get accustomed to quieting down the noisy interference I lived under most of my life.

I can remember the day where it broke through even further. A miracle for me, I was able to engage the peace of God for an entire day. Thinking about that day and more days like it makes me cry as I write this. To be able to bask in the presence of God’s peace, when for years I struggled so badly, was the greatest gift I could ever receive. Many people chase wealth, status or achievement. I just wanted to access inner peace. This was worth more to me than any riches someone could offer.

That's why my daily "home base" is a treasured habit for me. Today, it's my place of refreshment. It's not a place of isolation or avoidance, but a grounding resource, where I connect to who God is and re-connect my heart to the love and peace that my Father has for me.

This is such a valuable practice, but you have to give yourself time to get used to living in peace. The more you give yourself grace to learn and grow, the greater fruit you will see in your life. I just know that true peace is one of the greatest manifestations we can receive in these days.

For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: "In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

Isaiah 30:15

2. APPLYING THANKSGIVING

Nothing puts things into perspective as when we engage gratitude and thanksgiving with all our hearts. My family has put this into practice by keeping thanksgiving journals. We take several minutes on a few nights a week to write down what we are thankful for. Then we share it with each other to encourage one another and realign our focus. This trains us to be more appreciative of things in life and to enjoy what we already have.

I learn the power of thanksgiving in a real way as I focus my words and mind on what I am grateful for. It gives me a whole new perspective and empowers my thought life. My first attempts at gratitude were met with large-scale resistance. Breathing in clean air can be a very new experience when you have been conditioned to inhaling smog most of your life. But over time, thanksgiving connected my heart to God's presence like nothing else and paved the way for me to see the possibilities for my life that were there all along.

3. SPEAK TO YOURSELF EVERY DAY

I talk to myself every day and I encourage you to do the same. When I wake up, I talk to myself. When I go to bed, I talk to myself. I take walks and talk to myself. When I am in the car I talk to myself.

Sounds crazy? It's actually a recipe for transformation. You actually talk to yourself all day in what many people call, "self-talk." You have an inner dialogue and narrator that follows you all day long. For most people, the inner dialogue is incredibly negative and disempowering.

To interrupt this negative inner dialogue, I use the power of my words to set the narrative I want my heart and mind to focus on. I developed a habit of certain affirmations and declarations, based on God's Word that I say out loud.

With that in mind, I encourage you to make a list of declarations that can help you face the battles in your life with an empowered perspective. Every person I know who is seeing fruit in their overcoming journey has developed a routine of declarations over their life. They contain specific and meaningful words to their personal journey.

- Take some Scriptures and personalize them for yourself.
- Memorize certain Scriptures that are helpful to your journey.
- Declare who God is over your circumstances.
- Declare God's love for you and affirm statements that agree with how He sees you.
- Take statements and write them on your walls and in places where you can be reminded.
- Record messages to yourself that are encouraging, for when you need them most. I literally did this. Whenever I was experiencing a breakthrough moment in my state of mind, I would record a message to myself, so that I could access it when having a tough day.
- Write down everything you learn as you overcome.
- Share what you learn with someone you know who can be encouraged.

4. GET REST AND SOLID SLEEP

When I work with people about enhancing their mood or overall state of mind, sleep needs to be at the top of the list. In my own life, I found that when I was more prone to being super anxious or overwhelmed, I often needed to (a) get more exercise or (b) get more rest.

When you're feeling anxiety and high levels of stress, you are probably overusing your "fight or flight" mechanism and may be in chronic exhaustion. I found that I needed more sleep than usual during tougher seasons of overcoming. Being gentle to myself was important. I even practiced taking naps for a while. Sometimes getting good sleep can do more for your mind battles than anything else.

I would include these tips:

- Develop a consistent bedtime and wake up routine. Don't let fear dictate your schedule.
- Once you wake up, don't lay around in bed and let your thoughts ruminate. Get up and start the day. The movement can help center the mind and improve clarity.
- Because you may have a lot of "fight or flight" going on, you may need to back down on the responsibilities you undertake, to give yourself time to heal and strengthen your body's vitality.
- Make sure you are taking proper days off and regular times of rest.
- Take naps. It's ok to stop and close your eyes for a few minutes. Even a 10-15-minute nap can do wonders.

5. EXERCISE

Christians are notorious for seeking spiritual help but ignoring the need for physical activity and healthy movement. One of the greatest stress relievers that God created is regular exercise. Unfortunately, a majority of people have sit down jobs, high stress and little to no exercise.

If running, biking or exercise routines seem too much for you, don't overwhelm yourself. Go on a walk every day for at least 25 to 30 minutes. In fact, many of you reading this have overworked your adrenals and are dealing with some form of adrenal exhaustion. A simple 20 to 30 minutes a day of nice walking can be incredibly healthy for healing your "fight or flight" response. Anything more intense than that is up to you, but please understand, taking care of your body is a critical aspect when it comes to overcoming fear's operation, but also for enhancing your mental state.

6. NUTRITION | NUTRITION | NUTRITION

If you are serious about empowering your mind and physiology, you'll need to consider making nutritional changes to optimize your health. You cannot fuel your body with garbage and then wonder why your emotional and mental state is shot.

Changing your diet can be one of the most helpful steps you can take now to improve your state of mind, overall energy and clarity. Studies are showing more and more the connection to what is going on in the gut and the effects it has on the brain.

This is becoming more important in today's culture, because "food" is changing rapidly in an unhealthy direction. In fact, many times, we are not even eating food, we are ingesting "food-like" substances.

More foods are becoming genetically modified or laden with chemicals and pesticides. It is important now more than ever to get understanding about nutrition. Do your homework, because you need to learn what you are eating and using for fuel.

I am not talking about going on a fad diet, but moving into a lifestyle change. Here are some things you can begin considering:

- Go to a doctor regularly and get blood work done so you can see where certain areas need to be addressed.
- If you haven't already, move away from processed foods in your eating routine. You'd be surprised how they may be affecting you.
- Get more greens in your diet. In people I have helped nutritionally, I encourage them to start by adding more greens and leafy vegetables to their meals.
- Get help on what kind of nutritional regiment will serve your mental clarity and strength. For most, processed foods, sugar, modern wheat and high glycemic foods create a lot of lethargy and fatigue and don't help mood or mental clarity.
- Be aware of stimulants, like caffeine, that can trigger anxiety-like symptoms in your body.
- Get schooled on what supplements can be helpful. Sometimes people can go overboard, but a magnesium supplement like "Calm" or a cortisol support supplement like Relora can be an added help.
- Eat slow. I like to ask older people what their secret to long living is. One man told me, "I eat slow." Slow down when you eat your meal.
- Take a pause when you eat. If you eat while working or moving, you overwork and stress out your digestive system. You won't even digest food in a healthy way. Stop, give thanks for your food and take time to enjoy it and the company you are with.

7. GET OUTSIDE

Modern culture spends very little time outdoors or connecting to the beauty of nature. When I was younger and full of anxiety, I spent very little time soaking in nature and enjoying what God created. Since my spiritual renovation process began, I have gained such an appreciation for the outdoors and for observing the majesty of creation.

It sets our perspective in a powerful way when we come into engagement with God's creation. Here are a couple suggestions:

- As much as possible, take breaks to go outside and soak in the air and sun.
- First thing in the morning, I like to walk outside, let my bare feet touch the ground. While standing there, I take in some deep breaths and thank God for His creative power.

8. DO A HOUSE CLEANING

A renewed outward environment can really help encourage your inner renewal. Change comes from the inside out, but it helps if the outward matches what you are developing inward.

If you are serious about living a transformed life, it can be a great experience to do a home reorganization. I am not talking about a whole renovation, but simple things, like cleaning the house, clearing out clutter and even redecorating rooms.

If you are not naturally an organized person or struggle to keep a clean living space, it would be helpful to include someone who can do some cleaning and organizing with you. Home chaos doesn't help when you are looking to cultivate internal peace.

Don't make this complicated, as there are some simple things you can consider:

- Do not neglect personal care. If you are struggling with anxiety or battles of the mind, don't neglect taking care of yourself. If you leave your home a mess or neglect hygiene, it can welcome further oppression and depression.
- Sometimes simple things like making your bed, showering and putting on some decent clothing can communicate care to your heart and mind.

- Do a spring cleaning, removing anything that contributes to a cluttered environment.
- Throw away things you don't need.
- Repaint and repurpose certain rooms.
- Get rid of old letters, pictures and memories that do not serve your freedom and movement forward.

9. FIND HELPFUL PEOPLE CONNECTIONS

Don't overwhelm yourself with finding a best friend who understands everything about you. That's a setup for discouragement. Try to find one safe person that you can begin connecting with. It's important for you to get out of your head and into conversations with others.

Many people who have deep battles of the mind make the mistake of monopolizing conversations. They end up only talking about themselves and they exhaust people. Then when people back off, they complain they have no friends. So, don't make the mistake of backing up the truck every time you meet with somebody. It's great to talk about your struggles, but you also need to know when it's healthy to give your problems a rest and focus on someone else.

Another weapon to use is to think about someone you can help. Every time I got hit with deep anxiety, panic or depression, I would think of the people I was going to help with what I learned. I found people I could reach out to, got out of my head and helped them with their life.

10. CHANGE YOUR INPUT

Be aware of the people, social media, news and entertainment sources that can have a negative influence on your life.

Some things to consider:

- Take a break from the news and see how you feel after a while.
- Take breaks from social media. Many times, those interactions can incite hopelessness, negativity and fear.
- With relationships, don't stick your nose where you don't need to. It's important to keep an eye on your own business, as you have enough to deal with.
- Find activities that will bring enjoyment and laughter.

- Laugh a ton. Watch funny movies. Tell jokes. Listen to jokes. Check out a good comedian that makes you belly laugh. Then laugh some more.
- Listen to lots of great music that moves your heart.
- Let go of friendships and relationships that are toxic. Stop blaming them or beating yourself up. Some relationships don't work out and that is ok.
- Stop taking yourself so seriously.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Of the ten habits mentioned, don't try to implement them all at once. What is one you can begin applying today?
2. What is one disempowering habit you can begin letting go of, one that is not serving your healing process?

PRAYER

Father God, I give You the habits of my life. I give You the routines, practices and daily actions that I engage. I ask that You help me to develop a rhythm and daily routine that is built to overcome fear.

I ask that You help me to understand which step to take today--to make more room for stillness, thanksgiving and speaking over myself. I pray that You restore my sleep so that I wake up refreshed and charged to face the day. I pray that You help me to take back the night season so that each day starts more empowered.

I pray that You would heal my physiology and renew it as I take action. Give me discernment to change my input so that I am meditating and focusing on things that empower my overcoming. I thank You for it. Above all, empower me by Your Spirit to start new and fresh, in Jesus name, amen.



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Five Steps to Address an Anxiety Attack

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efore I go any further, I want to clearly state that I am not a doctor, so none of this is meant to override or replace any directions that a medical professional gives you. I am your brother in Christ, simply sharing what has helped me and what has benefitted those I have helped.

Also, you have to give yourself time to renew your mind and retrain your physiology. I have found this takes the biggest amount of patience. Our bodies are so easily conditioned and will revert back to old patterns easily. I like to see it as a body builder does the gym. You don't develop huge muscles overnight. They must be developed as you continue to exercise them.

With that stated, I want to give five key tips when you are in the middle of an anxiety storm or anxiety attack where you feel overwhelmed and don't know what to do. With that in mind, this is not meant to replace calling a doctor or getting any professional help. This book is designed to help your daily strategy, but this chapter is dedicated to those moments that are really challenging.

STEP #1: CHANGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

I am not saying run home and be by yourself. What I am saying is change the setting you are in. If you are in your house, go outside for a minute. If you're in your office, take a break and go to a different spot. I found that when anxiety was creeping up strong, it was often in the worst situations, like when I was in a staff meeting or a party. I would politely excuse myself and take a few minutes in the bathroom. Sometimes changing the environment can help to interrupt the pattern that anxiety is creating. The point is, you want to find a comfortable place where you can address this issue.

STEP #2: GET STILL AND FOCUS ON YOUR BREATHING

The feelings and thoughts are manifesting in your physiology, so I find it helpful to address my physiology with peace right away. I often find it helpful to take a confident posture. Looking in the mirror is helpful because you can take a moment to talk to yourself.

But first, you need to take control of your breathing, which speeds up when you are under stress or any "fight or flight." You can do this by inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth, slowly and deeply. Repeat this until you see your body calming down, even if it's just a little bit.

Do this so that you immediately take in peace and establish it in your body. When under the work of fear, our breathing starts to speed up, often without us realizing it. So, establishing a new breathing pattern is one way of stabilizing yourself and moving more towards being calm.

STEP #3: BE LOVING TO YOURSELF

Remember, every place that fear is working in is a place where love needs to have a greater work. What you need is love.

This is not the time to start saying, "*What is wrong with me?*" or "*Why can't I just get it together?*" The biggest thing you need in this moment is love. It's awesome when you have someone with you who can give you a hug and pray for you. But most of the time, it's just you, God and the devil. You need to be able to rise up in moments like that. The first way we can do this is to exercise compassion for ourselves.

Patience and kindness are the pillars of love, so first start by being patient with yourself. No harsh words and heavy expectations. As you take in those deep breaths, let yourself fall into the arms of God's love. We often know we are receiving God's love when we can give that towards ourselves. You'll also need to be kind to yourself. Even in a difficult moment like this, be kind to yourself in your posture and your words. Think about what you would do if someone else was going through this. Give that same measure of kindness to yourself.

STEP #4: BREAK AGREEMENT WITH FEAR AND ANXIETY

You now need to break agreement and exercise the repentance prayer that I gave in the previous chapter. Some think that if you do this once, it should solve everything, but I have actually found that like most things, even repentance is a process. That's why I encourage people to use the repentance and renunciation prayer as much as they need to. How much is up to you, it just needs to be done from the heart as best you can.

To be honest, I have excused myself from dinner parties, so I could go into the bathroom and pray through some anxiety that was intense. I didn't have safe people around me at the time to process through it, so I had to work it out with God in the bathroom.

It's important to pray the prayer out loud. You don't have to say it exactly as I wrote it either, but I encourage you to use the words "repent" and "renounce" in your expression. But it is critical that you use your words. If you are in a setting where other people hearing you is not a good idea, you don't have to yell. I have found breakthrough whispering my repentance prayer. Remember, this is a process and you have to find your lane in it all.

You can even take authority over this fear and command it to leave. Be firm. You don't have to scream, just use your voice firmly. Don't argue with fear or try to have a shouting match. Just tell that fear to go in Jesus name.

STEP #5: MAKE DECLARATIONS THAT AFFIRM WHO YOU ARE

Now that you have broken agreement and taken authority, you need to focus your heart and mind on what God says about you. I encourage people to have a list on hand, either on their phone or in their wallet, that has a list of personal declarations and affirmations.

The first thing you can do, is to look at yourself in the eyes and say, “*It’s gonna be ok.*” Call yourself by name, saying, “*Mark, it’s going to be ok.*”

Words have a way to nurture our hearts, so it’s important that you learn the art of speaking to yourself. If you catch me going for a walk on a sunny day, you will most likely see my lips moving and no one around me. I’m speaking life into myself.

The first three things I encourage everyone to say on a daily basis, are personal affirmations and declarations, such as:

Father God loves me.

I love myself.

I have what it takes to overcome.

You can certainly add to this list or make your own. Don’t just utilize these in panic moments of anxiety. Use them as a daily weapon of attack.

SOME ADDED THOUGHTS...

In a moment where you are overwhelmed with anxiety and fear, you do not have to make a panic decision right now. Give it time because this will pass.

But above all, do not quit. Whatever happens, do not ever, ever, ever quit. *It will take as long as it takes.* You are going to be ok.

PRAYER

Father God, You have not given me anxiety. You have not put anxiety on me. This anxiety is not from You. So, I take a moment right now to break my agreement with anxiety. I repent of and renounce anxiety in my life.

I take responsibility today to walk away from anxiety as I do not want it in my life. I break agreement with the thought that I am just an anxious person. Anxiety is not who I am.

Today I take my stand against it. I choose to focus my thoughts on perspectives that lead me into love and empower my hope.

I command the works of anxiety to leave right now in the name of Jesus. Father, I thank You that in this moment You are here. You are with me and I lean into Your love. Your perfect love casts out all fear. I thank You for that

love because it is Your love that helps me to break out from the snare of anxiety.

I tell anxiety, you are no longer welcome in my life anymore. Day by day, God is healing me, restoring me, and transforming me. I thank You for this God. In Jesus name, amen.



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Confronting the Fear of Man

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As a young pastor, Timothy was faced with the daunting challenge of shepherding growing believers; many of whom were older than him. No doubt throughout his ministry encounters, he faced many situations that could be infected by the fear of man.

With that in mind, Paul gives his spiritual son in the Lord a reminder of what fear is seeking to do in his life by painting a clear spiritual perspective. *Therefore, I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 2 Timothy 1:6*

Paul was exhorting his young son, Timothy, to minister at his youthful age with boldness and authority. In earlier portions of this chapter, he reminds Timothy of his spiritual heritage and also of the faith that resides in him. He also reminds him of the gift of God that is within him through the laying on of Paul's hands.

I am sure there was a special moment that came to Timothy's memory when Paul wrote this exhortation. It probably brought him back to a place of spiritual infilling. It was most likely the occasion where Paul prayed over this young man and spiritual gifts were stirred up in him. When Paul

brought this to remembrance in his letter, no doubt Timothy knew exactly what he was talking about.

Now what is the significance of Paul's charge? One simple reason is because a spiritual gift must be used by a believer or it can lie dormant. Stirring up the gifts is absolutely necessary for the flow of ministry to take place. ^[6]

WHAT KEEPS THE GIFT FROM BEING STIRRED UP?

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:7

The context of Paul's message is very simple: *fear's overall objective is to keep the gifts from being stirred up*. Paul told Timothy, *stir up the gift that is in you*, because fear is seeking to work against God's ordained gifts and assignments. Ultimately, when the gift of God becomes stirred up in our lives, fear loses its ability to bring torment because boldness and authority takes over.

The NIV translates the word "fear" in this passage as "timidity," thus adding to our understanding of the word. This word *fear* speaks of cowardice and an act of remaining in timidity. It can communicate the meaning of being *intimidated*. Intimidation, or the fear of man, will seek every opportunity to keep you from truly knowing who you are in Christ and prevent you from stepping out in boldness to minister the love and power of God.

THE TRAP

The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.
Proverbs 29:25

The word "snare" in the Hebrew is the word *môqēsh*, which describes a noose for catching animals. The definition of this word also implies a hook to the nose that leads you towards that snare. This snare becomes the prison where a person affected by it becomes trapped.

The illustrated meaning here is that being intimidated by other people is a lure that leads us into bondage. I believe the fear of man keeps many people from stepping into what is really possible in their life.

The book of 1 Kings contains a dynamic example of how intimidation can infect the strongest of people. The prophet Elijah came under the

influence of intimidation, coming from a woman named Jezebel. Interestingly enough, it occurred right after he witnessed a mind-blowing miracle on Mount Carmel before the prophets of Baal. Jezebel, the biblical example of intimidation and witchcraft, finds out that her prophets were embarrassingly defeated at this spiritual showdown. In reaction to this loss and the killing of her prophets, she retaliated with a harsh message of fear to Elijah.

Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. 1 Kings 19:2-3

You would think that a powerful man of God like Elijah would think nothing of a threat like this one from Jezebel; especially after all that God did in his life. Yet instead of Elijah remaining calm and confident in the Lord, he panicked under these words of intimidation and ran for his life. In a moment, he completely forgot about the victory on Mount Carmel and escaped in panic, which led him to later feeling afraid, isolated and even depressed.

The truth is, when Elijah came under this intimidation, he lost his vision and spiritual authority. He forgot who he was. In fact, if you continue reading the account in 1 Kings, not even the presence of God visiting could help him climb out of his depression! This is why we need to open our eyes to recognize when these tactics of intimidation are manifesting in our circles of relationship.

STOP CARING?

Ultimately, fear has no place in someone who does not care what people think. I know this can be so much easier said than done, but it is truly the point at which fear has no entrance. A heart that truly believes what God thinks about them is the heart that will not be taken out by fear.

This does not in any way imply an attitude of disrespect towards people; it is an issue of being firmly established in what God says about us.

The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? Psalms 118:6

Overcoming the fear of man or the fear of what other people think needs to be healed with a revelation that God is for you. He's got your back and He is with you. Yet at the same time, I have had to learn how to move towards what intimidates me, rather than avoiding.

One of the greatest places that fear of man binds people is in the area of confrontation. It actually keeps us from making the important decisions and holds our relationships from improving, because honest conversations are avoided. In my work with people, I have had to shoot straight and be ok with healthy confrontation. This only came about because I decided I did not want to be held back by the snare of intimidation. Each time I faced what I feared, I found myself overcoming another layer of fear's tactics.

Breaking through intimidation involves being sure in my identity in Christ and living in accordance with it. Having triumph over the fear of man comes in knowing that God has my back and will always take care of me. My Dad in heaven is my supplier, provider and He is my source. With that in mind, I need to be more concerned about what *He* thinks than what any person thinks of me.

Overcoming the fear of man happens when I truly get immersed in the love of God, for it will revolutionize every atmosphere in my life. Love has the power to change relationships and the way we see people. Love is the paramount thing when it comes to the Kingdom of God. It has power to blast out sin, change lives and usher in the freeing, delivering power of God. People will follow you in greater freedom when your love for them is your highest priority. You will also see people changed to a greater degree and the power of God will manifest more when love is cultivated in a fellowship.

I have to be honest with you. I cannot minister to you in my full capacity if I am afraid of you. In addition, I cannot love you if I am afraid of you. I also will not be able to lead you or challenge you if I am also afraid of you. This fear needs to be confronted, love needs to be established and truth needs to be treasured, so that our relationships can go to the next level.

The love of God is the most powerful thing I have ever experienced in my life. It has changed what could not be changed in my life. True love has allowed me to minister to people in divine power because I was first moved

with compassion. Love is a matter of the heart and cannot be faked, but when it arrives, there is no power like it.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Where is the fear of man keeping you from walking confidently and moving in boldness?
2. What gifts in your life is fear seeking to attack and keep in a state of dormancy?
3. Where is the fear of what other people think holding you back?
4. In what ways have you become more passive because of the fear of man or intimidation?
5. What one situation do you need to face today to overcome fear?

PRAYER

Father God, I recognize that the fear of man or intimidation is a real snare. I recognize where it has had influence in my life. I take responsibility for areas where I've agreed with it, putting my focus and attention on being afraid of people.

What people think or their influence in my life has taken my eyes off of You. It has hindered me from being able to see more clearly and kept me from the boldness that I can have in my life.

I choose to come out of the snare that the fear of man seeks to bring in my life and I even stand against the depression, discouragement, and despair that may have come out of living in the fear of man.

I give my life over to God knowing that You will protect me. I choose to not live, holding the cares and worries of what other people think in my mind, heart and body. I choose today to stand against the attacks of the enemy that seek to intimidate me. I also make a decision to stand boldly in Your power and confidence. In Jesus name, amen.



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Facing Your Fears

Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore . . .

Ephesians 6:13-14a

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feel led to close this book by bringing a final challenge, as you cast out the work of fear in your life. I must tell you some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that fear will always try to knock on your door. The good news is that you have the weapons available to face fear and overcome it. Your confidence can be elevated to a greater level as you learn to do battle and gain victory.

As you seek to gain freedom, I must tell you this: ***True victory over fear really only takes shape when you face your fears.*** You have to take a step of faith and face those areas that used to keep you completely bound. The only way to really shut the mouth of fear and bring silence to its torment is to face it and make a display of fear's lies by proving there is nothing to be afraid of. Remember, at the core of battling fear's projections, it is simply a bunch of smoke and mirrors. Fear is not true reality.

FACE IT OR IGNORE IT?

At some point you will need to make a decision to start moving *towards* the things you used to move *away* from in fear. Some of you are waiting on God, but in reality, God is waiting on you to stand in faith and see Him meet you as you take a risk.

Those who have agoraphobia, will eventually need to get in the car and go with a friend to the mall. Those who struggle with a fear of poverty need to release their financial fears and make new decisions. For those who struggle with a fear of rejection, they will need to face their fears and open up to someone--taking the risk of transparency.

At the same time, you will also learn there are many fear-based thoughts that you need to just ignore. Because of our growing brokenness, modern society is becoming more obsessed in their thinking. We give way more attention to certain thoughts than we ever should. Our fast paced, stressed filled lifestyle is conditioning our minds to be open to some of the most oppressive thoughts.

I've done a lot of work with people who have what's called obsessive compulsive struggles, where they cannot stop certain racing thoughts that continually oppress them. It's a battle I have had to learn to overcome. But I also find that in society as a whole, we are becoming more and more easily prone to obsession over thoughts that we need not pay attention to.

There are the thoughts that you need to face. Then there are those that we need to ignore.

You need to face the person you keep avoiding that continually pushes you around and intimidates you.

But you need to ignore the thought that someone could come around any corner and kill you. Listening to that over and over again will keep you from even leaving the house.

It's important to face the fear of a decision that's difficult, one that you have been ignoring.

You need to become more active where you have been passive.

You need to ignore all the "what's ifs" that torment you and keep you from your peace.

You may need to face the money struggles you are ignoring. They won't just vanish.

You need to face the person that you have conflict with at work.

You need to ignore the opinions of people that keep holding you back.

How do we know the difference? The big answer is that you need wisdom, a precious gift from God that enhances our discernment and helps us to face what we need to face and let go of what we need to let go of. One thing that can help your development of wisdom is that you usually need to go against what fear is driving you to do. You need to face things that fear is keeping you from facing. But you need to ignore those things you keep obsessing about in fear, especially those areas you can usually do nothing about.

ENGAGE THE PROCESS

One of my biggest areas of emphasis to people is the need to embrace the process more wholeheartedly. We are so quick to want to get rid of uncomfortable feelings or get over whatever is bothering us, that we make no room for the process of learning and growing. Therefore, we miss out on the beauty of discovery.

All transformation involves a process. Too many are looking for shortcuts to bypass what they need to go through to overcome. Even Christians can search for shortcut theological mindsets or quick fix approaches, all to find a way to bypass the process.

One of my greatest victories came about when I gave myself permission to engage the process. I remember the day and time where I made this decision. I literally stopped and spoke to myself, saying, *“Mark, you didn’t get here overnight, and you have some things you need to process out. So, we don’t need to hurry ourselves. The healing will take as long as it takes. If it takes me 10, 20, or 30 years to get free, it doesn’t matter. It will take as long as it takes.”*

That heart felt decision actually accelerated my growth. So many are frustrated with their transformational journey because they put so much pressure on their growth and the timing on when they should be “better.”

I have learned to get my eyes off the short term and look to the long term. I don’t obsess about how much growth I am making in one day, I look at what I am doing today that will sow into my future. This is a major step in taking the excess pressure off and loving yourself in the journey. I have found that the more pressure I put on myself, the worse it gets.

WHAT YOU HAVE IS PRECIOUS

In the parable of the talents, the one who was given one talent became afraid and hid it in the ground, rather than investing it and using it to bring a return. Jesus called this person a wicked and lazy servant, all because he did not step out and use his talent. In fact, his talent was taken and given to the others who were using theirs. This is a tragic story when there could have been so much harvest and blessing. (See Matthew 25:14-30)

Do not bury in fear what God wants you to use and bless others with. Face the fear and step into victory. I know the number one fear of Americans is public speaking. I believe that at some point, we are all going to need to break that fear, so we can share our testimony and the Word of the Lord with love and grace. Do not let the enemy convince you that you are just shy and have nothing to offer. I encourage you to refuse to allow fear to push your talents and gifts down. The world needs your ministry and desperately needs what you have to offer them.

When fear causes us to look inward too much, it's time to reverse that. When we focus on others, many times it can put our fear issues away, or at least, put them in the proper perspective, so that they do not dominate us any longer. There is a benefit to "getting out of your head" and engaging others in relationship.

Doing this causes *boldness* and *love* to be stirred up. Fear focuses on "what is going on with me? What is going to happen to me? Will I be preserved?" Boldness and love thinks about others and how to bring blessing and healing to them. Serving the people and reaching out gets your mind off of all your phobias and focuses your heart on the harvest.

My prayer for you as you go forth is that you face your fears, knowing that your Father has your back and will do great things in your life as you trust in Him!

Go in faith! Be yourself! Be free in love!

Join the army of those who choose to declare, "I will not fear!"

CLOSING PRAYER

Father God, I thank You that You are showing me more and more how to overcome fear. I choose to take a stand and to face the areas of my life that fear has tried to push me away from. I thank You that You have given me

gifts, talents, and abilities. I know that fear is seeking to block and put a lid on them. So, I take my stand to see the gifts that You have given me as precious.

I see where fear is seeking to hold me back from empowered decisions. I also see where fear is seeking to hold me back from encouraging, empowering, and blessing others.

You have not given me the spirit of fear. You have gifted me. You've created me for a purpose. You designed me to make a difference, so I choose to lean into my process and journey of overcoming.

I thank You Father that day by day You will help me to overcome. I make a decision to share what I have learned with others so that they may benefit and be blessed.

I choose to face my fears and not run or hide anymore, so that in it I can show what fear really is: smoke and mirrors. Fear is nothing but a coward. I thank You that You have given me the power to face everything that comes my way. I choose to live as an overcomer and I know that You will empower me by Your Spirit. In Jesus name I pray, amen.

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- [1]. "worry." *Merriam-Webster.com* . 2018. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (1 Feb 2018).
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- [6] Some translations say to “fan the flame” or “kindle afresh” the gift.

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