

What the Bible says about Fear and Anxiety



The Scream – Edvard Munch, 1893

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)

Fear and anxiety are the emotional responses to a mind concerned over the possibility of some future loss or misfortune. Nobody wants to suffer loss, and yet we all sense our vulnerability in this dangerous, unpredictable world. After the Biblical character Job lost his business, family and health, he said, “The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me” (Job 3:25). Even before the disaster, Job was insecure for he knew the real possibility of loss. The poet Thoreau aptly stated, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”

People fear the following:

- Loss of health or disease
- Loss of their loved ones
- Loss of wealth and ensuing poverty

- Conflict
- Losing control
- The shattering of their life plans or goals
- Their children's welfare
- Losing their source of security
- Failure
- Responsibility
- Public embarrassment

Irrational Fears

Some fears have no rational basis, such as, a person who excessively washes his hands to avoid germs, a person who will not cross bridges, or a person who will not leave home. These fears are called irrational because the reaction is out of proportion to the danger. Even if the individual does not understand the remote statistical chance of disaster, the fear is still based on actual perils. Simply explaining that there is only a .0000001% chance of death does not ease the real threat he fears.

The Basis for All Fear

The ultimate fear is the fear of death. The Bible points out that death is the root of all fear, for this is the loss upon which all other losses are based. No matter how much we try to put on a happy face, the specter of death still haunts the recesses of our conscience. The curse of sin and death is actively working in our bodies, and it is terrifying. It is no surprise that fear and anxieties are the most common mental disorder. We all die, and, therefore, as the Scriptures teach, we all live in bondage to the fear of death.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He [Jesus] also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.(Hebrews 2:14-15)

The second chapter of Hebrews teaches that Jesus came from heaven and took upon Himself a human body to deliver His people from death. Jesus accomplished this by paying the judicial price for sins. He sacrificed His life on the cross as a substitutionary death for sinners. Jesus Christ is the only savior from fear because He is the only savior from death. (Other brochures are available that explain in detail God's plan to bring about salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ.) The point we want to consider here is that the problem of death needs to be remedied before any other fear can be removed. If one has the assurance of eternal life in heaven, any loss that might be feared on earth is of no great consequence because it is understood to be temporary and minor. Cure the problem of death, and you cure all fear.

False Ways to Alleviate Fear

Because people are sinners by nature, they avoid coming to God as the solution to their fears. Jesus said,

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

(John 3:19-21)

Although we fear death, we have a greater fear of being honest with God because either (1) we don't want to change our sinful ways, or (2) we don't

want our shame and guilt exposed. Many hold to a very high, self-righteous opinion of themselves, and they refuse to face their moral and ethical failure. Therefore, the most common way to cope with fear is through denial. People will avoid talking or thinking about the subjects of sin, death, judgment and God. This is called suppression, but eventually that which is suppressed reveals itself in strange behaviors and defense mechanisms.

For example, someone might view himself as smart, talented, and righteous; as a result he avoids any kind of responsibility or public experiences that would expose him to the possibility of rejection and failure. Such a person is paralyzed because he fears the dismantling of his egotism.

Someone might try to compensate for his fears by working very hard to control others or by building security on earth through money, possessions, diet, etc. To ensure safety, he is driven to constantly fight against his environment. This always ends in stress because one can never do enough to be secure. Any security apart from Jesus Christ is a false security. Anxiety attacks soon arise because the realities of life pull down the walls of protection that have been built.

Drugs, either prescription or illegal, are a common way to alleviate fear. It is easier to walk about in a stupor than to face reality and change one's system of beliefs.

Some try to compensate through secular ideologies which promise neither heaven, nor hell. Others find a false security in man-made religions or self-righteous works. Some assure themselves by saying, “I will make it to heaven because I served in WWII,” or “I gave money to charity,” or “I am a good person compared to the next guy.” Despite the cover up, the honest man still has nagging fears because he senses he has not been made clean in God's sight. The Bible teaches that we cannot save ourselves through our own self-righteousness. Salvation is granted to those who make Jesus Christ their Savior. Beware of trying to assuage your fears through false hopes and substitutes.

Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

How to be Free from Fear and Anxiety

1. One must have real deliverance from the very things we rightly fear. Once we receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we are adopted into the family of God; therefore, we are safe for all eternity. God is our heavenly Father, and nothing can separate us from the love of God. The eighth chapter of Romans is the great Biblical passage about our safety in Christ.

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”

Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, “For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:15, 33-39)

2. The Scriptures also assure the Christian of God’s continual hand of protection.

So that we confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:6)

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread? When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, my adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell. Though a host encamps against me, my heart will not fear; though war arise against me, in spite of this I shall be confident. (Psalm 27:1-3)

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. (Psalm 46:1-3)

3. The Christian must meditate on the promises in God’s Word rather than listen to his feelings or circumstances. The Christian must identify the lies he still believes and the truths he must embrace. Be ruled by faith, not fear.

And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. (John 8:32)

4. The Christian must understand that he need not fear tragedy because God causes all things to work together for his good.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

5. Fear is cast out through the knowledge that God loves us and, therefore, will not condemn us.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. (1 John 4:18)

6. Having the right priorities delivers the Christian from many fears. Those who pursue earthly treasures will always fear the loss of their treasures. The Christian does not worry because his treasures are laid up in heaven and are not subject to loss.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also . . . Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:20-21, 31-33)

7. Fear and anxiety are often the result of too much self-centered thinking; life becomes all about how you are doing rather than how God is doing. The great martyrs of the Christian faith made the testimony of God their main concern. Therefore, they did not fear death, nor deny the faith. Rather than simply trying to stop your fear, change your motive for living. Live for God not self. Live for obedience to God rather than living for the preservation of creature comforts.

But I [Apostle Paul] do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

8. Rather than being fearful, God wants you to come to Him with your concerns. Replace worry with prayer.

Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

God offers contentment, peace and worry-free living through the salvation He has provided. This is not a make-believe hope, but a real deliverance that genuinely removes the dangers we fear. May God help you to understand and apply these truths.

Peace I [Jesus] leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. (John 14:27)

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