

Linda Burnett, 23, was visiting her in-laws, and while there went to a nearby supermarket to pick up some groceries. Several people noticed her sitting in her car with the windows rolled up, her eyes closed with both hands behind the back of her head. One customer who had been at the store for a while became concerned and walked over to the car. He noticed that Linda's eyes were now open, and she looked very strange. He asked her if she was okay, and Linda replied that she'd been shot in the back of the head, and had been holding her brains in for over an hour.

The man called the paramedics, who broke into the car because the doors were locked and Linda refused to remove her hands from her head. When they finally got in, they found that Linda had a wad of bread dough on the back of her head. A biscuit canister had exploded from the heat, making a loud noise that sounded like a gunshot, and the wad of dough hit her in the back of her head. When she reached back to find out what it was, she felt the dough and thought that it was her brains. She initially passed out, but quickly recovered and tried to hold her brains in for over an hour until someone noticed and came to her aid.

H.P. Lovecraft (**picture**) said, *“The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear.”* We're a frightened culture and it's painful. The Apostle John wrote, *“fear involves torment”* (1 Jn. 4:18, NKJV), but our loving Heavenly Father doesn't want us to live in fear. Please turn to 2 Timothy 1:7 (p. 995). I like the NKJV translates this, *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

Nearly 100 times in Scripture you will find God encouraging His people, *“Do not be afraid.”* God does not want us to suffer from fear and He certainly doesn't want us to be, as so many are, imprisoned by our fears. Our Heavenly Father wants us to be free from fear. That's the purpose of this message today, to help you understand and control your fear.

**1. What is fear?** Webster's (**slide**) defines fear as *“an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger.”* Everyone deals with fear at some level. It's part of the human condition.

Whoever came up with the slogan *“No Fear”* had no idea what they were talking about. An absence of fear in a sin contaminated world is impossible and foolish. The words *fear* or *afraid* are found 500 times in the Bible.

**What does the Bible mean by “the fear of the Lord?”** Frequently, Scripture refers to *“the fear of the Lord.”* The most familiar passages are in the Book of Proverbs where this phrase occurs 14 times. The fear of the Lord is that reverential trust in God which make us want to please Him. It means to respect or reverence Him, which in turn will produce obedience. It protects us from carelessness or being sacrilegious. Fearing the Lord is the key to successful living. Reverence enables us to know God, praise Him, enjoy His many benefits and blessings, and rest in His peace. Luther said (**picture**), *“Being afraid of God is different from fearing God. The fear of God is a fruit of love, but being afraid of Him is the seed of hatred. Therefore we should not be afraid of God but should fear Him, so that we do not hate Him Whom we should love.”*

There are though two sides of *“the fear of the Lord.”* The one God wants for us produces reverence and obedience. The other *“fear of the Lord”* is a result of not knowing Him and causes us to cower in dread and terror in anticipation of His wrath and judgment.

**2. All fear has a common root.** Dr. Myron Hofer (**picture**) states that *“Anxiety is probably the first emotion that an infant experiences, at the moment of birth and separation from the mother.”* Isn't it interesting that you never have to teach a child to fear? Fear is not part of our design as image-bearers made in the image of God. Though Jesus experienced the vast array of human emotions, He was never afraid, even when facing the horror of the Cross.

**Where does fear come from?** Genesis 3:10 is the first time fear is mentioned in Scripture. Adam said to God after the Fall, *“I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid.”* It's the result of sin. Before Adam and Eve sinned there was no death. They were in perfect harmony with God, each other and all of nature – there was nothing to fear. Prior to the Fall they experienced perfect love with their Creator and with one another. While it's not a sin to feel fear, fear is ultimately a by-product of sin.

Fear is used by Satan to attempt to thwart God's will. Fear hinders us from trusting God. It's what caused Abraham to lie and deny that Sarah was his wife. Fear caused Peter to deny the Lord. Fear finds its roots in sin and often causes us to sin more.

**3. Fear falls into 3 basic categories: Healthy, Imagined and Irrational.**

**Healthy Fear** – An article in one Medical Journal stated, *“The man who knows no fear is not only a gross exaggeration, he is a biological impossibility.”* Fear helps us protect ourselves. It provides us with sudden bursts of energy and strength when we need it. It's a basic survival instinct. Healthy fear protects us when we're driving on the

highway and a drunk driver careens into our lane. Healthy fear is what keeps us from playing with fire and cautious with electricity. Fear often keeps us alive. Leonardo Da Vinci (**picture**) said, “*Just as courage imperils life; fear protects it.*”

Sometimes it’s a healthy sense of fear that motivates a student to study or an athlete to practice. They fear failure and shame. Even God uses a healthy fear of hell and judgment to motivate us to repent and turn to Him. God uses fear to keep us from sin. All fear is not bad.

**Imagined Fear** – Small children are afraid of the dark. When we become adults, we’re often still afraid of the “bogey man,” he’s just a bit more sophisticated. It’s imagined fear that causes us to be paranoid of going to the dentist, or of crowds, or even driving in Chicago.

Many believers live spiritually emaciated lives because they’re victims of imagined fear. They fear being unemployed, or some disease, or that their mate or children will abandon them. And they are violating Phil. 4:8 which commands us to think on things that are true!

One study estimated that 60% of our fears are unfounded; 20% are already behind us; 10% are so petty that they don’t make any real difference; about 5% are real but they’re out of our control and we can’t do anything about them. The bottom line is that about 5% of our fears that we think about are “real” fears that we can actually do something about.

**Irrational Fear** – Healthy fear is like a fire alarm. It signals us of danger. Some people’s alarm have been set incorrectly.

Some parents program their children with repeated lies like, “If you don’t get A’s, you’ll be a failure.” We produce perfectionist adults afraid of ever failing. The media has programmed the fear alarm of many. The responses are paranoid thoughts that interfere with reality. Painful childhood experiences program many to fear things adults need no longer to fear.

Distorted concepts of God produce fear in people. Many want nothing to do with God. Others have relationships with God that are characterized by guilt and shame. Those are irrational fears. If they’re not controlled, they can result in psychotic behavior. Proverbs 28:1 says, “*The wicked man flees though no one pursues...*” He’s succumbed to irrational fear.

Linda Welch had the painful experience, at the age of 35, of seeing her mother die from cancer. The suffering was horrible. Linda nursed her until the end. She did all she could to make her mother more comfortable, but mostly she had to just sit and watch her slowly getting worse. As the disease progressed, Linda was affected by it as well—in her emotions and thoughts. A few months later, Linda had a severe and persistent sore throat and became convinced that it was cancer. She knew she couldn’t go through the suffering her mother had endured. She reasoned that this world was a cruel place and that she and her two children would be better off in heaven. Notes that she left indicated that she was extremely anxious about the cancer in her throat.

So one day Linda took a gun and shot her five-year-old daughter, her ten-year-old son, and finally herself. Her actions were the horrible end result of irrational fear. The tragic thing is that an autopsy revealed that Linda’s throat condition was not cancer, but simply a strep infection.

**4. Fear is costly.** Katherine Paterson (**picture**) said, “*To fear is one thing. To let fear grab you by the tail and swing you around is another.*” Fear takes a toll on us physically. Dr. Walter Cannon (**picture**), a pioneer researcher in psychosomatic medicine at Harvard describes what happens to the human body when it becomes fearful: “*Respiration deepens; the heart beats more rapidly; the arterial pressure rises; the blood is shifted from the stomach and intestines to the heart, central nervous system, and the muscles; the processes of the alimentary canal cease; sugar is freed from the reserves in the liver; the spleen contracts and discharges its contents of concentrated corpuscles, and adrenalin is secreted.*” Fear can make you sick and even kill you prematurely.

While fear costs us emotionally, physically and relationally, fear costs us the most spiritually. F. B. Meyer (**picture**) “*Unbelief puts our circumstances between us and God, but faith puts God between us and our circumstances.*”

**Fear blinds us to the needs of others.** Fear in the parable of the Good Samaritan kept the priest and Levite from helping the man who’d been robbed. It blinds us to others’ needs, even those we love. It can so distract us that we don’t care for our families or others in the Body of Christ.

**Fear causes us to doubt God’s power.** When fear comes upon us we forget Jesus’ words in Matt. 28:18: “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.*” Jesus is *omnipotent*, not *impotent*. Fear is the enemy of faith. It paralyzes us spiritually. When we’re afraid, we focus on our fear, which only causes our fear to grow.

**Fear clouds our spiritual understanding.** Ever heard that expression, “blinded by fear?” It was because of fear that the Children of Israel didn’t trust God to give them the Promised Land. Jesus’ disciples often lacked spiritual discernment because they were blinded by fear. We must live by faith not by sight. We must live by faith, not by our feelings of fear.

**Fear causes us to be pessimists.** It is foolish to talk about the good old days of the church. The Church never did live in good days, and never has, for the present evil age covers all days from Paul’s time to ours. If you wish you would have lived in Paul’s day, you will only be wishing yourself back to an evil age. If men could travel back in time, no matter

where they stopped, they'd still in be the present evil age where Satan reigns in the hearts and minds of the lost. Every generation has added another chapter to the history of evil. It's why too many churches and Christians have a fortress mentality. But the early church stepped out in faith-filled optimism and turned their world upside down. That same power is available to us.

Will we be faith-filled optimists or doubting pessimists? Fear causes us to "play it safe" and it costs us spiritually. What's fear costing you?

**5. You can be free from fear.** Whenever John Wesley (**picture**) felt fear he'd pause to pray and praise God for the fact that He was still on the throne of heaven ruling all things well. He wrote, *"I have never known more than fifteen minutes of anxiety or fear. Whenever, I feel fearful emotions overtaking me I just close my eyes and thank God that He is still on the throne reigning over everything and I take comfort in His control over all the affairs of my life."* How can we experience that same godly freedom from fear that Wesley had?

**Honestly confront your fear/s.** Most long for fear to magically disappear. It's not going to. If you want to defeat fear, you must go nose to nose with it, like David did with Goliath. Seek to determine what's at the root of your fear. Sometimes we don't know what we're afraid of. Ask God for wisdom and to search your heart for you. He knows where the problem lies, but you need to let Him show you. Take a stand and face your fear in God's power.

**Confess surrendering to fear as sin.** God commands us to *"Fear not."* When we dwell in fear, we're staying in sin. Now everyone has fleeting moments of fear. The problem is when we make our "home" there. When we do and we realize it, then we need to come to God and confess it as sin.

Some are going to say, "I can't help the way I feel." To a point that's true but I can control continuing in those feelings. Just as my thoughts are under my control so are my feelings. While I can't control what pops into my head, I can control what stays there. The same is true with feelings of fear.

We can choose to obey the Father, replacing fear with faith. Psalms 34:4, *"I sought the LORD, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears."* To walk with God is to walk fearlessly. Identify the fear, confess it, then replace it with the promises of God. As we do, we set aside fear and begin taking steps of victory in Christ.

**Claim the promises of God's protection.** Scripture is the Sword of the Spirit. Victory over fear means that we have to pick up our Sword. Many believers don't realize the power at their fingertips. God's Word is filled with practical promises. If you struggle with fear, let me encourage you to take some three-by-five cards and write down promises in the Bible about victory over fear. Memorize them. Put them in places that you'll see them every day because God's Word has power. Claim His promises. When Satan attacked Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus repelled him with Scripture.

**Cultivate a closer relationship with God.** When children are frightened, who do they run to? Their parents. They feel safe in their presence. The same is true spiritually. Do you practice the presence of God? He's always there. Are you faithfully in His Word? Are you letting Him speak to you? Do you spend time with His people?

Our fear level is ultimately a referendum on the closeness of our relationship with God. Do we see things in human dimensions or godly ones? As we spend time with our Heavenly Father, it's easier to stand against fear. We've seen His power, love and faithfulness. If you have *"the fear of God,"* you won't fear the things of this world. If you don't have the fear of God, everything else is to be feared.

The opposite of fear is not courage or trust, it's love. Parents understand this. They know little children often wake up in the dark of night and are afraid of the darkness. They don't rush in the room and say, "Be courageous" or "Trust me." No, we assure the child of our love. Trusting and resting in God's love frees us from fear. We'll lift that child in our arms, hold them tightly to us and speak softly with assurance. We tell them that we love them and everything is all right. We help the child realize they're in a safe place; that we're very near as they sleep; we'll always protect them. That's exactly what our Heavenly Father does for us when we call on Him.

Harry Ironside, (**picture**) a preacher from years ago, told of playing a game called *Bears* with his young son. The grown-up would be the bear, and he'd chase the boy all over the house. One day the game got a bit too intense. The boy was cornered by the "bear," and suddenly became truly frightened. It wasn't a game anymore. He hid his face, trembling, and then turned around quickly and threw himself into his father's arms with the words, "I'm not afraid of you! You're my Daddy!"

Our Heavenly Father wants us to leap into His arms that way when we're afraid. He wants us to realize who He really is, that we don't need to fear. The key to that assurance is love. To experience fully the love of God is to sense the deepest security. It's to trust that God loves us so much He'll always fold us in His arms; He'll always be near, even when it's dark; that He's our "Daddy" and we do not need to be afraid.

**Commit Your Life to Jesus Christ.** There's one huge fear each of us must face. The greatest fear that we all face is Death. God doesn't want death to terrify us. Death was conquered on the Cross. But you can't have freedom from the fear of death unless you've committed your life to Christ, unless Jesus Christ is truly your Lord and Savior. Is He?

Personally, I'm not eager to die. I love life. Yet, it's wonderful to have peace about the finality of this life. It's good to be able to say, "I'm not afraid to die." Paul understood that it's a win-win situation for God's people. *For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (Phil. 1:21). We can stay on earth and experience the joy of Christ or move on to the next life and occupy those mansions He's gone to prepare. Either way, we win! Why fear the doorway that leads to the next one? God does not want us to fear even death.

**Conclusion:** Max Lucado in his book, *In the Eye of a Storm (pictures)*, talks about traveling from one speaking engagement to another. This was before the age of cell phones. Lucado had traveled from San Antonio to Boston and had spoken at a gathering in Boston. Then, he was flying on to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada to fulfill a speaking engagement there. When his plane landed in Minneapolis and he had to change airplanes. He was thinking about how tired and hungry he was, and how crowded the airplane had been, and how his back was aching, and his mind was hurting. Try as he might, he couldn't even remember who was supposed to meet him at his destination in Canada.

As he was heading to the gate to catch his next airplane he saw a McDonald's in the distance and thought, "That looks good. Maybe I'll run over there and buy a burger and that will at least satisfy my hunger pains."

Then he writes, "I passed something better. I passed a telephone and decided to call home. I called and my wife answered the phone. I'm convinced that when my wife gets to heaven she's going to be at the reception desk welcoming everyone in because when she answers the phone it makes you feel so good."

He continued, "I just talked with her. We settled earth shaking issues. We talked about the weather in San Antonio vs. the weather in New England. We talked about what the girls did when they went to school that day and that one of them was going to have a friend over to spend the evening. We talked about earth shaking things like that," he said. "And after I had finished talking with her I really felt good. Then she passed the receiver over to one of my daughters who told me about her day. When she finished she said, 'I love you, Dad.'" And he said, "It felt good to be loved." Then the phone was passed over to the next daughter and she talked to him for a while and she said, "I miss you, Dad." And he said, "It felt good to be missed." Then he said, "They passed the phone over to the little six month old baby, and I talked to my baby over the phone. I cooed and I talked baby talk, and the people passing by looked at me in strange ways. But it felt good to be cooed at. Then, we hung up and I made my way on to the next gate. I forgot how hungry I was. I forgot how tired I was because I had called home, and that made all the difference in the world." Then he adds, "Maybe we all ought to call Home more often. If you do, you will find the listening ear of God so anxious to talk to you, and He will make you feel good from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet. And as you grow in your love you'll find your fears disappear."

In our fear contaminated world, we'll never be able to be rid of all of our fears, but if we can just get rid of the things that really bother us and focus our attention on a loving God who really cares about us, then we will begin to hear Him when He speaks. As we listen we will get to know Him, and love Him. As our love for Him grows, our fears will be forgotten, because the closer you get to the Father the further away you get from fear.

Friend, do you want freedom from fear? Accept the Father's love and salvation. Claim His promises and cling to Him, talk to Him, knowing that you are always safe in the arms of your Heavenly Father.