

Equipping Hour: Oct. 5

Oct 5: A Biblical View of Fear (part 1)

Just a quick reminder that you can find Equipping Hour notes, and now recordings as well, on the church center app.

This morning we begin our three-week conversation about fear. Today we start by examining what the world says about fear, then next week we will examine what God's Word says about fear, and then week three we will put it together through application.

So, why this topic? Why talk about fear? Well, first I want to help us remove cultural and societal stigmas and labels and see these struggles as God sees them, with grace, patience, kindness, gentleness, longsuffering, and truth. So my first goal is to accurately view fear biblically. Jesus Christ our Great High Priest is intimately acquainted with our weakness, which means there is no room for judgmentalism. We all struggle, at all times, with the effects of the curse of sin, being sinned against, and battling our remaining sin nature, but your struggle may look different from mine, and mine from yours. That's okay. The playing field, so to speak, is completely level because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

My second and ultimate goal is to offer hope and freedom found in God's Word and the Holy Spirit is fighting these remaining battles, but this will likely be uncomfortable for some as we confront our worldview of fear with a biblical worldview. We need to bathe this conversation in prayer because none of this is possible without the Holy Spirit illuminated our hearts and minds, so let's do that now.

Pray

In his inauguration speech on March 4th, 1933, Franklin Roosevelt sought to bring confidence to a nation ravaged by the Great Depression. He declared, "This great nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."

How do we do that, though? How do we convert retreat into advance? Or, in other words, how do we move from fear to confidence? I asked almighty Google how to overcome fear, and the magical internet fairies offered me 228 million responses in 0.31 seconds, so clearly this is a common issue for us all, which means we should be making some headway, right?

Well, approximately 40 million adults in the United States have received a fear-based disorder diagnosis, from panic disorder, to special phobias, to generalized anxiety disorder, to social anxiety disorder. That means in a group of twenty adults, three will be receiving some kind of treatment for fear. Folks, in a room of twenty juveniles, that number is closer to six. There is hardly any statistical difference between church-goers and non-church-

goers. Why else do we need to talk about fear from a biblical perspective? Because there's no other way to be whole. Fear can tear us apart. Only God's power, through God's Word, can make us whole.

2 Timothy 3:12-17

All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Our completeness, our wholeness, is a direct result of God's Word correctly applied to our lives and struggles. The Word of God has the power to bring us to wholeness because the Word of God is the power of God. If you have the Holy Spirit abiding in you, then the Word of God is the Holy Spirit's megaphone for your conscience. I want you to consider that for a moment. If that is not a reality you have embraced, it will be evident in your beliefs, values, and behavior.

Unfortunately, far too often people struggling with fear come to church for help, only to be met with some glib Bible reference, usually taken out of context, followed up with "Christian" platitudes and told to pray more, or worse, chastisement and judgment for a lack of faith. Still others are outsourced because of a lack of equipping within the church to rightly apply God's Word to struggling people. "The Church" has pushed struggling people out of the church and into the hands of secular thoughts, theories, and solutions, hands that have been far kinder and receptive than the Body of Christ who ought to be conforming more and more into the image of Christ! That needs to change, and change now! That's why we are talking about fear. Paul goes on in chapter four:

2 Timothy 4:1-4

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Here we see transformational fruit, the evidence of the power God's Word has to make us ready, which means confidence, and to fill us with all patience because teaching is hard. Following God's outline for living is hard, but that's the only place where wholeness can be found. This is important why? Verse 3:

³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Yes, Church, we need to be people of the Word. But we also need to be people who determine in our hearts to follow God's plan, God's way, God's Word rather than have itching ears. That's a clever way of saying I don't like what you said, so I'm going to go find someone else, some other teacher that contradict God's Word but affirms my desires, that tells me what I want to hear. This is why we began with the incredibly important question: Who is your teacher? Who is teaching you about fear? About sin? About freedom?

So how does the world view and address the issue of fear? Let's talk about a:

Secular Worldview of Fear

In psychology, fear is primarily understood as an adaptive emotional response that evolved to help humans survive threats. Within a secular framework, fear is seen as a biological and psychological mechanism—a natural response involving brain structures (e.g., the amygdala), physiological arousal (fight-flight-freeze), and cognitive processes (threat appraisal).

Fear itself is not considered “good” or “bad,” meaning it is morally neutral, but rather maladaptive fear (irrational, persistent, or impairing) becomes the focus of clinical concern. The secular worldview avoids spiritual or moral categories; fear is understood strictly in terms of biology, environment, cognition, and behavior.

Does everyone remember this book from anger? This book impacts every single area of your life, including politics, law, justice, healthcare, education, and insurance. This is authority. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition*, does not list “fear” as a standalone disorder, but fear is central to several diagnostic categories, especially under Anxiety Disorders. Let's look at a few examples:

A Specific Phobia is a marked fear of a specific object or situation (e.g., spiders, flying, heights). These phobias have to be considered “out of proportion to actual danger” in order to be considered clinically concerning and in need of intervention. Depending on whose opinion you are seeking, “out of proportion” can take different forms. I have a significant fear of heights, but I can go up a fifteen foot ladder to change the batteries in a smoke detector if I have to. But that doesn't mean I will ever go on a zipline, and since riding a zipline isn't part of my daily routine, it wouldn't be considered disproportionate. “Out of proportion” typically means this fear will interfere with your daily operating, meaning it will impair your ability to go about your day. For instance, someone might have a fear of riding in an elevator and will start to hyperventilate when approaching one and will instead opt for walking up twenty flights of stairs just to avoid the elevator, thereby being late for an appointment or work and experiencing the consequences of being late. A common one is agoraphobia, the fear of being in situations where escape might be difficult (e.g., crowds, open spaces, public transportation), thus those things are avoided to the point the person's work, social, and family life are impaired.

Social Anxiety Disorder (or Social Phobia), is an intense fear of social scrutiny or humiliation. This would include fear of meeting someone for the first time, being observed at work, and performing in front of others such as public speaking, even in a small setting. The individual fears that he or she will act in a way that will be negatively evaluated and therefore lead to embarrassment, humiliation, and rejection. Situations and circumstances that could lead to this negative evaluation, especially social ones, are therefore avoided. Mind you, this isn't about introverts versus extroverts. This fear is intense, therefore the avoidance is extreme and causes impairment to everyday quality of life.

A rather common one is Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), which is excessive worry and apprehension across many areas of life occurring more days than not, to the point the individual finds it difficult to control the worry and experiences restlessness, feeling amped up or on edge, but also perhaps chronically fatigued, struggling to concentrate, irritable, and trouble sleeping. Again, this is more than just having a bad day or a couple of rough nights of sleep, but rather this has become an impairment to one's quality of life and everyday functioning.

Our last example is panic disorder. Panic Disorder is recurrent panic attacks with overwhelming fear of future attacks. A panic attack can have no obvious cue or trigger at the time of occurrence, but a clinician may be able to help the patient make the connections for what preceded or lead up to the attack. These attacks are abrupt and intense and usually include rapid heartbeat, sweating, trembling or shaking, chest pain or discomfort, even nausea, dizziness, and catatonic numbness. A big part of this fear is the fear of repeated attacks.

Fear, from a secular worldview, is relevant when it is persistent, disproportionate, and causes significant impairment in the person's daily life, such as work life, social life, and family life. Fear is only a problem when it becomes a problem, essentially, and unfortunately this can be extremely subjective. I might not think my fear of crowds is a big deal, but you might disagree. There's a huge amount of space for subjective interpretation.

So where does this fear come from?

Prevailing Theories of Fear

Historically thinking, there are several psychological theories explain the origins and persistence of fear:

Biological Theories

This view holds that fear is rooted in physiology and evolution. Genetic predispositions, neurotransmitter imbalances (e.g., GABA – gamma-aminobutyric acid, serotonin), and hyperactive fear circuits in the amygdala and hippocampus are to blame for maladaptive fear. From an evolutionary psychology view, fear developed as a survival mechanism to

avoid predators, danger, and social exclusion, meaning we are wired this way, and faulty wiring is the problem for those with maladaptive fear.

Behavioral Theories

There are several prominent behavioral theories from the past, and we won't get to all of them, but the belief was that fear was learned through conditioned experiences, both in a positive and negative sense. For instance, in Classical Conditioning, fear is learned when a neutral stimulus, something that would not regularly be frightening, is paired with a frightening experience, for instance the Little Albert Experiment. Is anyone familiar with Little Albert?

Behavioral psychologists in the 1920s conducted an experiment on a 9 month old baby boy named Albert. They would place a white rat in front of Albert, then they would accompany the exposure to the white rat with a loud, frightening noise that would cause Albert to be startled and cry. Over a relatively short amount of time, Little Albert developed a significant phobia of not just the white rat but anything furry placed before him, including a brown bunny, and would immediately start to cry and get away even without the loud scary noise.

Albert's real name was Douglas, and he died at the age of six. His mother was paid a dollar to have her baby in the experiment, and the scientists never bothered to deprogram his fear response. People were eventually fired over this experiment. As dark as this story is, it's incredibly tame compared to others I could share. According to this theory, maladaptive fear is an association of a fear to what otherwise would not normally be a fear-inducing event. Fear, and responses to fear, are learned from one's environment and experiences. For instance, a child might avoid a normal fearful situation, like jumping off a high dive, and be punished for it by a father who wants his kid to overcome this fear, thereby making the fear actually worse because now the kid has two things to be afraid about, the thing he's afraid to do and his father's punitive actions.

Cognitive Theories

For the cognitive theorist, fear arises from distorted thinking patterns. These distorted patterns include:

Catastrophizing – Expecting the worst-case scenario or blowing things out of proportion.

Example: "If I make one mistake at work, I'll probably get fired and never find another job."

Overgeneralization – Drawing broad, sweeping conclusions from a single event.

Example: "I failed this test; I'm going to fail at everything in life."

Black-and-White (All-or-Nothing) Thinking – Seeing situations in extremes with no middle ground.

Example: "If I'm not perfect, I'm a complete failure."

Mind Reading – Assuming you know what others are thinking, often in a negative way.

Example: "She didn't text me back—she must think I'm annoying."

Fortune Telling – Predicting the future negatively without evidence.

Example: "I just know this presentation will be a disaster."

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Emotional Reasoning – Believing that because you feel something, it must be true.

Example: “I feel anxious, so something bad is going to happen.”

Labeling – Defining yourself or others by one negative trait or action.

Example: “I forgot to pay a bill. I’m such an idiot.”

Disqualifying the Positive – Ignoring or dismissing positive feedback or experiences.

Example: “Sure, they said I did a good job, but they were just being nice.”

Personalization – Taking excessive responsibility for things outside of your control.

Example: “Our team lost because I didn’t play well enough, even though everyone else made mistakes too.”

All of these distorted thoughts can be applied to relationships, people in authority over you, as well as being internal about self. As these distorted thoughts spin and spin, the person becomes fearful and may isolate, lash out, or in some other way respond in an unhealthy coping mechanism, such as drinking or drug use to interrupt the thought patterns, or any means for escaping reality.

These are some of the historic theories, but most contemporary psychology integrates biological vulnerability, environmental triggers, and cognitive-behavioral maintenance into a combined model called the Biopsychosocial Model, or Integrative Model, meaning humans are complex, making fear and its root complex, so we have to attack it from multiple angles using as many tools at our disposal. So how does the work “fix” fear?

Secular Therapies for Fear

Treatment approaches often blend different schools of psychology, but the current gold standard is Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, or CBT. While CBT became popular in the 70s and 80s, it really skyrocketed in the 90s and early 2000s to become the go-to treatment approach for individuals. CBT is a goal-oriented form of psychotherapy that focuses on the connection between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Make no mistake, CBT attempts to make worldview connections. It is based on the premise that distorted or unhelpful patterns of thinking contribute to emotional distress and maladaptive behavior, and that by identifying, challenging, and replacing these thoughts, individuals can experience meaningful change. CBT typically involves learning to recognize cognitive distortions, developing healthier thinking patterns, and practicing new coping strategies to manage stress, regulate emotions, and modify behavior. The goal of CBT is cognitive restructuring, a fancy way of saying changing your thoughts by challenging the distorted ones and replacing them with ordered ones.

Other approaches include Exposure Therapy: gradual, repeated exposure to feared stimuli until the fear response diminishes, meaning you become desensitized to it.

Then of course there are numerous Pharmacological Treatments including SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors), which are a common first-line treatment for anxiety-related

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fears. Also your Benzodiazepines, which are fast-acting but can become addictive over long use.

Then you have Trauma-Focused Therapies (when fear is tied to trauma, e.g., PTSD) that are a specialized branch of CBT.

Unlike anger, most of these treatment approaches include the goal of eliminating fear because of how much impairment it can produce in a person's life. The power to overcome the fear, from the view of CBT, comes from within you. Self-empowerment. We cannot talk about a secular view of fear without addressing self-empowerment.

The self-empowerment movement traces its roots to several cultural and intellectual currents of the 20th century, though its themes echo much older traditions of self-improvement and personal mastery sprinkled throughout history, and from a biblical perspective, all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Early modern influences can be found in the **New Thought movement** of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which emphasized the power of positive thinking, mental discipline, and "spiritual" alignment to shape one's destiny. Mid-century psychology added further momentum through **humanistic psychology** in the 1950s and 1960s, led by figures like Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, highlighted personal growth, self-actualization, and the belief that individuals possess inner resources to flourish.

During the **1960s and 1970s**, self-empowerment became intertwined with social and political movements, particularly feminism and civil rights, which framed empowerment as both a personal and collective act of reclaiming agency, autonomy, and authority. At the same time, the rise of **self-help literature** brought empowerment themes into mainstream culture, focusing on motivation, self-discipline, and unlocking potential.

By the **1980s and 1990s**, the movement expanded into business, leadership, and organizational development, promoting empowerment in workplaces as a way to boost performance and morale. In the **21st century**, self-empowerment continues to flourish through coaching, wellness, and digital platforms, often blending psychology, spirituality, and practical tools for resilience and autonomy. At its core, the movement represents an enduring belief that individuals can take control of their lives, cultivate inner strength, and actively shape their futures.

How have you witnessed or experienced this worldview?

"Life Doesn't Frighten Me" by Maya Angelou
Shadows on the wall
Noises down the hall
Life doesn't frighten me at all

Bad dogs barking loud

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Big ghosts in a cloud
Life doesn't frighten me at all

Mean old Mother Goose
Lions on the loose
They don't frighten me at all

Dragons breathing flame
On my counterpane
That doesn't frighten me at all.

I go boo
Make them shoo
I make fun
Way they run
I won't cry
So they fly
I just smile
They go wild

Life doesn't frighten me at all.

Tough guys fight
All alone at night
Life doesn't frighten me at all.

Panthers in the park
Strangers in the dark
No, they don't frighten me at all.

That new classroom where
Boys all pull my hair
(Kissy little girls
With their hair in curls)
They don't frighten me at all.

Don't show me frogs and snakes
And listen for my scream,
If I'm afraid at all
It's only in my dreams.

I've got a magic charm
That I keep up my sleeve
I can walk the ocean floor

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And never have to breathe.

Life doesn't frighten me at all
Not at all
Not at all.

Life doesn't frighten me at all.

According to God's Word, self-empowerment is the most deceived of distorted thinking,

...evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived...

³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Does self-empowerment work? For many people, yes, but they are self-empowering themselves all the way through the gates of hell. Go ahead and live this life with self-confidence and assurance, ultimately leading to self-righteousness. What a lie! What a trap! We will examine this in week three of fear. Come back next week for a biblical worldview of fear to see how the wisdom of the world aligns, or misaligns, with the wisdom of God.

Questions