



From *Fear and its Self-focus* to *Faith and its God-Focus*

Fear has two primary faces in God's Word. One face of fear is detrimental to spiritual growth, and the other is desired for Christ-like development.

- Desired fear focuses on God and leads one to a stronger faith. Detrimental fear is self-focused and can lead one to despair and disillusionment.
- Desired fear trusts in the One who controls all circumstances. Detrimental fear perceives difficult circumstances as being out of anyone's control.

In the Bible, words associated with fear are translated in the following ways: "fear," "awe," "reverence," "terror," "to be afraid," "to dread," and "timidity." The context of these words determines if they are detrimental or desirable.

In most instances, fear is either detrimental or desirable based on its focus. For example, God's Word tells us to put off self-centered fear and to put on the desired alternative, which is the fear of the Lord. Moses reminded the Israelites of this truth in Exodus 20:20: "Do not fear (*detrimental fear*), for God has come to test you, that the fear of him (*desired fear*) may be before you, that you may not sin." (*insert added*)

As Moses knew and wanted the people to learn . . . detrimental fear is a response to difficult predicaments or people without considering that God's power and sovereignty reign over all aspects of life.

Before reviewing God's alternative to detrimental (sinful) fear, we should be reminded of natural fear. This is a God-given emotion that responds to the presence or anticipation of actual danger. As a result, natural fear helps one to avoid or respond specifically to potential harm and is one of God's gifts to every person.

In another acceptable dimension, fear (awe) may also be experienced as a sense of reverence. This occurs when one recognizes power or honor associated with a created object (*for example: the night sky, a 100-story building, nuclear reactor*) or a person who is notable (*for example: a king, heart surgeon, Olympic athlete*).

As the previous two paragraphs indicate, natural fear is to be expected and can be a helpful, God-ordained response to various aspects of life. The detrimental fear that is condemned in Scripture, however, can hinder one's spiritual growth and, thus, dishonor the Lord.

As might be expected, the primary spiritual antidote for detrimental fear is the desirable fear of God (trust, reverence, faith in Him).

Psalm 25:12-14, Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. ¹³ His soul shall abide in well-being and his offspring shall inherit the land. ¹⁴ The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

Psalm 27:1, The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalms 34:4, 9, I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears . . . Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!

Psalm 56:3-4, When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?

Psalm 118:6, The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

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

Isaiah 8:12-13, Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. ¹⁵ But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

Matthew 10:28, And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

2 Corinthians 7:1, Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Ephesians 5:21, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Hebrews 13:6, So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

As Dr. Herbert Lockyer summarized in All the Promises of the Bible, "If we fear Him with all our heart, there will be nothing else to fear. How unworthy is unwholesome fear when we have the promise that His everlasting arms are underneath and around us. The presence of (*detrimental*) fear is the evidence of the absence of faith. Fear and faith can never exist together." (*parenthesis added*)

May we be known as people of faith in God!