

Never Let Your Fear Decide Your Future (Love Banishes Fear)

When fear enters a Christian's life, there are two vital factors to neutralise it: faith and love.

In the Message translation of 1 Jn 4:17-19 we read:

*God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and matures in us, so that we're free of worry on Judgment Day—our standing in the world is identical with Christ's. **There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear.** Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love. We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first.*

When we arrived in the town of San Pedro Sochiapam in Southern Mexico in 1970, to our knowledge there were no committed Christians in that area.

In brief, by 1972 there were about 16 men and 2 women meeting for Bible studies when they went through a period of intense persecution. They were jailed and beaten. After their release they remained firm in their convictions. They didn't respond with animosity towards those who had abused them. As people saw the reality of their faith many began to join in the simple worship services held in the dirt floored hut of brother Felix. Ultimately, well over a 1000 people spread across 15 towns have become believers.

We had to learn their language and, little by little, we also began to see the world through their eyes. They were convinced that the world around them is alive with invisible spirit powers that are out to harm you if given an opportunity. The rainbow, for example, is a malevolent spirit snake. Never say her name when she is visible or point at her or you will become paralytic!

And we saw God begin to deliver them of their fear of evil spirits. One of the most dramatic examples of that happened when one of the new Christians told me about a limestone sinkhole he had found in his cornfield. Several of us went along with a long piece of rope and 4 of us went down some 6 meters into a wonderland of crystalline beauty. The Christian guys with me were overcome with its beauty and remarked "We had always thought of caves as being the habitat of demons, and none of us would ever go into a cave. But we thank God that He has taken that fear out of our hearts so that we could see this place."

We might find the superstitious fear of the Chinantecs a far cry from our sophisticated outlooks, but fear still controls us in other ways.

Christine's fear of flying began to dominate her ability to prepare for another trip out to the village in the little single engine Cessna 180. We had to land on a one-way dirt airstrip that looked like a roller coaster. She laid her fears before God, and He graciously lifted those fears through assurances in Psalm 121, particularly the sentence "*he will watch over your life, he will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore*". And in the aftermath of finding inner peace, she was able to write a beautiful song of praise based on Psalm 121.

There are people who have fear of the number 13 or the number 666, or of spilling salt, or of breaking a mirror—the fear of invoking "bad luck" -- So parallel to the Chinantecs' fear of unseen forces that could affect their lives.

Some have a fear of walking up to a stranger in a gathering (mine - I have a hard time initiating conversations with people I have never met.) When Christine and I are in a crowd where we know very few people, Christine will initiate a conversation with a stranger, draw me in, and then go off to meet others she hasn't met before. What a wife!

Some have a fear of rats / dogs / water / cockroaches / spiders / heights / elevators.
And many have a fear of failure.

There **are** times when fear can be a good thing. Through it we can learn to avoid those things that could harm us—like when we might tell our little children about the danger of electrical outlets, or try to create a healthy fear of habituating drugs in the hearts and minds of our teenagers by alerting them to the end results of their choices. This fear is, in reality, more like a **healthy respect** for that which may harm us if mishandled.

For a Christian, fear is rooted in uncertainty:
Does God really love me?
Are God's promises true?

Fear gives Satan power and opens the door for him to operate in your life.
Fear brings worry, torment, and unrest; whereas **faith in God** and an awareness of **His unfailing love** brings peace and contentment.

As followers of Christ, we were never meant to be emotionally crippled by any fear!
For the **unbeliever**, the fear of God is the fear of God's judgment and eternal separation from God.
(Luke 12:5; Hebrews 10:31).

For the **believer**, the fear of God is something **much** different; it is a reverence of God. Hebrews 12:28-29 is a good description of this:
"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.'"

And Proverbs 1:7 declares, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge."*

Until we understand who God is – holy, just, and righteous – and develop a reverential fear of Him, we cannot have true wisdom.

2 Tim. 1:7 assures us that God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of love, and of power and of a sound mind. The Greek word for "fear" in this verse does not refer to the reverential fear of the Lord. Rather, the word refers to *cowardice* or *timidity*. The Living Bible expresses this well:
For the Holy Spirit, God's gift, does not want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, and to love them and enjoy being with them.

As believers, we have no reason to be scared of God. In Romans 8:38-39 we have His promise that nothing can separate us from His love. And in Hebrews 13:5 we have His promise that He will never leave us or forsake us.

As believers, it is right to have a reverence for God that greatly impacts the way we live. For a believer, the fear of God is respecting Him, obeying Him, submitting to His discipline, and worshiping Him in awe.

Reverential fear of God is a realistic awareness of His glory, His majesty, His right to authority over our lives, His hatred of wilful disobedience, selfishness, SIN.

Reverential fear of God is meant to bring us to a change of attitude and purpose in life; to acknowledge His rightful rule – in my life and yours, as both Creator and Saviour.

How we can praise God for His goodness and patience with us! As Psalm 103:10 declares “*He does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities.*”

I have learned from my own experiences and those of others I have talked with that there seems to be two critical life-changing experiences in our lives. Both seem to provoke a deep fear in almost every heart, and as a consequence many people back away from that which can make a life-changing difference.

The first fear I want to address is that of really letting God take you as you are and make you into a new person. Some are afraid that God is so holy that He wouldn’t accept them. Some are afraid of the changes that they know deep within will have to take place. And so they back away from an encounter with the living God. They never discover the joy and delight of sins forgiven - gone - cleansed. They never find the warmth and strength of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit of God within.

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, be assured that God loves you just as you are; **but He loves you too much to leave you that way!**

But for most who have experienced God’s saving grace, there still remains a decision from which many back away in fear.

For some reason we want to hang on to the things of this world as if we could take them with us into eternity. We are afraid to believe that God really does have our best interest at heart.

Unlike the “prosperity” gospel prevalent in some circles these days – a philosophy which focuses on material and social success in this life, our Lord has admonished us to store up treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt. And the apostle Paul (who was undoubtedly a man of deep faith), reflecting on the hardships he has been going through while sharing his faith remarks in 2 Cor 4:17: “*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*”

We may find ourselves backing away from such a commitment from a fear of the unknown—**What will God want me to do?!**

Hence the title of this message: ***Never let your fear decide your future.***

In fact, fear is the major mechanism the enemy uses to fuel doubts in our hearts about God and His word. When you are afraid, you can’t believe; when you don’t believe, you can’t obey; when you don’t obey, you don’t see results!

E. Stanley Jones was right when he said, ‘**Fear is the sand in the machinery of life.**’

Fear disrupts and cripples progress in both the physical and spiritual dimensions of life.

Here are seven kinds of fear that most believers face at one time or another. Each one of these seven springs from the fundamental, underlying fear to really take God at His word: that He loves us and wants only the best for us.

#1. Fear of Opposition

We live in a world whose god is hostile to Christ and the Christian message. And we know that Satan often stirs up opposition when we make a move to walk in obedience, represent the kingdom or share the Good News.

But the truth is, there will always be opposition to the light, life and message of the Christian faith. And that's merely because the enemy is still around. We should accept this reality, be prepared to live for the Lord and launch out when necessary, in faith and confidence.

#2. Fear of Incompetence

Sometimes, we may receive an idea, an inspiration to do something. But we feel highly unqualified to carry it out.

Remember Gideon? He also felt incompetent to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites as God mandated him to. He said to God, *'Pardon me, my lord,' Gideon replied, 'but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.'* (Judges 6:15). God, however, saw in Him, a mighty man of valour. **It is not so much that God calls the qualified, as it is that He qualifies the called.**

#3. Fear of Starting

God may give you a vision that you consider too big for you to undertake. And you wonder how you might start.

Don't get worked up about the big picture and how it will play out. Remember, every piece of the jigsaw fits in **gradually** to solve the puzzle. Realize also that If God starts a good thing in you, He is committed to establishing it. Philippians 1:6 NIV says, *'being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus'*.

#4. Fear of People's Opinion

This is one of the biggest fears we face.

What will my parents say? My friends, my siblings, my colleagues, what will they think of me? We get ourselves worked up about what everybody's opinion will be about us, or what we've set out to do.

God's view of us is more important than what any other person has to say. We shouldn't be held back by what we think people may say.

#5. Fear of Failure

Sometimes we could get so overwhelmed with the thought of, 'What if it does not work out?' that we back away from taking action. **We are afraid of failing!**

But failure has never been final. Many spiritual giants in the Bible and in contemporary times did fail at one point or the other. But they were courageous enough to pick themselves up and get things right. As the motivational speaker Anthony Robbins once said, **'Stop being afraid of what could go wrong, and start being excited of what could go right.'**

The truth is, failure is not a destination. Thomas Edison stated *"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."* And Edison also wrote: *"Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up."*

#6. Fear of the Future

Some believers are afraid to go into full-time ministry, whether in NZ or overseas, even though they are clear that's what God wants them to do, just because of the fear of the future. They ask themselves: How will I support myself and the work I sense God is calling me into?

Sometimes, it's fear of remaining single. There is a preponderance of single women on the mission field. One lovely young gal we got to know in Mexico shared that this was something she had to lay on the altar when she committed her life to being a missionary.

We have a God who not only knows the future, but owns it as well. He's got times and seasons under His charge. BTW, that single gal met a lovely man on the mission field and ended up married. Fear will only keep you in bondage; and it will never allow you see the all the possibilities.

#7. Fear of the Unknown

Sometimes the enemy comes and haunts our imaginations and harasses our minds with negativity, making us to be scared of something we really have no concrete information about.

It may be a fear that God will take away something you deeply enjoy. But He made you. He knows every fibre of your being. He knows what will give the deepest and most permanent satisfaction.

A missionary working in a Muslim country shares this story:

Sometime ago, while sharing tracts at a particular junction in a town, a turbaned Muslim man was passing. The moment I spotted him, I stretched out a tract to him. He paused and asked haughtily, if I really meant that He (pointing arrogantly to himself) should take the tract. I said yes, I wanted him to take it. He hesitated, then took it and uttered some words that sounded in my ears like "You will see". At that point many thoughts raced through my mind. Will he mobilize Muslim youths to beat me up? After a short while, I discarded those thoughts, and encouraged myself with the word of God. I don't know if anything transpired behind the scene but nothing happened to me. I continued my ministry in that area for several weeks afterwards. You see, it was just an unfounded fear of unknown danger.

We do not know all things; but we have a God who does. And He is on our side. Romans 8:31 asserts, *'If God is for us, who can be against us?'*

How to Deal With These Fears

The most important way to address fear is to control what we expose our minds to. Romans 10:17 says, *'Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.'* And 1 John 4:18 assures us, *perfect love drives out fear.*

Ultimately it boils down to an unwillingness to really, truly, unequivocally, believe God loves us.

The antidote for fear is faith. Faith in His love, that indeed He does have my best interests at heart. And the proof of faith is obedience.

In James 1:22 (NLT) it says:

"But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves."

We must not only see the door, but walk through it. We must not only discover the way, but take it.

In Hebrews 11:1 NIV we read: *...faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

Simply put, faith is the opposite of fear. When we learn to live in faith and rest in His unfailing love, we can enjoy a fulfilling, and joyful life in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:7 (NIV) says: *For we live by faith, not by sight.*

We're not called to occasionally choose to have faith. As Christians, we're called to *live* by it.

In 1 Thes 1:3 we read:

*We remember before our God and Father your work produced by **faith**, your labour prompted by **love**, and your endurance inspired by **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Faith is not just some whimsical wishfulness. True faith is active. It produces results.

In Philippians 4:6-7 the apostle Paul declares:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Just as God equipped Moses for his calling, God will equip you and me for anything He has called us to!

***Faith in God**...is demonstrated and activated by the words we speak; words that are in agreement with God's Word.

***Faith in God** is fuelled by unconditional love, compassion, and a willingness to serve others and put their needs before our own.

***Faith in God** will cancel out, overcome, and conquer fear and it will always defeat Satan.

***Faith in God** will set us free from bondage, guilt, and condemnation.

***Faith in God** gives us courage, confidence, and expectant hope.

***Faith in God** equips and empowers us to succeed and prosper.

***Faith in God** leads to our salvation, victory, and eternal life.

The apostle Paul declares in Galatians 5:6:

*The only thing that counts is **faith** expressing itself through love.*

Regardless of the work you do, whether it is in your home community or overseas, the primary question is: Are you willing to take God at His word and believe that He **does** want to give your life a new dimension of purpose and fulfilment?

Rom 12:2 states that God's will is **good, acceptable and perfect**.

It's time to stop being afraid that somehow our loving Father is going to mess up our lives, or take all the fun and joy out. Believe me, when you trust and obey, you will find yourself **stretched** and **challenged** and **fulfilled** to a degree that you could never have planned for yourself.

The task of sharing the good news is great. There is a role and a place for every one of us.

And the retirement benefits are out of this world!