

## LESSON 13

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# Beating Fear and Anxiety

When you were a child, what places, events, or persons scared you most? What still scares you as an adult? What is it about fear and anxiety that make them such powerful emotions? Fear is certainly one of the most common human emotions, as everyone is afraid of something. People are frightened of heights, darkness, confined spaces, open spaces, animals, and so many other things. Fear can make people do strange things. Consider the following fear-induced situations:

- Joseph Stalin was so afraid of being assassinated that he had eight different bedrooms in his home, all of which could be locked up like a bank vault. And no one knew in which of those rooms he would sleep on any given night (De Jonge 1986, 450) (Grey 1979, 457). Similar things were said of Muammar Kaddafi in Libya and Saddam Hussein of Iraq.
- A Japanese soldier in World War II hid in a cave on the Island of Guam when the area was being retaken by Allied forces. He stayed there 28 years after Japan surrendered and hostilities ceased. He survived by eating rats, frogs, snails, nuts, and mangoes. The soldier made those choices because he feared that if he turned himself in he would be executed.
- A woman who had just returned from a trip to the desert thought she heard a rattlesnake in her overnight bag. She threw the bag out the window and called the police. When they arrived, they too heard the ominous buzzing and approached the bag cautiously, only to find that the noise was coming from a cordless electric toothbrush.
- An open truck carrying an empty coffin stopped to pick up a hitchhiker. As the hitchhiker rode along

in the back of the truck, rain began to fall. So he opened the coffin, crawled inside, and fell asleep. Meanwhile, the driver stopped to pick up two more hitchhikers. Later, the first rider awoke, opened the coffin lid, and said, "Oh, has it stopped raining?" The other two men were so terrified that they jumped from the speeding truck and were seriously injured.

We all live with fear, but we do not have to be bound by it. In Isaiah 41:10, God assures His people: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." The psalmist David also proclaims, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4). Then in 2 Timothy 1:7 is the affirmation, "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

## LESSON OUTLINE

Fear and Anxiety

Healthy and Unhealthy Fear

Causes of Fear and Anxiety

What the Bible Says About Fear

Steps to Overcoming Anxiety

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

When you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- 1: *Define fear and anxiety.*
- 2: *Differentiate between healthy and unhealthy fear.*
- 3: *Explain why people become fearful and anxious.*
- 4: *Point out what the Bible says about fear.*
- 5: *Discuss steps to take in overcoming anxiety.*

## Fear and Anxiety

### Objective 1:

Define fear and anxiety.

We all know what it is to experience fear and anxiety, but there is probably much about fear itself that we do not know. An important first step, then, is to be able to define fear and anxiety. The Bible uses words like *afraid, terror, dread, anxious, tremble, shake, and quake* to describe fear. Essentially, when a person is experiencing fear he or she is said to be alarmed, nervous, fainthearted, apprehensive, upset, disturbed, scared, frightened, aghast, and anxious or worried. For most of this lesson, we will use the words *fear* and *anxiety* interchangeably.

Specific fears are called phobias, and there is an extensive list of these phobias in our world today. The chart below includes only a few phobias. Do not be surprised if you have not heard of all of these.

Phobias	Meaning
Acrophobia	fear of heights
Agoraphobia	fear of large, open spaces
Aichmophobia	fear of sharp objects
Ailurophobia	fear of cats
Arachnophobia	fear of spiders
Astraphobia	fear of thunderstorms
Claustrophobia	fear of confined places
Hydrophobia	fear of water
Micro-phobia	fear of germs
Mysophobia	fear of dirt
Nyctophobia	fear of the dark
Phobophobia	fear of fear
Xenophobia	fear of strangers
Zoophobia	fear of animals

In addition to phobias, fear is also described according to its relative degrees. For instance, fear

can be felt more or less intensely. Three such degrees of fear are distrust, paranoia, and terror. Distrust is the period of warning before the actual fear begins. Distrust is sometimes explained as the inward feeling of caution, and it is usually focused towards a person or object. Distrust is a lack of faith or belief in something questionable or unknown.

Paranoia is a term used to describe a fixation on fear, related to a false perception of being persecuted. This perception often causes one to change one's normal behavior in radical ways. And, after time, the individual's behavior may become extremely compulsive. Finally, terror is pronounced fear when someone becomes overwhelmed with a sense of immediate danger to the point of making irrational choices and demonstrating non-typical behavior.

## Healthy and Unhealthy Fear

### *Objective 2:*

*Differentiate between healthy and unhealthy fear.*

There are healthy and unhealthy forms of fear. Healthy fear is an emotional response stimulated by a real threat or problem. There is usually good reason to be afraid. Healthy fear benefits us by warning us of danger and pain. It also teaches us the consequences of disobedience and helps us know our limits. The healthiest fear of all is the fear of God. Proverbs 9:10 says that such fear "is the beginning of wisdom."

Unfortunately many people, including Christians, confuse a healthy fear of God with being afraid of God. They see God suspending them over the pit of hell; they fear they may have committed the unpardonable sin; they fear the return of Christ; or they fear the mark of the beast. This, however, is not God's intent in our relationship with Him. A healthy fear of God should not strike terror in our hearts, but should give us wisdom in making better decisions daily.

Dissimilarity between healthy and unhealthy fear is also seen in the difference between fear and anxiety. Although up to this point I have used the terms *fear* and *anxiety* interchangeably, there is some distinction between these two. As already stated, healthy fear is a response that is stimulated by a real threat or problem. Anxiety, on the other hand, is fear in the absence of an adequate cause. Anxiety does not have a specific object; it is more of an undefined feeling of apprehension or uneasiness. Anxiety produces worry. The word *worry* comes from a combination of two words which mean “mind” and “divide.” Thus, worry means literally “to divide the mind.”

John Haggai (2001) in his book, *How to Win Over Worry*, writes,

1. Worry divides our feelings—Our emotions lack stability.
2. Worry divides our understanding—Our convictions are shallow and changeable.
3. Worry divides our perception—Our observations are faulty and even false.
4. Worry divides our judgment—Our decisions are often unjust.
5. Worry divides our will—Our plans and purposes, if not scrapped altogether, are not filled with persistence.

## Causes of Fear and Anxiety

### *Objective 3:*

*Explain why people become fearful and anxious.*

Following are several causes of fear and anxiety. It will help you in your Christian development and mental health to be aware of these causes.

### Exhaustion and Loneliness

People worry more when they are physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted. All their reserves are

spent, and they are no longer able to think rationally or objectively. This vulnerability then makes them more susceptible to fear and anxiety.

Beyond tiredness, people also tend to become more fearful and anxious when they are alone than when they are with people they know and trust. Humans have an inherent need for community, for other people. The lack of such community creates anxiety.

### Loss of Control

All of us fear what we cannot control because threat of danger exposes our inability to preserve what we most deeply cherish or value. Thus, people become more anxious when they feel they are losing control of a situation.

### Inadequacy and the Unknown

Personal inadequacy increases our fear of failure and rejection. Sometimes fearful or anxious people try to cover up their feelings by acting overly confident, or they feel threatened by anyone who questions their abilities. So many people choose to live safe lives, where neither failure nor success is likely. Such people never take risks, never accomplish any real service, and never make a difference. Fear of failure paralyzes them.

Furthermore, most people feel apprehensive about the unknown or unfamiliar. And, sometimes, their overactive imagination even conjures up frightful situations that may not even exist.

### Physiological and Emotional Makeup

Other people are physiologically and emotionally “wired” to be more cautious or apprehensive by nature. This may be an inherited or learned trait passed on to them by previous generations who behaved in much the same way.

## What the Bible Says About Fear

### Objective 4:

*Point out what the Bible says about fear.*

Read Matthew 14:25–33, and select the responses you think best answer the following questions.

1. *Were you in the boat with the disciples during the storm, how would you have reacted if you had seen someone walking on the water?*
  - a. *I would not have believed my eyes.*
  - b. *I would have closed my eyes and waited for things to return to normal.*
  - c. *I would have done what Peter did.*
  - d. *I probably would have had a heart attack.*
  - e. *I do not have a clue about how I would have reacted.*
2. *Why do you think Peter reacted so differently from the rest of the disciples?*
  - a. *He loved to take risks.*
  - b. *He had more faith than the rest of the disciples.*
  - c. *He was the most impulsive of all the disciples.*
  - d. *He always needed to be “one up” on the other disciples.*
  - e. *He had to be a little crazy.*
3. *When it comes to taking risks, how would you describe yourself?*
  - a. *Cautious: I do not take any unnecessary chances.*
  - b. *Impulsive: I am always trying new things.*
  - c. *Calculating: I want all the facts before I decide.*
  - d. *Procrastinating: I put off making a decision as long as I can.*
  - e. *Apprehensive: I am scared stiff most of the time.*
4. *Where do you think God is inviting you to “get out of the boat” right now?*
  - b. *In my job/career: taking on a new challenge, putting in for a promotion*
  - c. *In my family: being willing to be more open and vulnerable with them*
  - d. *In my spiritual walk: trusting myself fully to God*

- e. *In my future planning: trying something I have always wanted to do*
  - f. *In my personal life: facing a lifelong challenge*
5. *How could God help you deal with your fears?*
    - a. *Do not push me into being brave.*
    - b. *Give me a lot of support.*
    - c. *Give me a push.*
    - d. *Assure me that it is okay to fail.*
    - e. *Get out of the boat with me.*
  6. *How could others help you deal with your fear?*
    - a. *Leave me alone to work it out.*
    - b. *Encourage me, but do not try to force me.*
    - c. *Be a safe harbor for me to return to.*
    - d. *Talk me through the process from the sidelines.*
    - e. *Walk with me through the process.*

Now read **Philippians 4:4–9**, and use the following questions to help you think through the passage.

1. What did Paul mean when he said, “Rejoice in the Lord always?” What could help you rejoice when you are facing a fearful situation?
2. Do you sometimes let anxiety keep you from rejoicing in the goodness of God? What could you do to prevent that?
3. How does remembering the Lord is near help in conquering fear and anxiety? What are some things you could do to remind yourself of His nearness?
4. How does bringing your needs to the Lord in prayer keep you from being anxious or fearful? What elements should you include in your prayer besides presenting your requests to God?
5. What does it mean to have the peace of God guarding your heart and mind? In what two areas of your life does God’s peace operate?
6. How would changing what you allow your mind to dwell on help you beat anxiety? What more positive things could you focus on when you are feeling anxious or fearful?



7. What have you learned from this passage that could help you cope with fear and anxiety? How will you put these truths into practice in your life?

## Steps to Overcoming Anxiety

### *Objective 5:*

*Discuss steps to take in overcoming anxiety.*

We need not live our lives bound by fear and anxiety. We are not helpless victims of our emotions. There are some positive things we can do, with the Lord's help, to beat anxiety. Dealing with our fears usually involves the following five steps.

### Confront your fears

Do you remember how it felt to walk into a dark place? Your first impulse was to turn and run in the other direction. What did you do when you thought something was under your bed? You finally mustered the courage to turn on the light and look. That is the decision you have to make in defeating all your fears—confront them and stand your ground. God has given you the ability to conquer your fears and bring your anxieties under control. He did not give you a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Running away only adds to the feeling of panic and makes matters worse. It helps if you can talk honestly about your fears with someone you trust. As you talk about this, your fears may become less overwhelming.

### Expose your fears to the truth

Most fears often exaggerate situations. If you are habitually fearful, you will have to work harder at exposing your fears to facts. This is because your self-talk tends to out-argue the facts. But if you persist in exposing your fear to truth, the Lord will help you minimize your fears. Again, it will also help if you can talk about your fears with someone else. Another

person's perspective can make us see the irrationality and illogicality of our thinking.

### Confess your faith, not your fears

Sometimes we talk ourselves into a state of panic. When we constantly think and talk about our fears, we give power to those thoughts and words. Listen to Job's confession about the effects of his thinking: "What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me" (Job 3:25). Therefore, you must learn to verbalize your faith and trust in God, not your doubts and fears. Adopt an *as if* rather than *what if* approach to living. This is what Jesus encourages us to do: "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24).

### Practice the Lord's presence

One of the most powerful verses to help us overcome fear is Psalm 23:4: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." The psalmist David knew how to practice the presence of the Lord when confronting frightening situations. We can learn to do the same by putting the power of an anointed imagination to work. Most fearful people seem to have very active imaginations. So why not use those imaginations to overcome fear? When you are facing a frightening situation, imagine the Lord Jesus, your Good Shepherd, walking with you through that situation. Hear Him saying to you, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

### Listen to the Word of God

The best resource for conquering fear is the Word of God. The Word has power to do what no other resource can do. Here are a few verses that address fear:

- a. 2 Timothy 1:7, "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

- b. 1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment."
- c. John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."
- d. Isaiah 41:10, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

### Reference List

- De Jonge, Alex. 1986. *Stalin and the Shaping of the Soviet Union*. New York: William Morrow.
- Grey, Ian. 1979. *Stalin*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Haggai, John. 2001. *How to win over worry*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers.

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**SELF-TEST**

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After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *Claustrophobia is the fear of*
  - a) *water.*
  - b) *heights.*
  - c) *confined places.*
  
2. *The word worry comes from two words which mean*
  - a) *"anticipate" and "expect."*
  - b) *"mind" and "divide."*
  - c) *"plan" and "failure."*
  
3. *Healthy fear is defined as*
  - a) *a response stimulated by a real threat or problem.*
  - b) *fear in the absence of an adequate cause.*
  - c) *fear that does not have a specific object.*
  
4. *The healthiest fear of all is*
  - a) *fear of things that are real.*
  - b) *fear of the unknown or unfamiliar.*
  - c) *fear of God.*
  
5. *Which is not a reason some people become fearful?*
  - a) *A thorough knowledge of the Word of God*
  - b) *Loss of control*
  - c) *Feeling of inadequacy*
  
6. *In walking on the water, Peter*
  - a) *selfishly jeopardized the safety of the other disciples.*
  - b) *was motivated by pride.*
  - c) *allowed his faith to overcome fear.*
  
7. *When we constantly think and talk about our fears,*
  - a) *we give added power to those thoughts and words.*
  - b) *we minimize their impact on our lives.*
  - c) *it helps build our faith in God.*

8. *In Mark 11:24, Jesus encourages us to*
  - a) *believe that we have already received what we asked for in prayer.*
  - b) *keep praying until we get what we ask for.*
  - c) *believe that we can have anything and everything we ask for in prayer.*
9. *The best resource for conquering fear is*
  - a) *the prayers and support of our Christian friends.*
  - b) *to remember past victories over fear.*
  - c) *the Word of God.*
10. *According to 2 Timothy 1:7, God did not give us the*
  - a) *spirit of fear.*
  - b) *faith to believe.*
  - c) *wisdom to discern.*

## ANSWERS TO SELF-TEST

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parentheses.

1. *c* (13.1)
2. *b* (13.2)
3. *a* (13.2)
4. *c* (13.2)
5. *a* (13.3)
6. *c* (13.4)
7. *a* (13.5)
8. *a* (13.5)
9. *c* (13.5)
10. *a* (13.1)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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