

## What is fear? What does it look like to be free of fear?

The fearful man is full of faith. It's just not the kind of faith that leads to life. Fear IS faith, but it's faith in evil. It's the unwavering belief in evil's ability to overcome, and that God's goodness is a mirage.

Being fearful requires diligence. This diligence is backed up by pride, which maintains that the realm of belief can be managed and decoded by me. I alone am able to protect me, to navigate life's pitfalls, and to provide for all my needs. I worry and fret and have anxiety because nobody else can or will. I'm my best hope.

Did I mention that the fearful person is a landing strip for disease? Doctors will tell us that maintaining increased levels of adrenaline (which fear and stress—which is a socially acceptable word for fear—cause) is a perfect growth culture for all manner of cancers, asthma, tumors, allergies, etc. This is perfect, because it gives the fearful person something else to worry about. That's, of course, fine, because...

As stated before, the fearful person is proud. Fear, as you can already see, is self-centered. "God may have made all kinds of sweet-sounding promises, but I'm the exception, clearly. And those little verses may 'work' for some, but not for me. I, obviously, have to look out for myself." Pride supports fear like I-beams support a skyscraper. If anyone had the humility to admit that life is a mystery and no human understands it, fear wouldn't have a leg to stand on. As it is, that sentiment is rather rare.

A fearful person believes, simply, that he is alone. If God is aware of him, he believes, He is either impotent to deal with Real Needs, or hasn't the desire to actually meet those needs. (Fear makes some awfully strong statements about God.)

A fearful person has a hard time being open and transparent. He spends so much time and energy in his own protection that it's counter-productive to share his hurts, needs, or frailty. He is, after all, building a tower to his own ability. Why undermine that by volunteering his weakness? "No thanks," he decides. He is closed off to others, to God and, often, to himself.

The fearful person may be overly careful about his words (because he fears betrayal), overly concerned with his performance (because he fears

failure), overly concerned with his morality (because he fears rejection by God), overly concerned with his money (because he fears poverty), etc. Fear can look like a thousand different obsessions, and none of them lead to life or freedom.

His 'what-ifs' dominate his mind. His thoughts are given to dark possibilities and "vain imaginings". He fantasizes about hopeless situations, of threats, and of possible calamity. "He flees though no one pursues," says Proverbs 28; it also calls this man wicked. His life, because of the perceived threats around him, is small and mean and shrinking. His view of God is small; his hope for his fellow man is slight. He recedes into the increasing confinement of his own ability. Fear baits him into control with pride, and the traps closes in on him with increasing tightness.

The man who is free of fear speaks faith to the path before him. Proverbs 31 says that a wise woman "laughs about the days to come". Instead of concerning himself with the possible calamity in the future, he looks forward to the promised provision of God. He knows, like David, that he "will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living." He believes, regardless of his present circumstances, that God is good. And that he has the desire and the ability to do what he promised: to protect and provide for needy little people like us.

The man who's free of pride believes that God is greater than the world. He believes that God is the Sovereign of the Universe and that he regards people who look to him for help. He believes that God's heart is loving, like that of a Father toward his son--even when he allows pain or trouble. He believes that light and momentary suffering is incomparable to the goodness that God engineers through it. He is not afraid of pain and he's not afraid of the devil. Like David, he "will fear no evil."

Because he's not out to protect himself (he trusts God to do that), the man who's free of fear is NOT trying to hold onto his life. He opens it up, and it expands naturally as a result. He loves hurting people, even when that love impinges on his 'freedom'; he gives his money to people with less, even though this action de-insulates him for future needs. He isn't trying to live a predictable, controllable life; he is open to the unknown, because he is living by FAITH.