

Facing Fear

Many of us identify a fearful person as a coward, someone who is not assertive, shyness or some--one cowering at intimidation. But fear can also be expressed by unrealistic bravado, excessive talking, work-aholism, and lying, to name a few. Fear is revealed in cover-ups and phoniness. It keeps us from being fully honest about who we are, prompting us instead to project false or only partially true images of ourselves. Fear identifies itself by defensiveness.

Three forms of defensiveness include:

- Denial -- refusal to acknowledge personal problems or tensions - often unconscious self-deception
- Evasiveness - a deliberate deception of others where we specifically choose to avoid the responsibility of meeting problems head on
- Reversal - we assume others are out to get us so we become offensive whenever delicate matters are mentioned

God has something richer and safer for each of us. We can relax in His provision of a good life, and His protection from the forces that would try to harm us.

I am confident that I will see the Lord's goodness while I am here in the land of the living. Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.
(Psalm 27)

O God, have mercy on me. The enemy presses in on me. My foes attack me all day long. My slanderers hound me constantly, and many are boldly attacking me. But when I am afraid, I put my trust in you. This I know: God is on my side. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?
(Psalm 56)

Fear can be contagious. When we are uncertain of others' motives and feel attacked by their actions, we often respond with our own fear and defensiveness. This leads to anger and a widening of the cycle of fear and mistrust. We need a realistic picture of the person we are relating to. If we can accept the idea that he/she may have a bad day or sometimes will have bad intentions towards us, then we will not be shocked when a disappointment occurs. The result will be that we won't give undue attention to some else's failings and we can stay on our course for healthy living. If we let go of our shock and its associated fear we will be more guided by objectivity. This will allow us to react less and free us to initiate our own healthy responses.

When our emotions hinge solely on the opinions of other people, we are fearful because we can never be sure when we might be rejected or criticized or ignored. A human-based self-image is only as secure as the humans we entrust with our emotions. But a God-based self-image is different. God accepts us, weaknesses and all. We can live

confidently in the knowledge that God can guide us through all relationships and circumstances. We gain a lot when we let God be in charge of our emotional stability.

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. How does fear show itself in my relating with others?
2. How do I respond to fear from others?
3. How does fear of rejection colour my responses to the attitudes and actions of others?
4. What does it mean to be human-based in my self image versus God-based?
5. How does God promise to help me in situations that seem fearful to me?
6. What is my responsibility when faced with fear-filled words and actions of others?
7. How does God mean for friendship and relationship with Him to impact on how I relate to others?

