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# Fear

and how to deal with it



Egerton Long is an ordained Baptist Minister and has served in churches in both USA & Australia. He and his wife Betty also served among the Indigenous people in Australia for over 25 years. Other booklets are available in this series as well as Daily Devotional material.

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# **Fear**

and how to deal with it



**Egerton C. Long**

Ann Landers, a popular newspaper columnist in the USA for many years, often received over 10,000 letters every month. When asked if there was any one problem which predominated in these letters, Ann Landers immediately replied: "The one problem above all others for those who write to me seems to be fear and how to deal with it". Is fear the most common of all our emotions?

Where does all this fear come from? Is there a difference between fear and worry? They can be closely related but, while both fear and worry are emotions, worry takes over our minds so that our thoughts continually cover the same ground in a dark, gloomy circle.

Fear can come from many sources. For example, being afraid of rejection or criticism or of being inadequate in a given situation can generate fear. Being asked to speak in public has been said to be one of the most common fears. A person who has no trouble talking with others can become almost petrified when facing an audience.

Fear of sickness or death is another major concern. The slightest mention of cancer or AIDS can frighten most of us, whether it involves ourselves or a member of our families.

### **FEAR OF THE FUTURE**

Fear of the future is experienced by many. Is our job secure? What about old age? What will happen to our family? Fear of the unknown.

I acknowledge myself to be a sinner in God's sight.

I accept Jesus Christ now as my Saviour.

I thank Him for saving me.

Sign your name here

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Date \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

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## HOW TO RECEIVE CHRIST AS YOUR SAVIOUR

If God has been speaking to you as you have read this booklet and if you are willing now to take Jesus Christ as your Saviour, here is what you should do:

1. **Confess** – tell God in your own simple words that you are a sinner needing a Saviour (Read Romans 3:23) Tell God you are sorry for your sin – the Bible Word is ‘repent’.
2. **Accept** – tell God that you see Jesus Christ as your only Saviour and that you accept him now (Read Romans 6:23)
3. **Believe** – that Jesus Christ has saved you because you asked him to do so (Read Romans 10:13) His Word is the assurance that God has done what you asked Him to do.

If you have made this decision today then sign your name here and tell someone else what you have done. Join a church where you can hear God’s Word preached and have fellowship with other believers.

Fear of change. Fear of failure in any given situation. These are well known to many of us. So the list goes on.

But fear is the wrong use of our imagination. It always anticipates the worst, not the best that could happen. Fear can cause confusion. It can cause a person to cheat or lie.

Fear can lead to disastrous decisions. A young girl was in a car approaching a railway crossing when she saw a train coming. She was so afraid of the car and train meeting on the crossing that she jumped from the car but was killed in doing so.

For believers, fear can rob us of joy and prevent us from serving Christ as we should. Lack of what is called “assurance” is involved here. Questions such as “Am I really a child of God? Do I really belong to Jesus Christ? Am I sure of going to heaven?” can all create serious uncertainty. I personally had no assurance on these questions in my teen years and I know how disturbing they can be. For some people there can be a constant battle between faith and fear. It has been said that “Fear can rob our minds of peace and is one of the greatest threats to health today”.

### PHOBIAS – WHAT ARE THEY?

Long lasting fears - which often continue from childhood through adulthood - are generally known as “phobias” with a prefix defining the object which is feared. A phobia is any

unreasonable dread or fear which seems to continually remain with an individual – “phobos” is a Greek word meaning fear.

A medical dictionary lists almost 100 various types of phobias. Among the most common are: fear of crowds (agoraphobia), fear of heights (acrophobia), fear of enclosed spaces (claustrophobia), fear of water (hydrophobia). Some people are afraid of being stared at. Others are afraid of the dark or of children or animals or snakes. Lightning, thunder, flying in a plane can all cause fear in many people.

Most phobias can make us feel physically weak whenever we are called to face these situations. Or there have been occasions when a person has suffered a serious panic attack causing physical symptoms such as irregular breathing, dizziness, numbness in the hands or feet, or even an increased heart action. A medical examination at that time may find nothing wrong, even though the panic attack has been very real for the person concerned. Sad to say, prolonged anxiety attacks and depression are affecting more and more people every year. They are closely related to fear.

### **OTHER CAUSES OF FEAR**

The anticipation of certain events can prompt feelings of fear. For example, being faced with a new or unfamiliar situation, walking alone, being home alone, living alone. Or being in a situation where you were threatened or hurt on

his/her father, and you can expect Him to honour your request. You can't see God but He is as close to you or closer than anyone else could ever be. **Believe it! You are his child forever.**

**Tell fear to go** - you are God's child now. A small victory today will lead to a bigger victory tomorrow as you learn to walk in this new way of life – as a member of God's family. Now step out in faith to be the person God wants you to be. Keep on asking God for His help and keep on believing what He has said.

Remember, fear can be conquered by believing what God has said and by Jesus Christ living within you, now and always. “Perfect love (God's love) expels all fear” 1 John 4:18.

Can we help you? Or can you find a pastor who will help you? If fear is your problem, help is near. Act now. Don't go on in fear when God is waiting to help you. Talk to Him today – and every day - and watch Him work in you, for you and through you.

Jeremiah 29:11: “I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”.

## **OTHER FEARS FOR THE FUTURE**

Fear of the future may include **fear of dying**. But what is ahead for the believer in Jesus Christ? He or she has the assurance that to be absent from the body here, (in other words – to die) is to be present with the Lord in Heaven. Death is only a doorway into the very presence of Christ, where He is waiting for us – there in Heaven. Departure from this life means our arrival in glory, if you are a believer now in Jesus Christ as your Saviour.

Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. But you say: “how do I prepare for heaven? How do I believe in Jesus Christ as the door into heaven?”

First, tell God you’ve messed up your life trying to run things your own way but now you want Him to be in control. You’ve heard that Jesus Christ died on a cross for us and that your sins and mine were nailed there so that you could have a love relationship with God. Right now you want God to know that you have come to believe in Jesus Christ and want to belong to Him.

Have you told God this (and were you sincere about it)? If so, you now have the freedom to ask God for anything, just as a child would ask

a previous occasion. Believing you will not get the help you need or losing the help you now have or losing a sense of control can all bring fear to many people.

## **WHAT IS FEAR?**

We have all experienced fear but how can we define it? A dictionary says that fear is “an unpleasant emotion caused by exposure to danger or expectation of pain.” If we list some of the words which are synonymous with fear it may help us better understand the meaning of the word. For example similar words include panic, anxiety, dread, terror, apprehension, worry, being scared, or being frightened. These words can often be summed up in that one word – fear.

## **BENEFITS OF FEAR**

But before we look more closely at the adverse effects of fear as we have been describing it, let’s stop and think of the benefits which come to us through fear. Remember it is a God given emotion, which can keep us from danger, accident or injury.

You might be walking along a city street but fail to notice you are approaching a busy intersection. As you step on to the roadway, out of the corner of your eye you discover a car rapidly heading your way. You immediately pull back – fear has warned you that you almost became a statistic. On hundreds of occasions in an average lifetime fear will save us from serious danger.

Where did that kind of **helpful fear** come from? It was implanted within us by the God who created us. In the same way in which He gave us the ability to love or to know the various other kinds of emotions which we experience from time to time, God added to our human experience and personality this emotion which we call fear. It is there for our protection. Only when it takes over and wants to control us completely, do we realise it must be dealt with and kept in its proper place in our lives.

### **FEAR OF GOD**

The Bible also speaks about the “fear of God”. Does that mean we are to be so afraid of God that we will never approach Him in any way? No, definitely not! Rather it means we are to be careful to do what God wants and has asked us to do. The meaning of the word as used in this way has changed like many other words in our day-to-day vocabulary.

Fearing the Lord is acknowledging His greatness, His love and the fact that His desires and wishes are always for our own good. To fear Him is to have a desire deep in our hearts that we will do only those things which please Him. The early church knew this truth. Acts 9:31 states that the church grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. It is as we recognise His perfect will for us and seek to live within it that we truly “fear the Lord”. It includes an overwhelming desire to please Him. As we do that, we do not need to be

His words found in the Bible can give you that certainty. Romans 10:13 tell us: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”. Did you in all sincerity call on Jesus Christ to accept you, to save you, to come into your life? Then what does this verse say? If you called, **Christ saved you – now and forever. So believe what He says.**

I mentioned my own experience as a teenager regarding my lack of assurance. It continued until I realised that as I had believed that Jesus Christ **could and would** save me, now I had to believe His Word that He **had done so**. That sounds simple – it is – but believing His Word made a great difference in my life and still does.

### **FEAR OF THE FUTURE**

Then what about fear of the future? Are you afraid of being tempted to do something that is wrong? Again our trust should be in Jesus Christ. First remember the words of 1 Corinthians 10:13 – here is a paraphrase: “Every temptation which faces you also comes to everyone. But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted (by fear) in a way which you cannot bear. With the temptation (to fear), He will show you a way of escape so that you can resist the temptation.” Look for that way of escape – it may simply be to remember that **God means what He has said and that Jesus Christ is with you always to help you.**

the past. You don't need to dwell on them. If sin was involved, have you confessed it to God? If you have, what does God say? 1 John 1:9 is very clear: "If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". Will God hold our failure, our sin, always against us? Are we afraid He will bring it up again? What has He said?

"Your sins will I remember no more." In other words: when God forgives, He forgets. Then why not trust Him and believe the past is forgiven, and that it need not bring fear to your heart now? Satan will try to remind you of past sins and failures but his voice is always one of condemnation, trying to bring fear. Right now is the time to **remember what God has said** and to let fear go forever on that particular issue. Face your fears and let go of old memories.

### **FEAR OF THE PRESENT TIME**

What about the present? When fear comes, whatever it may involve, isn't it wonderful to have a friend right there with you to help you? Who could be a better friend than Jesus Christ? What has He said? "I will never leave you nor forsake you". "I am with you always". So believe what He says and count on His presence and help. The well known words of Psalm 23 say: "I will fear no evil – why? – **for you are with me**".

Is your problem lack of assurance that Christ has saved you and that you belong to Him? Again

afraid of the future or of anything else because the Lord is lovingly watching over us.

### **GOD'S GREAT DESIRE**

God often said to His people in the Old Testament that His one great longing was that they might have hearts to do His will, that they might fear Him and obey all His commands (Deuteronomy 5:29).

The Psalmist used this phrase frequently "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him." Psalm 103:13 "From everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear Him." Psalm 103:17.

One of the clearest explanations of the word "fear" in this context is found in Deuteronomy 10:12: "What does the Lord your God ask of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to love Him and to serve the Lord your God with your heart and with all your soul." We don't need to be afraid or terrified of God. What we need to do is to make sure we are doing what He wants us to do and trust Him with our lives and circumstances day by day.

### **HOW CAN WE DEAL WITH OTHER FEARS?**

We have mentioned "helpful fear" or the protecting value of fear and also what we mean by the "fear of God". Now what can we do about the other kinds of fear – fears which prevent us

from living the full, happy life God has planned for us?

Counselling, especially by a Christian counsellor, could be a very real help to many who suffer from the fears or phobias we have named above. Serious, long lasting phobias, which prevent a person from living a fulfilled life, may need professional attention and help. Be willing to admit your need of help.

If we are facing (and fearing) serious surgery, it can be very helpful to find out all you can about the hospital and surgeon involved, as well as trying to understand the procedure and the recovery time. In any situation knowing what to expect can help alleviate fear and can give strength as we face a problem, whatever it may be.

Although there is so much we can do ourselves, it all begins with our recognition of the help God wants to give and by relying on the promises He has made in the Bible. Our efforts to overcome our fears without relying on God and His promises will fail. If we are to get the most help from those promises we need to take our eyes off our fears while we look to God in faith, believing He will help and deliver us from those fears.

The command - "Fear not" - occurs 366 times in the Bible – more than one for every day. Two of the strongest verses in the Bible are in 2 Timothy 1:7 "God did not give us a spirit of

timidity (fear) but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline". And Isaiah 41:10 "So 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."

## IDENTIFYING OUR FEARS

We can begin to confront our fears by identifying them and then facing them one by one in the light of His promises? Remember most fears come from within so we usually know what it is we fear. Let's make three headings and try to put our fears in their right place as far as time is concerned. Let's call the lists, **Past, Present and Future**. It may not be easy to separate them in this way as some fears carry through all three suggested time slots.

Under **Past**, list the fear of being found out for something done years ago. Or the memory of an experience you do not ever want repeated. What else could be listed here?

Under **Present**, list the various fears which bother you day after day. This may include some of the many types of fears we have already listed.

Under **Future**, list the fear of illness, or death, or financial failure or whatever seems to come up in your thoughts regarding the future.

## CHRIST - THE ANSWER TO OUR FEARS

Now who is sufficient to address all these fears? The answer is Jesus Christ. Take the fears of