



THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

FEAR IN THE
BIBLE — HOW TO
STOP LIVING FOR
APPROVAL AND
START LIVING
FOR GOD



JARED PRICE

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INTRODUCTION

Few things capture global attention like the raw exhilaration of the Olympic games. Athletes from all over the world discipline their bodies to maintain pristine fitness and compete with maximum output to defeat their opponents and earn the admiration, honor, and praise that comes from an Olympic gold medal — a symbol that recognizes them at that moment as the best in the world.

Perhaps you have heard of the gold medalist, Eric Liddell, the Scottish runner depicted in the movie *Chariots of Fire*. Eric was born to a missionary family in China and, by God's grace, survived the Boxer Rebellion in the early 1900s. As a kid, Eric discovered he had an extraordinary love and talent for running. He trained his body for years, and eventually made it to the 1924 Paris Olympic games. But when his race, the 100 meter dash, was announced to be held on Sunday, he withdrew from the ticket. Eric saw only two choices: compromise his convictions about the sabbath or surrender his spot in the race.

Eric received criticism from teammates, countrymen, and local and international newspapers. Even his future king, the Prince of Wales, publicly urged him to run the race. But Eric would not budge. In the face of overwhelming pressure and media assaults, Eric chose to honor God over bending to the fear of man.

Perhaps because of his reputation or sheer remarkable talent, the Olympic committee finally offered him an alternative. He could compete in the 400 meter race, a race he had only several weeks to train for but was not being held on Sunday. To everyone's incredible surprise, he qualified and made it to the final heat. As he left the hotel on the morning of the medal race,

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the team trainer gave him a note, “he who honors him, God will honor.” Not only did he win the gold medal, but he set a new Olympic record — 47.6 seconds.

In the movie *Chariots of Fire*, Liddell’s character says the following line, “God made me fast, and when I run I feel his pleasure.”

Throughout life, we will all encounter Eric Liddell moments. Everyone faces times when we are tempted to bend our knees to the fear of man and compromise our theological convictions. The fear of man can be a suffocating and paralyzing pressure that overpowers us into a prison of sinful defeatism and siphons our love of life. This fear rises from a belief that somehow a person or a group of people can provide something we need or want that God either cannot or will not give. It is essentially believing a lie and results in worshiping the creation rather than the Creator.

Secular books attempt to bandage the hemorrhage caused by this pressure with psychological self-help to no avail. The only means to how to conquer fear is paradoxically through surrender — a surrender to the one who has already conquered.

This field guide is designed to help you identify and how to overcome fear of man and enrich your joy in life through a profound surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The first two parts provide a fear in the Bible lens to investigate the difference between sinful and godly fear. In the first part, you will analyze your fears. In the second part, you will examine a fear of God that casts out fear. In the third and final part, you will discover how your surrender and union to Christ enables you to conquer your fear of man.

1

THE FEAR OF MAN

The Cambridge Dictionary defines fear as an “unpleasant emotion or thought that you have when you are frightened or worried by something dangerous, painful, or bad that is happening or might happen.” Notice that in this definition, fear is either an emotion (a feeling) or a thought (a belief). But I argue that fear is rarely, if ever, simply one or the other. To varying degrees, every fear is influenced by what we think and believe.

I remember coming home from work one day and opening the garage door to find my two year-old standing on the kitchen table trying to grab hold and swing from the dining room chandelier. Instantly, I felt my eyes widen and my heart begin to race as I ran to scoop her up before she either pulled the chandelier down on top of herself or swung off the table. But to my surprise, at that moment she had zero fear. She had no category to conceptualize chandelier pull-ups potentially causing pain, hurt, and destruction. But I did! My mind immediately calculated the danger, and my fear for her safety quickened my action to save her.

I experienced this same fear sensation — the combined emotion and belief — during my first time jumping out of a perfectly good airplane. I still remember the feeling when the SC.7 Skyvan’s back ramp lowered, and the initial rush of air came into and out of the cabin. I stood there with my legs shaking as I stared 1,500 feet down to the earth below. This was not the nebulous rush feeling of freefall where at least you have a minute or two to enjoy the experience before opening the parachute. This was static line parachuting, World War II style — if the parachute didn’t open, my body would make impact in less than 12 seconds. Of course I was afraid. But I feared something more than the risk. More than fearing death by electrocution from powerlines (as warned in the safety brief), I feared failing the program and letting down my family, friends, and teammates. The fear of man is certainly convoluted and multilayered.

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As we think about the fear of man, it is important to remember that the physical sensations we experience, like shaking knees and racing heartbeats, are intrinsically tied to what we believe. But fear doesn't often remain a sensation. The natural result of experiencing fear is action. Typically, this action is referred to as fight or flight. In either case, our action is influenced by what we believe about potential outcomes in that situation. When we look at what does The Bible say about fear, we see that it addresses both the heart's belief and the resulting behavior.

The fear of man can thus be defined as the emotion that arises from believing an individual or group of people has the power to remove or give something you think you need or want and influences the following actions to achieve a favorable outcome. Examining what does the Bible say about insecurity helps clarify that this struggle often stems from misplaced trust in others rather than in God.

Put differently, Edward Welch states that “the fear of man is when people are big and God is small.”¹

The Scriptures and life experiences teach us that our fear of man often falls into five different categories. I will use the acronym *FEARS* to help us remember them: (F) Finances, (E) Embarrassment, (A) Arguments, (R) Rejection, and (S) Suffering. In each category, we will encounter biblical teachings and examples of that specific fear and will be challenged to think through our fears. As you read, consider the descriptions and examples from Scripture, then think about your own situation and life experiences and what they might reveal about what you believe as it relates to fear.

Fear of Finances

“The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil,” wrote the Apostle Paul (1 Tim. 6:10). We can experience significant fear of those we perceive to have power over our financial security. Our fear of these people can positively motivate our work performance, but can also lead to being consumed as workaholics or tempt us to compromise our integrity to appease a superior. It is also easy to slip into idolizing people we perceive to have power over our financial security or those who have the financial freedom we desire. This latter type of fear is less afraid of what people may take and is more in awe of what people possess. Whether that person

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is our immediate boss, an organization, investors, or influential relationships, it is easy to begin shaping our actions to what we believe will best increase or protect our financial future.

God knows we will struggle with fear, worry, and anxiety over our finances. Jesus addressed this in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt. 6:31–33). When we lose sight of God’s power to provide, the first thing that comes into focus is the people who can provide what we think we desperately need or want.

This type of fear of man can lead us to covet and crave what others possess. In Luke 12:13–21, Jesus encounters a person who wants him to intervene in a family dispute and command his brother to share his inheritance with him. Jesus responds with “one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15b). Jesus continues by telling a story of a man who had an abundance of crops that were overflowing his barns. Instead of distributing his abundance, he builds bigger barns to store all of the crops so that he can have goods for many years and can relax, eat, drink, and be merry — essentially have an American-style retirement (Luke 12:16–19). But God calls this man a fool, for that very night his soul was required of him, and the things he has prepared will be another’s (Luke 12:20–21).

Financial security will not bring the type of freedom our hearts crave. Instead, this achievement can act as a barrier that replaces dependency and trust in God with trust in material possessions. When the rich young man approached Jesus, he asked what he needed to do to inherit eternal life (Matt. 19:16). Jesus responded by telling him to keep the commandments, to which the young man proudly replied that he had kept these from his youth (Matt. 19:17–20). But Jesus then said to him to go and sell what he possessed, give to the poor, and follow him (Matt. 19:21). At this statement, the young man departed sorrowfully. Jesus revealed to the young man where he had placed his true trust: in his finances. Fear of our financial security can lead us to be consumed with material possessions

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— craving what others have — and miss God’s incredible blessings right before us.

Fear of Embarrassment

We learn as kids to fear embarrassment. Whether figuratively or literally, everyone has a story of being caught with their pants down to the laughter or ridicule of others. Embarrassment makes us feel alone, helpless, vulnerable, and insignificant. Depending on our experiences with embarrassment, we can develop significant barriers and defenses to ensure we do not experience those same feelings again. This fear of man can cripple us into cowardice, compel harsh defensive language, cause us to isolate ourselves, or lead us into compromising our integrity to appease those we perceive as having power over our social circles.

Fearing embarrassment often starts with what is acceptable or unacceptable in our cultures. In the first century, when Mary and Joseph were betrothed, it would have been exceptionally shameful for Mary to be pregnant before they were married. This is why upon hearing of her pregnancy, Joseph resolved to divorce her quietly (Matt. 1:19). Joseph didn’t want to be associated with claims of infidelity, but also wanted to ensure he divorced Mary as quietly as possible so that she would not be publicly shamed. This is why the angel of the Lord says to him: “do not fear to take Mary as your wife” (Matt. 1:20). In their obedience to God, both Mary and Joseph risked significant cultural ostracism by choosing to remain betrothed while she was pregnant with Jesus.

When we succumb to the fear of embarrassment we corrupt all those we lead. Paul describes his confrontation with Peter in Galatians 2:11–14. While in Antioch, Peter had been ministering to and eating alongside Gentiles, a practice that was shameful for first-century Jews. When certain Jews came from James, Peter withdrew himself, “fearing the circumcision party” (Gal. 2:12). As a result of Peter’s fear, other Jewish believers did the same thing, including Barnabas (Gal. 2:13). Understanding how to overcome the fear of what others think is vital, as we must be aware that our fears deeply affect those around us — most often those closest to us.

The fear of saying or doing something embarrassing can not only lead us into disobedience and sin but can also rob us of significant joy. We often

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fail to share our faith or call people to believe in the gospel because we are afraid of what people will think or say about us. Think about the implications of this. We would rather risk the eternal destruction of our friends and family than experience the embarrassment of offending them. In these moments, we are choosing the perceptions of people over the perceptions and commands of God. Dealing with the Spirit of fear in these social interactions requires us to prioritize God's voice above all.

Fear of Arguments

For some people, the thought of relational arguments, disagreements, and confrontation brings tremendous amounts of anxiety. For those who fear relational conflict, they may attempt to avoid, appease, or ignore conflict with others. Conflict with family members, neighbors, church members, or work relationships can consume these people's thoughts, time, and attention. And if their denial tactics don't work to mask the problem, those who fear arguments would likely rather end a relationship than work through the problem. The danger with this fear is that it can lead to compromising God's commands, falling into sins of omission, and spiritual atrophy in apologetics.

Saul's fear of argument from the people of Israel led to his compromise of God's command and ultimately God rejecting him as king. In 1 Samuel 15, Saul is commanded to devote all of Amalek to destruction, including all people and animals (1 Sam. 15:3). The significance of this command is for another time; however, the point is that when Saul led the people to defeat the Amalekites, they ended up sparing King Agag and best of the animals and good things (1 Sam. 15:9). When Samuel confronted Saul on why he had disobeyed the Word of God, Saul responded with, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice" (1 Sam. 15:24). Saul didn't want an argument or an uproar from the people who wanted the plunder from their victory. Instead of adhering to God's command, he partially obeyed, and even attempted to hide behind his partial obedience (1 Sam. 15:20–21). Fearing arguments and confrontations can lead us to compromise our obedience to God's commands.

When we fear getting into an argument or a difficult confrontational conversation we can easily slip into sins of omission — not doing

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something God has commanded us to do. Conversely, a sin of commission is proactively doing something God has forbidden. Jesus commands, “If your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother” (Matt. 18:15). The command is straightforward. If you have been sinned against, it is your responsibility to confront your brother and tell him his fault. For some people, even thinking about confronting someone concerning a sin — where an argument or disagreement may arise — is terrifying. But to ignore the confrontation would not only be unloving to the brother who sinned, but also a sin of omission — failing to obey Jesus’ command. Paul reiterates this point to the Corinthian church when he stresses the seriousness of sin (1 Cor. 5:9–13). Paul writes, “Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. ‘Purge the evil person from among you’” (1 Cor. 5:12b–13). Fearing uncomfortable conversations that we know could ignite arguments can easily lead us into sins of omission.

While there are certainly more consequences of fearing arguments we could list, another one is spiritual atrophy in apologetics. Peter writes to those in the dispersion, “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). Peter is responding to the substantial suffering Christians are enduring, a different fear we will discuss momentarily. However, even while suffering, Peter charges the Christians dispersed through the region to always be prepared to defend their faith in Christ. When we fear arguments, confrontation, or disagreements, our natural default will be to avoid defending our faith. Succumbing to the fear of man can stunt our spiritual growth and cause us to be unprepared to defend the hope within us.

Fear of Rejection

If the fear of embarrassment deals primarily with social circles, the fear of rejection covers both professional and personal spheres. These are the spheres of life where you spend most of your time, energy, effort, and thought, whether you’re an employee, still in school, an entrepreneur, retired, a hobbyist, or a stay-at-home mom. Regardless of what that sphere looks like, no one aspires to fail and be rejected. If you do, you probably

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will! We want to succeed and have the reputation of doing our job well. The fear that people will smear your reputation or think less of you can pressure you into sinful disobedience or people-pleasing in order to gain favorable recognition.

The fear of rejection is often as simple as peer or professional pressure that dissuades us from obeying God. During the Feast of Booths, people were talking about Jesus (John 7:11–13). Some were saying he was a good man, while others thought he was leading people astray (John 7:12). But one thing was consistent about all of them — they weren't speaking openly "for fear of the Jews" (John 7:13). Later on, John explains why people were afraid: "for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22). The religious leaders were using personal rejection from corporate worship and fellowship as a tool to deter people from learning about, following, and believing in Jesus. Even during his last week in Jerusalem, "many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue" (John 12:42). This is the same type of peer or professional pressure that deters people today from following Jesus.

Biblical meaning of people pleasing is another expression of the fear of being rejected personally or professionally. We already saw how King Saul's fear of the Israelites pressured him into trying to appease their desires (1 Sam. 15:24–25). When defending his view of the gospel, Paul challenges the Galatians, "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). When Paul challenges bondservants to utilize their position to glorify Christ, he says not to do it in a people-pleasing way, as some do, but to work in such a way that glorifies God from the heart (Eph. 6:6, Col. 3:22–23). People-pleasing occurs when the motivation for our activities, actions, and words stems from a desire to appease a superior or subordinate for our benefit. The fear of rejection can fill us with such anxiety that, before we know it, we are a slave to the desires of those around us rather than the God who loves us.

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Fear of Suffering

Fear of suffering is the most broad type of fear as it entails both physical and psychological suffering. People are sinful and commit ranging acts of evil against each other. Suffering can range from verbal abuse to physical torture. Cruel people use physical pain or sadistic vocabulary to coerce others to do what they want. While fear of suffering or death is not always sinful, the fear of people hurting us can suffocate joy, instill a spirit of timidity, destroy confidence, and entrap us into silent depression.

Abram experienced the fear of suffering physical pain when traveling through Egypt. He knew Sarai was exceptionally beautiful and thought the Egyptians might try to kill him because he was her husband (Gen. 12:10–12). The fear of man influences our decisions and reveals what we believe. Abram's fear drove him into telling a lie — that he was Sarai's brother. After hearing of her beauty, Pharaoh gave gifts to Abram and took Sarai to be one of his wives. As a result, God afflicted Pharaoh with great plagues (Gen. 12:13–17). Apart from God's intervention, Abram's fear might have resulted in Sarai becoming Pharaoh's wife permanently.

The fear of death and physical pain is no small thing. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus spent his final night before his betrayal praying to the Father, “if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Certainly, Jesus was thinking of bearing divine judgment and wrath for sin, but also humanly speaking, he was probably thinking about the physical pain he was about to endure in crucifixion — the Roman punishment process that created our word excruciating. As a physician, Luke notes that “being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44). This is a physical condition known as hematohidrosis, where blood emerges from the sweat glands. Leonard Da Vinci allegedly described a similar situation that arose from a soldier before going into battle. While Jesus' agony surpassed fear of physical suffering, it certainly included it.

Similar to physical pain, verbal abuse, threats, and malice can cause terrible fear and result in people feeling shame, choosing isolation, and having low to no confidence or trust in people. These verbal wounds may arise because of sin committed by us or sin committed against us. When

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we fall into sin, cruel and unloving people may try to exploit our failures by shaming and ridiculing us because of our actions. This is partly why James writes, “How great forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness” (James 3:5b–6). Satan, the accuser, wants nothing more than for us to feel shame and hopelessness because of our sins (Rev. 12:10). Additionally, our fear of suffering can emerge from sins committed against us. Perhaps you had a parent who was always angry, yelling and screaming, or constantly discouraging and speaking cruel things to you. Or you might have a tyrannical boss who is never pleased. Maybe just going into the office is terrifying and you are always wondering when they are going to blow up next. Or maybe it is a spouse, and while they are not cruel, you haven’t been given a compliment in years. Without transformation, the fear of suffering can push us into a prison of isolation, people-pleasing, and depression.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. What are your financial goals? Write down all that comes to mind. Write down all of your financial fears. How are these different or similar to your financial goals? Are these fears a reflection of trust in God or trust in man?
2. How might your fears of embarrassment be leading you into sin? How might your fears of embarrassment be robbing you of joy in life? What things might you do or try if you were not afraid of being embarrassed?
3. In what ways do you struggle with peer or professional pressure? Who are the sources of this pressure and what do you think is causing you to view them in this way?
4. How often do you find yourself slipping into talking about your achievements or successes? Do you think you may be slipping into boastful pride out of a desire to be recognized? How do you know?
5. In what ways do you struggle with a desire to please people? Who are the people that come immediately to mind and what role do they play in your life?

2

THE FEAR OF GOD

Fear casts out fear.

I still remember my first Navy funeral for a fallen warrior and teammate. It was an uncharacteristically gray cloudy day for the perpetually sunny San Diego, California. One of my teammates walked up a small stage in his pristine Navy white uniform to a lone podium in front of a massive American flag backdrop, which was waving devotedly in the ocean breeze. I don't remember all of his words, but his closing prayer is trapped with me to this day. Unfortunately, it is a prayer I have come to hear often at such memorials and one I have unwillingly memorized. A simple but powerful prayer:

"Lord, let me not prove unworthy of my brothers."

Steven Pressfield, in his short book *The Warrior Ethos*, recites this same prayer. In his analysis of Spartan warrior culture, he argues that the fear of suffering and death in battle is cast out by a love for one's brother in arms. He states that at the battle of Thermopylae, when the last Spartans knew they were all going to die, Dienekes instructed his fellow warriors to "fight for this alone: the man who stands at your shoulder. He is everything, and everything is contained within him." Pressfield calls this emotion and belief that casts out fear "love" — and we know from Scripture that Pressfield is correct, but perhaps not in the way he thinks. In Greek culture, the city or *Polis*, was central to safety and security. Life revolved around the city and the people were only as powerful as their city. For professional men of war, defending the city was where they found their identity. To be caught a coward or unwilling to fight and lay down their life would have been the most shameful and humiliating thing—something far worse than death. The warrior's prayer highlights that while love is certainly involved, there is also a fear that casts out fear. In this case, it is the fear of man in the form of being unworthy of one's brothers.

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Scripture does teach, as Pressfield argues, that love casts out fear. First John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” God is clear through his inspiration of John’s letter that perfect love casts out fear. But within the context of the letter, this is a particular fear. Right before this passage, John writes, “By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). The type of fear that God’s perfect love casts out is the fear of judgment on the last day. Our position in Christ’s perfect love cements our future hope of an eternity with him and thus casts out the fear of judgment. What this text doesn’t mean is that Christians should no longer experience any fear.

Instead, what the counsel of Scripture teaches is that fear casts out fear. Specifically, a right understanding of God requires a certain fear of God informed by both his character and his love. When we consider how to overcome the fear of being judged for my faith, we must realize that a deeper reverence for the Creator eclipses the opinions of the creation. This is the fear of man Bible definition in action: replacing the horizontal pressure of human opinion with a vertical devotion to God.

The Difference Between Fears

To properly understand and combat the various fears of man, we need to begin where fear starts. The first mention of fear in the Bible comes from Adam after he and Eve sinned and tried to hide from God (Gen. 3:10). When Adam and Eve sinned, they experienced something they hadn’t before — an unhealthy fear of God. Because of God’s goodness and holiness, sinful humanity is now separated from God and is desperately in need of reconciliation. The fear of God is then the sensation when an imperfect sinful creature beholds their perfect and holy creator. Edward Welch states that the fear of man is when people are big and God is small.² Inversely, the fear of God is when God is big and people are small. And since fear is a combination of emotion and belief, what we believe about our position before God will directly influence the sensations we feel about God.

The fear of God is founded on God’s goodness and holiness, and it is a tremendous and terrifying thing to behold. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and

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instruction.” Knowledge and wisdom are both good things that start with a right fear of God because he is perfectly and intrinsically good. First Chronicles 16:34 says, “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!” Psalm 86:11 highlights this relationship between God’s goodness and our fear further: “teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.” Instruction, truth, and fear are all combined in this passage as good things that are centered on God. Psalm 33:18 even combines God’s love with those who fear him: “Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love.” While tremendously good, we also fear God because he is utterly, terrifyingly holy.

When man encounters God, the consistent reaction is fear and trembling. Isaiah the prophet records being ushered into the heavenly host and standing before God. Isaiah writes about his experience in this way; “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5). When Moses asks to see God’s glory, the Lord responds with, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” (Ex. 33:20). Ezekiel records that when he saw the glory of the Lord in a vision he immediately fell upon his face (Ezek. 1:28b). The fear of God, brought on by our sinfulness when compared to his perfection is even further extended when we consider the scope of God’s limitless knowledge, presence, and power.

Intrinsic to God’s sovereign character is his omniscience — God is all-knowing. God knows all things, including himself, perfectly (1 Cor. 2:11). He knows all things actual and all things possible and he knows them all instantaneously from before time (1 Sam. 23:11–13; 2 Kings 13:19; Isa. 42:8–9, 46:9–10; Matt. 11:21). First John 3:20 says that “God knows everything.” David describes God’s knowledge, writing: “O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar” (Ps. 139:1–2). When Jesus performs the miracle at the wedding in Cana, John’s Gospel recounts his knowledge from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: “many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people.” (John 2:23–24). In God’s sovereignty, he fully knows all things, which is why Jesus says our Father

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in heaven knows what we need before we ever even ask him (Matt. 6:8). The fear of God is further informed by God's perfect omniscience coupled with his omnipresence.

God is not only all-knowing of actual and possible worlds but also omnipresent — all-present in all spaces and places. God is not limited by physical dimensions, for “God is spirit.” (John 4:24). As the creator of the universe, he is not bound to it. Deuteronomy 10:14 says, “Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.” And yet, God's presence doesn't mean he acts the same in all spaces and places. Consider the contrast between a passage such as John 14:23, where God is said to make his home with man, and that of Isaiah 59:2, where God separates himself because of Israel's sinfulness. While being equally present, his presence may bring blessing or justice. The idea of being near or far from God is then a matter of God's disposition to his creatures and creation in the space, place, and time (Jer. 23:23–25). However, God is always perfectly present in all spaces and places all the time.

God's omniscience and omnipresence are complemented by his tremendous limitless omnipotence — he is all-powerful. Anything God desires to do he can do; nothing is too hard for him (Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:17). Paul writes that God is able “to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.” (Eph. 3:20). When the angel Gabriel visited Mary, he told her “nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). The only impossible thing for God is to act contrary to his character. This is why the author of Hebrews states that “it is impossible for God to lie” (Heb. 6:18). When it comes to fulfilling and accomplishing his purposes, nothing can overthrow him, he will succeed (Isa. 40:8, 55:11). God's omnipotence coupled with his omnipresence and omniscience widens the expanse between our imperfection and his perfection.

The more we think about God's transcendence, the more we will experience both genuine terror at our otherness, but also awe and wonderment at his kindness. This wonder should drive us to worship God for his loving kindness, grace, long-suffering, and forgiveness. When Moses went up to Mount Sinai, the Lord proclaimed his name and said “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and

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abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity” (Ex. 34:6–7). After listing out the iniquity and sins of Israel, the prophet says, “Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him” (Isa. 30:18). And the ultimate expression of this lovingkindness and justice culminates at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Here at the cross, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). For those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord, there is no longer any condemnation for sin (Rom. 8:1).

To experience the fear of God is both to tremble in terror at his transcendence and to worship in awe of his benevolence.

We defined the fear of man as the emotion that arises from believing an individual or group of people has the power to remove or give something you think you need or want and influences the following actions to achieve a favorable outcome. In short, the fear of man is being scared of people.

In comparison, a right fear of God is the emotion that arises from believing that God is infinitely transcendent, with limitless just power to eternally destroy you, and yet graciously offers to forgive, sustain, empower, and give an eternal life inheritance through Jesus’ substituting sacrifice. Paradoxically, the fear of God is being captivated by God.

When we are captivated by God we cease to be scared of people. Fear casts out fear. A right fear of God leads us to surrender our fear of man because we are believing something entirely different. When we rightly understand that only God can supply what we desperately need and want, we no longer see people as having power, but God. Thus, in being captivated, in fearing God, we learn to desire to do his will — believing it is genuinely the best thing for us.

The Fear of God Leads Us to Want the Will of God

A right fear of God leads us to encounter the will of God. When we know who God is, we are confronted with the decision to either accept or reject his rule. There are no alternatives. Either I deny God’s rule or I fall at his feet and surrender to his will. For those of us who rightly fear God, his

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transcendence coupled with his lovingkindness calls and compels us to align our lives to his desires because we believe that it will go better for us to do so. And this "better for us" might not happen in this life but in eternal life to come. We see this represented in multiple inspiring stories of captivated Bible characters who struggled with fear yet found strength throughout the Scriptures.

From a young age, Daniel was captivated by God despite being a captive in Babylon. Daniel refused to eat King Nebuchadnezzar's food or drink his wine because of his conviction to obey God's Word (Dan. 1:8). The chief eunuch wanted to deny Daniel's request, fearing the king might punish or kill him if Daniel was in poor condition (Dan. 1:10). But God blessed Daniel and showed him favor.

Later on, Daniel's countrymen, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, similarly were so captivated by God they refused to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image and were condemned to burn alive in a furnace (Dan. 3:8–15). When the king inquired of them, they responded with, "If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not... we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up" (Dan. 3:16–18). Notice how their surrender to God expelled their fear of suffering and death. They acknowledge God has the true power over their lives, and even if he doesn't choose to save them, he is still more worthy than others — and God does indeed save them (Dan. 3:24–30).

This same story repeats years later in the life of Daniel when he is thrown into the lion's den for continuing to pray to God, and God miraculously spares his life (Dan. 6:1–28). When we are captivated by God, we will surrender to the will of God, effectively learning how to conquer fear in the face of death.

When David faced Goliath, both sides thought his situation was unfavorable. Prior to David, all the men of Israel who saw Goliath fled from him because they were so afraid (1 Sam. 17:24). But David responded with, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam. 17:26b). And when Saul found David, he said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with

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this Philistine...The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Sam. 17:32, 37). David feared the power of God more than the fear of man, even a man as daunting as Goliath. God chose to use this young boy who was captivated by him to declare “the battle is the Lord’s” (1 Sam. 17:47). God’s power so supersedes the power of man that he can use even a shepherd boy to defeat a warrior giant.

Before his execution, Stephen must have seen the anger building on the Jewish crowd’s faces as he explained to them the gospel of Jesus Christ. But as they became dangerously enraged, Stephen only grew more captivated by God, and God granted him a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:54–56). Upon sharing this, the crowd cried out, stopped their ears, and rushed at him (Acts 7:58). And taking Stephen out of the city they began to stone him to death. Even here, Stephen continued to demonstrate surrender to the will of God and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). A right fear of God leads us to desire to do the will of God, even if that means experiencing pain and suffering.

Hebrews records for us a great cloud of faithful witnesses who were captivated by God. We could talk at length about Abraham’s surrender to God’s will in offering Isaac. Or Joseph’s 20-year stint in captivity due to his brothers’ betrayal. Or Moses’ and Aaron’s surrender to God’s will in Egypt. Or any of the prophets and their unique stories of surrendering to the fear of God over the fear of man. But none of these stories encourages and empowers us to conquer fear like the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Part III, we will examine how our union with Christ enables us to surrender to God’s will and learn how to overcome fear of man biblically.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. When you think about God, what comes immediately to your mind? Would you say that you fear God? Why or why not?
2. Who do you think you often fear more, people or God? Why do you think this is the case?
3. What was the last thing that caused you significant stress, worry, or anxiety? Was this caused by a fear of man? If so, which one? How might a right fear of God direct your heart toward the truth?

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4. How is your fear of God leading you to surrender to the will of God? If it isn't, what do you think is preventing you from surrendering? Is there a specific area of your life that you know is difficult or you are unwilling to surrender to God?

3

CONQUER THROUGH SURRENDER

A right fear of God casts out the fears of man as it leads us to the will of God. And what is the will of God? First and foremost, God desires all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). When we believe in Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, the Scriptures say we are united to him through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus describes it this way: “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him... the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:23, 26). When we confess our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as Lord, God forgives us and unites us with his Son (Rom. 10:9). To how to overcome fear of man, we must surrender to the one who has conquered.

It might seem trite to say that our fear of man is conquered through surrender to Jesus. You might think, “that is too simple. Is fear of man a sin that requires such a radical answer, or isn't there a better psychological answer or self-esteem building program that can help me how to conquer fear? Wouldn't I feel more confident and courageous if I was better looking, attended a prestigious university, bought new clothes, dated a beautiful person, or landed a reputable and high-paying job?” No, you would not. You would only further fall into the fear of man. Yes, the simple answer is correct. Only through surrender to Christ can we conquer the fear of man.

Paul discusses further how the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ. He writes,

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you... For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the

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Spirit of fear (adoption) as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”
(Rom. 8:11 & 15)

In a separate letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). In our union with Christ, we receive the power of Christ who faced and conquered the fears of man.

In our union with Christ, we conquer through continual surrender to Christ. Even in prison, Paul could write, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:16). We can face any circumstance fully trusting that “God works all things together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose...who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” (Rom. 8:28, 35). The implication is: nothing! Nothing can separate us from our union to Christ, from the Holy Spirit making his home within us, and from our eternal dwelling with God. Therefore, “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37). We conquer through surrender to Christ.

What does this look like in practice? When I encounter the fear of man, how does my surrender to Jesus help me conquer my fears? In the next few paragraphs, we will briefly walk through how surrendering to Christ transforms what we think we need and want. This is more than simply a change of perspective or mindset. It is becoming a new person — finding your identity in Christ alone. Remember, our fears emerge from our beliefs about those we think can provide what we need and want. Conquering our fears, then, requires us to be transformed into what Christ desires for us.

Conquering Our Fear of Finances

When we surrender to Christ, he changes the way we think about our financial needs and wants. Jesus reminds us,

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys

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and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matt. 6:19–21).

He continues by comforting his audience with the character of God, that he is omniscient and already knows exactly what we need, and omnipotent to provide it (Matt. 6:25–33). But the problem with our fear of financial insecurity often isn't about what we need as much as it is about what we want.

Surrendering to Jesus shifts our wants from earthly desires to heavenly ones. This doesn't mean we should be unwise with our finances or no longer save and diligently and appropriately invest. But it does mean we recalibrate what we believe about finances to align with Jesus, who said it is better to give than receive (Acts 20:35) and that you cannot serve both God and money (Matt. 6:24). Our financial position, however great or small, is a gift from God with which to honor him. When we align our financial beliefs to Christ, our fear of people who can influence our financial position dissipates.

Simply put, Jesus changes what you want. No longer will you believe you need that big house on acreage with a pool to experience happiness. Nor do you need the latest and greatest sedan, truck, or SUV to find joy. Nor do you need an abundant 401K or Roth IRA to live out retirement free from worry or suffering. You are freed from the lie that wealth will bring you joy. You are freed from being held captive by fear that only certain people can provide that wealth to you. Because you know and believe that your true wealth is found in the person of Jesus Christ, who has gone to prepare your home for an eternal inheritance. This belief is so much more than mere contentment. This is a surrender to believing that what Jesus said is true and that God — and not man — has limitless power and knowledge to provide all that we actually want.

Conquering Our Fear of Embarrassment

When we surrender to Christ, he becomes the most important relationship in our lives. Jesus said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). Union to the person of Christ means surrendering to him as Lord over every other

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relationship, even our very own lives. Conquering through Christ requires us to be in Christ — we must be ready to renounce all we have for him (Luke 14:33). Our fear of man is overshadowed and dominated by a greater concern for what Jesus thinks of us.

When Christ is on the throne of our hearts, we can conquer our fear of embarrassment by living for an audience of one. We can say with Paul, “I am not ashamed of the gospel” because Jesus is our life (Rom. 1:16)! People might say hurtful things. They might make fun of us. We might end up with fewer friends. But our position in Jesus Christ tells us that we are perfectly and completely loved and adopted into the family of God. In his lovingkindness, God has passed over our sin and chosen to forgive us in Christ. We have a secure eternal inheritance where Jesus has made a home for us. Considering this belief, we no longer fear what people may think or say about us — to our face or behind our back — because we live for King Jesus.

Conquering Our Fear of Arguments

When we surrender to Jesus, we can walk into arguments, disagreements, and confrontations with a heart of love and confidence. When it comes to confrontation about our faith, Jesus charged the disciples, “do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matt. 10:19–20). God can provide exactly what we need when we need it. Our task is to fixate on and live for Jesus unashamedly.

For all earthly matters outside of faith discussions, a believer’s success in an argument, disagreement, or confrontation is determined not by the outcome but by the process. Our goal is to speak with love, to consider the other person’s perspective, to desire their best, to serve them before serving ourselves, and ultimately to glorify Jesus through how we love our neighbor. Jesus expresses this when he says, “if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles” (Matt. 5:41). This doesn’t mean that Christians are called to surrender their opinions to the desires of others and be trampled. But it does mean we look at conflict differently. We don’t let professing Christians get away with sinful behavior because we love them. We choose to engage any hard questions about life, God, and the

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Scriptures unbelievers may have out of love for them. Our fear of arguments is conquered by our union to Christ and our desire to glorify and honor his name. When we ask how to overcome fear of man biblically, we find that it is this vertical devotion that settles our horizontal conflicts.

Conquering Our Fear of Rejection

When we surrender to Christ, we are accepted into the perfect family of God. Jesus says in Mark 3:35, “whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” When you are united to Christ, God is your Father, heaven is your home, and the church is your family. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. When our focus is on pleasing our Savior, we conquer the temptation to fear of man, which so often leads to a life of trying to appease others. This also frees us to love people as Christ has loved us — abundantly and unconditionally.

Rejection by people in the world isn’t something you need to fear — it is something you assume has already happened! As Jesus says during his high priestly prayer, “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (John 17:14). When we are united to Jesus, we are uprooted from the world, “For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world” (1 John 2:16). The church is where we find our relationships because we recognize we do not have anything in common with the world. Pressure from peers or professional colleagues disperses when we surrender to Christ and find our desire for acceptance met by him. For those wondering how to overcome the fear of being cast out, the answer is found in the security of our adoption.

Conquering Our Fear of Suffering

When we surrender to Christ, we embrace suffering as a means of becoming like Christ. Paul talks about this often, saying for “his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8). Peter even tells us to expect to suffer: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings” (1 Pet. 4:12–13). If Jesus suffered, we

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should expect to suffer too. This doesn't make suffering enjoyable, but endurable because we know we are becoming more like him. Our union to Christ shifts our affections from desiring comfort to desiring Christlikeness.

We shouldn't seek suffering, but shouldn't be surprised by it either. It is important to remember that Paul and Peter are talking about suffering because of being united to Christ. When we experience pain because we are in sin, breaking the law, or making unwise decisions, we shouldn't consider that suffering — that is better identified as discipline. But fear of suffering shouldn't stop us from walking in obedience to Christ. For we can expect, if we are surrendering our desires, ambitions, and lives over to Christ that we will suffer in some measure as he suffered. This shift in perspective is the key to how to overcome the fear of being judged for my faith, as we realize that even the fear of man is small compared to the glory of suffering for the truth.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. Recall your financial goals from Part I. Do you think these goals reflect a heart that has surrendered to Christ and desires treasure in heaven? Why or why not?
2. Recall your fears of embarrassment from Part I. How does your union to Christ help you overcome and conquer these fears? Have your fears of embarrassment kept you from sharing the gospel with anyone? Pray that God would provide you the opportunity to overcome that fear.
3. Is there anyone you are currently avoiding because you don't want to get into an argument or disagreement? How do you think you can demonstrate to them the love Christ has shown you?
4. How does Jesus' acceptance of you affect your ability to love those you're tempted to please? How does loving them look different than trying to please them?
5. Are you experiencing any suffering in life? What do you think is the cause of the suffering? If this is because you are a Christian, how is that making you become more like Christ? Is there anything you have chosen not to do because of fear of pain or suffering? How does surrendering to Christ change how you might approach that thing?



CONCLUSION

Eric Liddell conquered his fear of man through his surrender to Christ — and he still won his Olympic race. But conquering the fear of man does not always lead to ivy wreaths and gold medals.

In 1937, only a few years after Eric’s legendary race, a young German pastor published a book in German titled *Nachfolge*, meaning the “Act of Following.” In this book, the young pastor discussed the difference between cheap grace and costly grace.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate...Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has...It is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book was published as he was removed from teaching systematic theology at the University of Berlin. Soon after, his underground seminary in Germany for the Confessing Church was found out by the Gestapo, who closed the seminary and arrested some 27 or so pastors and students. As pressures increased, an opportunity arose in 1939 to teach at Union Theological Seminary in New York and escape the looming suffering in Europe. Bonhoeffer took it — and immediately regretted it. He was convicted by the call to surrender to Christ, and as such felt he was called to suffer like Christ. He returned to Germany two weeks later.

Bonhoeffer’s book is best known today as *The Cost of Discipleship*, and is famous for his quote, “when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

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On April 5th, 1943, Bonhoeffer was finally arrested. After preaching his last sermon, Bonhoeffer leaned over to another inmate and said, "This is the end. For me, the beginning of life."

Years later, a German doctor proceeding over the execution wrote the following: "In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God."

Bonhoeffer was captivated by God and through surrender to Christ conquered his fear of man. He was able to walk calmly and confidently into his physical death because he had already died to himself, he had been crucified with Christ, and his life was no longer his, but Christ's. Why am I afraid of being judged for my faith? Bonhoeffer's life answers this by showing that our identity must be found elsewhere. He is a premier example of how to overcome fear of man by recognizing that our true existence is secured in eternity.



ENDNOTES

1. Edward T. Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man* (P&R Publishing), 1997.
2. Edward T. Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man* (P&R Publishing), 1997.



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