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Faith > Fear

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Introducing

Faith > Fear

Approaching This Study of Faith > Fear

What are you afraid of? Spiders (arachnophobia), snakes (ophidiophobia), heights (acrophobia), crowded places (agoraphobia), germs (mysophobia), death (thanatophobia), or any of a myriad number of cringe-inducing people, animals, or situations? A quick glance at the television news programs can also be a frightening experience as reports detail the latest terror threat, hideous acts of violence, racism, economic downturns, job losses, disease, etc. What are we to do?

Fear can wreak havoc in our lives. It can be the source of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual pain that shortens lives and robs people of joy. This type of debilitating fear first revealed itself in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve chose to sin and then later tried to hide from God to cover their shame. We have been living with fear (and in fear) ever since.

Fortunately, we have a Savior who is well aware of our propensity to fear, and is the one in whom we can find faith that is greater than our fears. Of the 125 commands of Jesus recorded in the Bible, the topic he most often addressed with imperatives was fear, encouraging his followers to “Fear not,” or to “Take courage.”

The Old Testament writers speak to fear as well. Psalm 56:3–4 says,

When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?

This study consists of thirteen lessons focused on the topic of fear. Each lesson will address a specific aspect related to fear, explore the causes and consequences of the fear, and suggest remedies for defeating the fear through faith in God and his word. It is time for Christ-followers to cast off the shackles of fear, to take hold of their faith, and to confidently step into God's calling for each part of their lives. Doing so will create kingdom impact and encourage fellow Christians.

Each summer our BaptistWay Bible Study series focuses on a biblical theme. For a complete list of our studies see www.baptistwaypress.org.

Studying These Lessons

Fear is such a common human experience, and yes Christians aren't immune from its effects. As Max Lucado has written, in referencing the story of Jesus being asleep on the boat when the storm arose (Matthew 8:23–27):

Christ-followers contract malaria, bury children, and battle addictions, and as a result, face fears. It's not the absence of storms that sets us apart. It's whom we discover in the storm: an unstirred Christ.¹

Perhaps more than ever people need to know that they don't have to be paralyzed by their fears. Fear is one of the schemes the enemy uses to discourage us from becoming all that God has created us to be, and to keep us from embracing risks in our faith to further the cause of Christ. Listen to some of God's encouraging words for us to embrace as we face our fears:

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

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 (Isaiah 41:10).

I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears (Psalm 34:4).

But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead (Isaiah 43:1–3).

The Nature of Fear

Fear can be a good thing, it can warn us of impending danger and lead us to make wise choices. And fear, when it is referring to a “reverential awe” of our God and his word, is always appropriate. Unfortunately, it seems as if the most common experiences we have with fear are not quite so positive.

Lucado goes on to state,

Fear, at its center, is a perceived loss of control. When life spins wildly, we grab for a component of life we can manage: our diet, the tidiness of a house, the armrest of a plane, or, in many cases, people. The more insecure we feel, the meaner we become. We growl and bare our fangs. Why? Because we are bad? In part. But also because we feel cornered.²

Have you ever responded to fear in a similar manner? We don’t have to react in anger. As you study these lessons, let God’s word guide you and equip you to face the fear of overwhelming obstacles, hopelessness, prejudice, and even death. May you come away from this study with greater conviction to

trust in God's power and provision and to step into each day with a renewed confidence through your faith in Christ. Such faith truly is greater than fear.

FAITH > FEAR

Lesson 1	Fear: A Result of the Fall	Genesis 3:1–19
Lesson 2	Fear of God's Assignment	Exodus 3:7–15; 4:1–17
Lesson 3	Fear of Overwhelming Obstacles	Numbers 13:26–14:9
Lesson 4	Fear Leading to Hopelessness	1 Kings 19:1–5, 9b–18
Lesson 5	Fear of Retribution	Esther 4:4–17; 7:1–6
Lesson 6	Fear of Delivering an Unpopular Message	Jeremiah 1
Lesson 7	Fearing God Rather Than People	Daniel 3:1–2, 8–18, 26–29
Lesson 8	Fear Motivated by Prejudice	Jonah 1:1–3; 3:1–5, 10; 4:1–11
Lesson 9	Fear of Unmet Needs	Luke 12:22–34
Lesson 10	Fear of Suffering	Matthew 26:36–46
Lesson 11	Fear of Being Identified with Jesus	Luke 22:54–62
Lesson 12	Fear of Death	1 Corinthians 15:50–58
Lesson 13	Fear of Witnessing	Acts 4:1–22

Additional Resources for Studying Faith > Fear³

Jon Acuff. *Start: Punch Fear in the Face, Escape Average, Do Work That Matters*. Brentwood, Tennessee: Lamo Press, 2013.

Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Abridged Edition: New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994.

Bruce Barton, Philip Comfort, Grant Osborne, Linda K. Taylor, and Dave Veerman. *Life Application New Testament Commentary*. Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2001.

William Fay and Linda Evans Shepherd. *Share Jesus Without Fear*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 1999.

Craig S. Keener. *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

- Max Lucado. *Fearless: Imagine Your Life Without Fear*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2009.
- . *You'll Get Through This*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2013.
- A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Concise Edition*. Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 2000.
- Spiros Zodhiates and Warren Baker. *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible, New International Version*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996.
- Edward T. Welch. *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest*. Greensboro, North Carolina: New Growth Press, 2007.

Notes

1. <https://maxlucado.com/read/excerpts/fearless/> (Accessed 7/7/2015).
2. Ibid.
3. Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writers or BAPTISTWAY PRESS® with all of its comments.

lesson 1

Fear: A Result of the Fall

MAIN IDEA

The fall of man ushered sin and fear into the world.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

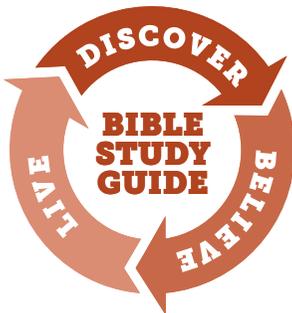
How did fear enter the world?

STUDY AIM

To understand how fear is the result of the fall of man

QUICK READ

Originally, human beings lived in perfect harmony with God, creation, and each other. However, the fall of humanity led to disharmony in every respect.



Introduction

Early in my senior year of high school, I developed a pronounced fear of death. One of my classmates committed suicide, and I began to worry about my death. I read whatever I could find about death. One article, in particular, caught my attention. The title could have summed up my testimony at the time: “Please God, don’t let me die. I’m only seventeen.” It was an article from the “Dear Abby” section of our newspaper.

Some of you may remember that advice column. My parents read it every day. For some reason, they showed me the column about death. I clipped it and stuck it in the back of my Bible. I read it numerous times. I was seventeen-years-old and afraid of death.

The good news is that my Sunday school teacher talked with me about my fear. He helped me come to a greater understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As a senior in high school I accepted Jesus as my Savior, and he delivered me from my fear of death! It truly was a miracle.

Why was I afraid of death? Was I the only one with that fear? At the time, I was not aware of how widespread the fear of death is among the human family. I certainly had not given much thought to the origin of that fear in human history.

Are you unnaturally afraid of death? Do you know someone who is? Do you understand how the fear of death arose in the human story? What are the theological implications of this conversation?

To fully grasp the depth of the topic of fear, in general, and fear of death, in particular; we have to go all the way back to the beginning of the human story. In the ancient account of creation in Genesis, we discover an explanation of the origin of fear and its impact upon humanity.¹

Genesis 3:1–19

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree

that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.”

4 “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. **5** “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. **7** Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. **9** But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

10 He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

11 And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

12 The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed are you above all the livestock

and all the wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust

all the days of your life.

15 And I will put enmity

between you and the woman,

and between your offspring and hers;

he will crush your head,

and you will strike his heel.”

16 To the woman he said,

“I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;

with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you."

17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'"

Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return."

Paradise (Genesis 1–2)

The opening pages of the Bible are spectacular on every level. From a literary perspective, the creation narratives of these pages are unparalleled in ancient history. The scope of the story is incredible. The Bible launches with the eternal God in the midst of his creative activity. Genesis 1 contains the macro story of creation. God created the great expanse of the universe and all of its inhabitants. Genesis 2 focuses on the micro story of humanity's creation and early existence.

Genesis 2 is truly the story of paradise. God placed human beings in the Garden of Eden. These first humans were to bear God's image, tend his garden, populate his world, and rule alongside him. The chapter concludes with a beautiful expression of innocence, "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (2:25).

Harmony characterized the paradise of the Garden of Eden. These first humans were in harmony with God, with their purpose for existence, with creation, and with one another. What could go wrong?

Paradise Lost (Genesis 3:1–13)

Genesis 3 opens with a description of the serpent. He was “more crafty” than the other wild animals. And he was a created being, not some supernatural being from another dimension. Also, note that Genesis 3 does not describe evil as an impersonal force. It is the story of rebellion. The serpent had rebelled against God, its creator. Now, he was inviting others to join him in his rebellion.

As a fallen creature, intrigue and deception laced the serpent’s method of temptation. He did not begin by arguing with the woman. Instead, he posed a question that cast doubt about God’s instructions. “Did God really say?”

Satan still uses this particularly deceptive tactic. We are often tempted to doubt God’s care for us. We can be led to doubt God’s goodness and his intentions. Just as Eve wondered about the motive behind God’s specific instructions, we may also be tempted to question God’s decisions. We like to be “in the know” and feel secure in our own knowledge. In fact, the fear of being left out can lead us toward rebellion. Adam and Eve had no reason to

Science and Genesis

Studying the Book of Genesis often leads to conversations about science and the Bible. Many often place the Genesis account of creation under the microscope of scientific inquiry. It is wise to note that the Bible is, first and foremost, a theologically oriented book. This statement does not imply the Bible is unable to withstand scientific inquiry. It can. However, our focal passage for today was not intended to offer a scientific explanation of the human fossil record but to provide us with an accurate and sufficient explanation of a deeper reality: the introduction of sin and the fall of humanity.

In Romans 5:12–21, the Apostle Paul used this story to help us understand the depravity of humanity. The sin introduced in Genesis 3 affected all human beings throughout history. This theological truth mandates the necessity of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Without the facts revealed in Genesis 3, we would not have the narrative that explains the sinful human condition of today.

doubt God's goodness. However, they were susceptible to rebellious behavior when the serpent stirred those doubts. For us today, learning to trust God can help shield us from similar fate.

Eve's response to the serpent's question is interesting. She did not accurately recall God's original command. She enhanced God's instructions with her comment about not even touching the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (3:3).

The serpent responded by tempting Eve to further doubt God. He played upon Eve's openness to doubt God's intentions (3:4–5). Again, this tactic exposes a weakness among human beings. The temptations to “be like God” and have our “eyes opened” are still applicable today.

As the story unfolds, Eve progressed (digressed) to the point of making judgments previously reserved for God. Until that time, God alone decided whether something was good. Without consulting God, Eve decided the fruit on the forbidden tree was pleasing and desirable. Her rebellion progressed to action when she took the fruit and ate it. Quickly, she shared it with her husband, and he joined her in rebellion (3:6).

The tree of knowledge was appropriately named. As soon as the first couple ate its fruit, “the eyes of both of them were opened” (3:7). However, this fruit led to the knowledge of evil, as well as good. Adam and Eve immediately recognized some things.

Notice they realized they were naked (3:7). They already knew this, didn't they? Recall that Genesis 2:25 confirms, “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” However, after eating this fruit, they recognized their nakedness and felt shame. So much so, they fashioned fig leaves to serve as coverings for their nakedness.

The English word *naked* derives its origins from two different Hebrew words. Although closely related, their meanings are a bit nuanced. In Genesis 2:25, the Hebrew word used implies that Adam and Eve were not totally clothed in what we might consider a *normal* sense. For example, that same word is used in 1 Samuel 19:24 to refer to an instance when Samuel stripped off his outer garments and lay “naked” all day. However, the inference is that he was still wearing his inner garments.

It might be helpful to refer to Psalm 104:1–2 at this point. In these verses, God is clothed with splendor, majesty, and light. We also read in Psalm 8:5 that God crowned humanity with glory and honor.

Perhaps we might infer, in the perfect innocence of the Garden of Eden, these original humans were clothed with the glory of God's original intentions. They were in harmony with him, and his glory was on display through an innocent nakedness.

However, in Genesis 3, the writer used a different Hebrew word that is translated "naked." This word is used throughout the Bible to refer to total exposure—and often, shameful exposure (Ezekiel 16:7, 22). In other words, this term is more direct and communicates an utter nakedness. The willful disobedience of Adam and Eve witnessed the departure of the original glory and splendor of their innocence, which was replaced by shameful nakedness.

Notice how Adam and Eve responded to this revelation. They immediately made coverings for their newly discovered nakedness (Gen. 3:7). When God searched for them in the cool of the day, they hid from him (3:8). Adam responded to God's inquiry about their whereabouts with an admission of guilt and an expression of shame, "I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" (3:9–10).

For the first time in history, fear infected the perfection of God's creation. Human beings were afraid. They were afraid because they were ashamed. Instead of seeking fellowship with God and relishing their relationship with him, they were hiding—afraid of being found. Actually, they were afraid of being found out!

Facing Fear

- Fear is a common reality in the human family. The first step toward overcoming fear is to acknowledge its existence and search for its root causes in our lives.
- Acts 4:23–31 relates the story of how the early believers gathered and prayed together in the face of their real fears of isolation and persecution. We can learn from them. In the church, we need each other! Together, we need to pray for God's strength to face our fears.
- Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is the ability to forge ahead and refuse to be paralyzed by our fears.

The interrogation and response recorded in Genesis 3:9–13 plays out like a courtroom scene. God asked the questions, and the defendants responded. Embedded in their responses were fear, blame, and shame. This couple on trial introduced to the world finger-pointing and passing the buck. It truly was a shameful day.

Judgment (Genesis 3:14–19)

God responded swiftly. He judged everyone involved. God first cursed the serpent and held him accountable as the instigator (3:14). Interwoven in the curse pronounced on the serpent, God announced a future victory (3:15). Scholars refer to this passage as the *protoevangelium*, the first hint of the gospel: the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent.

God quickly moved to the woman. She would still be blessed to give life, but pain would rack childbirth. And, her desire would be for her husband. This particular judgment has scarred human history. Obviously, the pain of childbirth is familiar to most mothers. However, the temptation to discover fulfillment and answer the deepest desire through a relationship with a human male has brought untold suffering to countless women. Instead of that desire being directed toward a perfect, loving God, many vulnerable women have been hurt by abusive men who have been more than ready to take advantage of them.

God included men in Eve's judgment (3:16). From that day forward, men would be tempted to dominate women. Again, many family histories are filled with examples of dominating men who have abused vulnerable women.

God's judgment on Adam was just as swift and painful. From that day on, men would labor to provide for their families. The ease of the Garden of Eden vanished. Humanity would sweat and suffer to provide sustenance (3:17–19).

God's warning in Genesis 2:17 came true. Sin demanded death. Humanity would return to dust (Gen. 3:19). This state of affairs introduced another dimension of fear: Human beings would struggle with both the reality of death and the fear of their impending doom.

How quickly things declined from Genesis 2:25 to Genesis 3:19!

