

FEAR, WORRY, ANXIETY



# BREAKING THE BONDS OF FEAR

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PUBLISHING

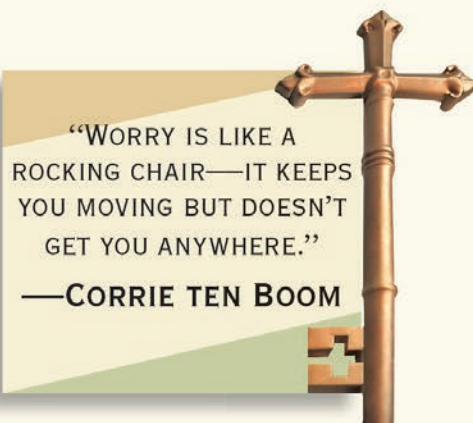
# WHERE DOES FEAR COME FROM?

I was your typical insecure teenager sitting in my high school social sciences class and listening to a lecture on how humans react to fear. The teacher summed up our instinctual response to fear in three words: “Flight or fight.” I recall thinking, *No wonder I’m so worn out! I’m constantly afraid of what other people think of me... I’m nervous that no one will ask me to the sophomore dance... I’m afraid I’ll fail my chemistry test... I’m afraid I won’t make the varsity basketball team.* It seemed that half my life was spent avoiding certain people and situations (flight) or struggling to make the grade or meet someone’s expectations (fight). I was only in tenth grade, but already I was emotionally worn to the core.



Joni at 15

They say that the number one menace to world health is not cancer, AIDS, plagues, or polio. It’s stress. Stress has its root in what we fear. When it comes to handling fear, it seems that humans can only take so much “flight or fight”—it results in pressure, nervous tension, worry, and anxiety. But what is at the real root of fear itself?



## FEAR OF MAN

“Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.” —Proverbs 29:25



What does it mean to have a fear of man? Although you can be an avowed worshiper of the true God, below the surface, the real “god” can be others around you. To fear man includes being afraid of someone, but it also means holding someone in awe, or being controlled or mastered by the opinions of others, or putting all your trust in people, or needing others to an unhealthy extent. In short, you replace God with people. The fear of man goes by other names, too. Teenagers call it “peer pressure”; adults call it “people-pleasing;” psychologists label it “codependency.”



How do you know if you possess a fear of man?

† Do you “paint on a smile” or “put on a front” when you’re among those you want to impress? Are you afraid of being exposed as an imposter?

† How much do you “need” your spouse? Unless you have a grasp of the biblical parameters of marital commitment and responsibility, your spouse may become the one you fear, controlling you and quietly taking the place of God in your life.

† Do you revere or fear others’ opinions, needing them to buttress your sense of well-being and identity?

† Are you afraid of making mistakes that will make you look bad in the eyes of others? Do you find it hard to say no even when wisdom dictates that you should? Are you on too many committees at church? You could be a people-pleaser.<sup>1</sup>

## FEAR OF THE LORD

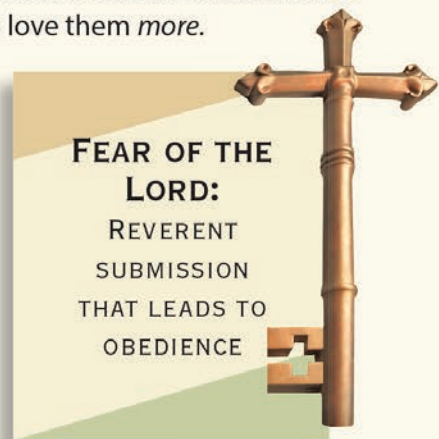
*“The fear of the LORD leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble.”*

—Proverbs 19:23

Virtually all of our worry and stress could be alleviated if we understood how to exchange “fear of man” for “fear of the Lord.” We need a

way to think less often about ourselves and more often about God. “God must be bigger to you than people are,” writes Edward Welch in his book, *When People are Big and God is Small*. When it comes to our family and friends, coworkers and neighbors, our problem is sometimes that we *need* them (and their approval) for ourselves more than we *love* them for the glory of God. The task God sets for us in life is to emotionally “require” people *less* and to love them *more*.

To escape the fear of man is to recognize that God is the One who is awesome and glorious, not other people. We need to understand and grow in the fear of the Lord—because the person who fears God will fear nothing else!



## WHAT IS THE FEAR OF THE LORD?

The fear of the Lord includes a spectrum of attitudes. In one sense, it does indeed mean a terror of God; for we are unclean people who will one day appear before the Almighty, who is holy and morally pure. Such fear shrinks back from God. But for people whose eyes have been opened to God's great love, this terror-fear gradually fades the more we come to know him.

For those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ, fear of the Lord means *reverent submission that leads to obedience*. Yes, such reverence includes an awareness of our sinfulness and God's holiness, but it is balanced by the knowledge of God's great forgiveness, mercy, and love. A proper fear of the Lord will have us moving from terror, dread, and trembling, toward devotion, adoration, and enjoyment of God. This is the love 1 John 4:18 is speaking of when it says, "There is no fear [terror or dread] in love."<sup>2</sup>

When we trust in Christ, we are able to truly love other people—not to need or fear them, worry about them, or people-please them. We are able to:

- † Love our enemies and pray for them
- † Think about the needs of our spouse before our own needs
- † Walk into a room and not worry about others' opinions of us
- † Say no to others without fear of judgment
- † Walk into church and feel like we're with family—with the family of God, there is no self-consciousness, embarrassment, or fear

### PROVERBS ON THE FEAR OF THE LORD

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS SHOWS US THAT THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS A GREAT TREASURE. MANY PROVERBS DISPLAY THE PRICELESS VALUE OF THE FEAR OF GOD.

Those who fear the Lord will fear nothing else (see Prov. 19:23).

The fear of the Lord adds length to life (see Prov. 10:27).

The fear of the Lord is a secure fortress for the one who fears and for his or her children (see Prov. 14:26).

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life (see Prov. 14:27).

The fear of the Lord should be praised when we see it (see Prov. 31:30).

WHAT DOES THE FEAR OF THE LORD LOOK LIKE? IT LOOKS LIKE LOVING GOOD AND HATING EVIL. IT LOOKS LIKE TRUSTING GOD, HAVING REVERENCE FOR HIM AND OBEYING HIM.

*To fear the Lord is to hate evil* (Prov. 8:13).

