



KNOW FEAR DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

*“Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.”*

Psalm 86:11

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Short-Term Missions Resources

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Introduction

You've seen the t-shirts, the commercials, the extreme sports, and maybe even a few of your friends embracing the popular "no fear" logo & concept. It has led to innumerable dare-devilish, death-defying stunts across the country, with the participants becoming heroes in the eyes of many; a few seconds of insanity resulting in notoriety, admiration and pride. Shows like "Fear Factor" are even adding financial gain to the list of rewards for staring fear in the face. "Evidently, fear is not a factor for you" is the parting comment to the winning party at the end of each show, shortly before receiving the \$50,000 prize.

The truth is: fear IS a factor for all of us. Most will not have the opportunity to traverse the side of a burning building in this lifetime, but everyone has and will continue to experience fear in one form or another. In fact, you are likely walking into this trip with many anxieties yourself. Do any of the following hit home for you?

- Fear of physical harm (What if I come across a snake? A crack vile? A street fight?)
- Fear of rejection (What if the people I'm trying to care for don't listen to what I have to say? What if I get laughed at?)
- Fear of not fitting in (What if I "don't get along" with the rest of the group? What if I'm not funny enough? Interesting enough? Or don't have anything to contribute to conversations?)
- Fear of looking stupid (Who came up with this dress

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code anyway!?) And how am I supposed to survive without my curling iron!?)

- Fear of failure (What if our drama flops? What if no one comes to know the Lord? What will my supporters think?)
- Fear of discomfort (How am I going to cope with no air conditioning? Food that I'm not used to? Cold showers? Sleeping on the floor?)

What do we do with these fears? Could they be considered somewhat reasonable (at least compared to some of the crazy phobias that are out there)? And how do we handle the fact that some passages of Scripture prohibit fear while others actually command it? Is God a schizophrenic?

The goal of these studies is to help you discover God's perspective on fear and what role, if any, it should play in the life of a believer. By the end of the week, we trust that you will "KNOW FEAR" in a way that you never have before and that this newfound knowledge will truly set you free!

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known by its fruit,” Jesus emphatically stated in Matthew 12:33, indicating that the very essence of a tree, its roots (the heart) will be exposed and identified by the fruit (words, actions, thoughts, attitudes and emotions) that it bears. Again we see that fruit and roots, heart and behavior are inseparably linked.

If behavior starts in the heart, then the priority must be discovering what in the world is going on down there. Well, the Bible tells us that our hearts are active . . . always seeking something or someone to worship. We are, by nature, worshipers. At first glance this may seem like good news. The problem is that, when sin entered the world, we began replacing the only worthy object of our worship and affection with other things. Romans 1:25 describes the detestable substitution in this way: “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator”.

When God is the object of our worship, then we desire to please Him, follow His will, and good fruit results. This, of course, is the way that God designed our lives to function. He made it very clear in the Old Testament that we were to have no other God’s before Him (Exodus 20:3). And when asked in the New Testament what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). God intends that His creation “only have eyes for Him”, that they live for worshiping and serving Him alone.

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Replacing the object of our love and worship with something else (not loving the Lord with all of our heart, soul and mind), is nothing short of idolatry, and will inevitably result in rotten fruit. This rotten fruit, of course, cannot be eradicated by working harder, having more self-control or through *any* attempt at mere behavioral modification, for that matter. Unless sin is attacked at the root, it is only a matter of time before it makes its re-appearance. In order to *really* get rid of rotten fruit, we need to turn to the heart and identify the particular idols which are stealing the worship that rightfully belongs to the Lord.

One of the most effective ways to uncover the truth about whom or what we are worshipping is to take a look at our emotional responses. Emotions, it has been said, are the windows to the soul. They, along with all varieties of fruit, serve to expose what it is that we love, crave and live for; in other words, what it is that we truly worship. Think about it. We feel or exhibit . . .

- HAPPINESS (at least temporarily) when we get what we crave
- SADNESS when we're *not* getting what we crave
- ANGER when it appears that someone or something is interfering with us getting what we crave
- JEALOUSY when we notice that others have what we crave
- FEAR when we reflect on the possibility of *not* getting what we crave

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Let's put this theory to the test . . .

Last night, sleep was a rare commodity around our household. Both of our sons were struggling in various ways. Our 9 month old, who usually sleeps through the night without a problem, apparently just couldn't seem to get enough to eat. And our 22 month old kept waking up in pain from teeth that are beginning to break through the surface of his gums. And the whole time I kept thinking . . . no fuming . . . about how much I needed rest. "How could I possibly have any clear thoughts for this devotional in the morning with no sleep under my belt," I wondered, sighing incessantly as I warmed yet another bottle.

Walking past our bedroom in route to pick up the "next contestant", I heard my husband contentedly snoring (he would say "breathing loudly", but I know the truth) as if nothing out of the ordinary was going on. I know that he's always willing to lend a hand, and I had purposely decided not to bother him . . . none-the-less jealousy filled my heart. Why couldn't I be the one sleeping?

Thirty minutes later, I had finally dozed off when another plea for help drifted my way. At first I wanted to cry . . . I had found just the right niche in the bed, and boy was I comfortable! But then anxiety began taking over again. How much sleep would I need to function effectively? I kept looking at the clock and doing the math. "This will never work," I thought, "I'll be way too exhausted to accomplish what needs to get done tomorrow."

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Alright, it's not something that I'm particularly proud of . . . but this series of events and my corresponding emotions certainly do help to reinforce my point. What was it that was making me so angry? Someone, or rather two "little someones" were interfering with my desire for sleep. What was lying at the center of my jealousy? My husband was enjoying what I was craving . . . again, sleep. What was at the root of my sadness? Surprise . . . unattained sleep. And finally, what was the driving force behind my fear? Among other things, concern over the fact that I might not get, you guessed it, sleep.

This brings me to an important point. You may be sitting there thinking, "This lady is way too intense. So she wanted sleep? What's the big deal? Is desiring sleep really that sinful?" John Calvin provides helpful commentary on this issue when he states that the evil in our desires often lies not in *what* we want, but that we want it *too much*.¹ "Natural desires for good things," writes David Powlison, "are meant to exist subordinate to our desire to please the Giver of gifts."²

Although sleep is a precious gift from God, when I began exhibiting sinful behaviors such as a grumbling and complaining spirit, discontentment, a lack of trust in God's ability to sustain me during the following day and jealousy of the other "sleeper" in my life, it was a clear sign it had become an idol for me. I was more focused on acquiring rest than I was on honoring, obeying and trusting the Lord. I had begun worshipping and serving the created above the Creator,

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Himself (Romans 1:25).

Now with all of this background in view, let's turn our full attention back to the subject of fear. Fear, as we have discovered, is an emotion (or fruit) which can be helpful in uncovering what it is that we truly worship. David Powlison has referred to it on many occasions as "an inverted want." "Fear and desire are two sides of a single coin," he writes, "A sinful fear is a craving for something *not* to happen. If I want money, I fear poverty . . . If I long to be loved, I'm terrified of rejection. If I fear pain or hardship, I crave comfort or pleasure, If I crave preeminence, I fear being subordinate to others." ³

When God uses our fears to expose what it is that we truly worship/idolize, it can be a heart-wrenching discovery. But the good news is that once identified and confessed, He will be faithful to forgive us, cleanse us . . . and change us! And not just in regards to our behavior, which can tend to be short lived. He promises to give us an *undivided heart* of worship for Him, that we might have the joy of bearing long-lasting, lovely and luscious fruit for *His* glory. Praise the Lord!

In a moment you will have the opportunity to process and digest this information on a more personal level, but before we do that, let me briefly summarize what we covered in today's study:

- Behaviors, attitudes, emotions, thoughts and words

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- (fruit) flow directly from the heart (roots).
- Attempted behavioral changes simply will not work. If we don't attack the roots, bad fruit will just continue to re-surface.
 - Root work, the source of real and lasting change, begins by examining the heart for existing idols.
 - Emotions serve as "windows to the soul" and can aid us in our search. Fear indicates a concern over the possibility of not receiving that which we crave (or idolize).
 - When our idols are revealed, we must confess them to God and ask Him to give us undivided hearts . . . hearts that worship Him and Him alone.
 - When He grants this request and becomes the sole object of our affection and obedience, it is then that we begin to see that our bad fruit is noticeably absent, and that the fruit of righteousness now stands in its place.

Thank you, Lord for encouraging us with the fact that change really is possible. How grateful we are to you for using our fears to expose those things which are stealing worship away from you. We long to be undivided worshipers, Father! Fill us with a vision of your Glory which is so strong and so sweet that loving and serving anything or anyone other than you becomes a near impossibility!

Day 1: Everyday Fear . . . Biblically Defined

There is a lot of confusion surrounding the concept of fear. What exactly IS it? An emotion? A state of being? A set of irrational thoughts? An outside force to which we merely fall victim? Do we have any control over it whatsoever? If hard pressed to define it, I'm not sure that many of us could really rise to the occasion. So, the first place to start in our quest to "know fear" is to come up with some sort of workable definition.

Comprehending and defining fear requires an initial understanding of the heart and how it works. So let's turn now to see what Scripture has to say on the subject. Proverbs 4:23 describes the heart as being the "wellspring of life." This means that all of our words, actions, thoughts, attitudes and emotions, like springs of water, flow from deep within. They don't stand in isolation, but rather find their source in the very heart of man.

"Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks", Jesus says in Matthew 12:34, giving further credibility to the heart-behavior connection. The picture here is that what's inside just plain cannot help but bubble over into, in this case, words (and by implication, all other kinds of behaviors). "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him" (Matthew 12:35).

Scripture uses many analogies to represent the heart-behavior relationship. But the one that we will focus on in this devotional is the analogy of fruit and roots. "A tree is

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3. Take a few moments to fill in the following chart. On the left side, record a couple of the sinful fears that you experienced while preparing for this trip. On the right, do your best to identify each one's corresponding craving. This craving is the idol which has become more important to you than loving, trusting and obeying the Lord. See the example below.

FEAR

- A. Personal rejection during evangelistic endeavors

CRAVING

The approval of man

B.

C.

D.

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4. Now take the time to confess these cravings to the Lord and ask Him to make Psalm 86:11, our theme verse, more of a reality in your life: *“Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.”* Use the space below to record your prayer.

ACTION POINT: Each day, you will receive a hands on assignment designed to help you grow in or apply what you learned during your devotional time with the Lord. Your assignment today is as follows: Before you go to bed tonight, you must successfully recite Psalm 86:11 (without any aids) to one of the 3 youngest members of your group. So read it, re-read it, meditate on it and memorize it. Your younger friends are awaiting your dramatic performance and God can't wait for the opportunity to weave its truths into the fabric of your soul!