

## Freedom from Fear

**Isaiah 41:10 HCSB** Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with My righteous right hand.

Everyone experiences fear some times. Fear is a normal response to unexpected or worrisome events. In fact, one of the toughest pair of microexpressions to distinguish is surprise and fear. In this series of photographs, the woman on the bottom left corner is showing surprise, while the man in the top center is showing fear.



Like all emotions, fear can be a good thing when it is a natural response to an appropriate stimulus.

However, fear, again like all other emotions, can sometimes begin to take on a power of its own. It can become too focused on a particular object or event and start taking over. That kind of fear, that unhealthy fear is called a phobia.

### **Fear of objects**

A phobia is persistent fear of an object or situation that is disproportional to the actual danger posed. A phobia is commonly recognized as being irrational. As the person approaches the object or situation, their fear rises in direct proportion until they can lose control of themselves, and hyperventilate or panic. Some will go to tremendous lengths to avoid the stimulus.

Some examples of phobias about a specific object would include the fear of elevators, spiders, knives, snakes, cats, fire or bugs. Zoophobia is the fear of some kind of animal.

### **Fear of situations**

Examples of phobias about situations would include the fear of flying, darkness, driving over bridges or through tunnels. A specific example would be acrophobia which is an extreme fear of heights or claustrophobia which is the fear of closed spaces.

### **Social phobias**

This is an extreme fear of embarrassment. A person who struggles with a social phobia would have a paralyzing fear of appearing stupid or being judged as embarrassing. They would not be able to easily initiate or maintain a conversation, eat in public, or attend a party. They also panic over performance situations like performing or speaking in public.

### **Fear of fear**

There is a phobia that is called agoraphobia and it is commonly thought to be a fear of open spaces. People with agoraphobia are typically homebound or even room-bound because of their condition. However, agoraphobia is actually a fear of having a panic attack in a place where escape would be difficult or embarrassing. Usually, after several panic attacks, the person retreats from all activities or social functions rather than actually face and deal with the fear. As a result the fear becomes habitual and they become homebound.

If we deal with a phobic person we need to carefully consider what righteous Job had to say on the issue.

- [Job 31:33-34 HCSB](#) Have I covered my transgressions as others do by hiding my guilt in my heart, (34) because I greatly feared the crowds, and the contempt of the clans terrified me, so I grew silent and would not go outside?

Job taught that the initial panic attacks that led to agoraphobia were rooted in covered transgression and hidden guilt.

This is likely what David was referring to when he said,

- [Psalms 38:18 HCSB](#) So I confess my guilt; I am anxious because of my sin.

This lines up with the Apostle John's teaching:

- [1 John 4:18 HCSB](#) There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears has not reached perfection in love.

In previous verses, John tells us that those who confess Jesus as their Lord come to know and believe the love that God has for them. They rest in that love and in that love they find peace – even when facing the end of the world and the judgment that is yet to come. A person who has God's love in them and fully rests in that love is not characterized by fear. As it is written:

- [Romans 8:15 HCSB](#) For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!"
- [2 Timothy 1:7 HCSB](#) For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment.

If you struggle with a phobia, I want you to spend time with me this morning meditating on the ramifications of Isaiah 41:10. To the phobic, God says,

- [Isaiah 41:10 HCSB](#) Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with My righteous right hand.

**What contributes to irrational fear?** Let's use the acronym FEAR to help us remember.

### **Former experiences**

- Trauma
- Scare tactics or threats
- Underdeveloped self-worth
- Example of others like parents or guardians

### **Emootional overload**

- Denying feelings
- People pleasing mentality
- Internalized stress
- Strict or perfectionistic authority figures

### **Avoidance of perceived threats**

- Refusal to face fears
- Giving no opportunity for growth or change
- Continually reinforced fears
- Reinforced negative thought patterns

### **Runaway imagination**

- False expectations of threats
- Anticipation of the worst
- Lack of faith that God can change us
- Thinking we have no control over our minds

As we examine each of these issues in our own lives or in the lives of those we counsel we should keep in mind Paul's admonition:

- [Philippians 4:8 HCSB](#) Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable--if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise--dwell on these things.

What advice can we give to the phobic?

1. **Acknowledge, confess, repent of and make restitution for any sin.**

- [Psalms 38:18 HCSB](#) So I confess my guilt; I am anxious because of my sin.
- [Proverbs 28:13 HCSB](#) The one who conceals his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them will find mercy.

2. **Attempt to use systematic desensitization or exposure techniques.**

Systematically and gradually approach the object or situation that you fear until you are able to overcome it. For example, if you are afraid of elevators, you might:

- a. Stand near an elevator and watch people get on and off.
- b. Push the button, as if you are getting ready to step inside.
- c. Step inside when others are not around. Hold the "Door Open" button, count to five, then step out. Do it again, this time counting to ten, etc.
- d. Step inside, allow the door to close, then open it and step out.
- e. Step inside, and ride to only one floor.
- f. Add other floors until you can ride normally.

Each step of the way, recite:

- [Psalms 118:6 HCSB](#) The LORD is for me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

If you're claustrophobic, perhaps a better verse for you would be the previous verse:

- [Psalms 118:5 HCSB](#) I called to the LORD in distress; the LORD answered me *and put me* in a spacious place.

Another good thing to do would be to personalize and recite Deuteronomy 31:6. It would sound like this:

"I will be strong and courageous; I will not be terrified or afraid. For it is the Lord my God who goes with me; He will not leave me or forsake me."

This treatment is very effective. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, about 75% of people are able to overcome their phobias through cognitive-behavioral therapy.

3. If you are too afraid to begin with desensitization techniques **consider using participant modeling** first. In this therapy, the counselor first approaches the object or situation and models the healthy way to deal with it.

- [1 Corinthians 11:1 HCSB](#) Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ.

Fear can be a healthy, useful thing. It is when we give in to our fear, allow it to rule us or dominate us, that fear becomes a crippling factor. I would like to leave you with two last passages:

- [Isaiah 41:13 HCSB](#) ...I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand and say to you: Do not fear, I will help you.
- [1 Peter 5:6-7 HCSB](#) Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you in due time, (7) casting all your care upon Him, because He cares about you.