

# *When trouble is all around, how can you win the battle in Overcoming Fear*

By Dave Batty

Fear comes into our lives in so many different ways.

Vancy was working in the top floor of her office building on September 11, when the World Trade Center right next to her building was attacked. Fear swept through the office, as they waited to get down the stairs. For Vancy the fear also connected back to 1993 when she was working in the World Trade Center when it was bombed.

The stairways finally unclogged so Vancy and her co-workers were able to flee their building, chaos surrounding them on the streets, running to the water's edge, waiting for the 5<sup>th</sup> ferry to finally take her away from the disaster.

- ❖ **How is your thought life related to overcoming fear?**
- ❖ **What are the tools that God has given us to battle our fears?**
- ❖ **What role does love have in winning the battle over fear?**
- ❖ **What are the steps to take in overcoming my fears?**

That same event brought fear to a child in 4<sup>th</sup> grade who said she was afraid all that day that a plane would crash into her school.

And 2,300 miles away in Arizona, weeks later, a lady is not able to sleep at night, living in fear sparked by this same attack.

Within just a few weeks a new agent of fear—anthrax—affected our whole nation, as businesses and individuals were afraid to open their own mail.

But fear was a very real issue before the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center.

## **The roots of fear**

Fear is a major issue in many families. Derrick grew up in a home with a mother who used drugs. She died of a drug overdose, and left Derrick and his young sisters without the protection of a mom. Derrick grew up with the fear that he would die young, just like his mom.

For many moms, fear is the telephone. With a son or daughter on drugs, running the streets, never knowing what to expect when the phone rings.

"My mother used to sleep every night with the phone under the pillow, waiting for a call from the police to

come and identify my body," shared Lori. "My mom had nightmares, especially after I threatened to jump in front of a train or a car."

A young mother who came to Teen Challenge shared how her addiction affected her young children, "I can recall times my children were afraid to go to sleep at night, not

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*Fear is mainly a battle in our heart and in our mind.*

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knowing if I was going to be there when they woke up."

Fear lives at home where children are sexually abused by their father, or another family member. "My abuser threatened to kill me if I told my mom what was going on," shared one victim of abuse.

What makes fear such a powerful force in our lives? What triggers fear in our hearts? Fear is mainly a battle in our heart and our mind. We fear danger, pain, or tragedy, and with that fear comes a thought pattern.

In our minds we perceive danger, and respond with fear. That emotion can dominate and paralyze us.

"I'm going to kill you!" are words that could strike fear to the depths of our heart, or laughter with not the slightest response of fear. What makes the difference?

Your response is determined by your thoughts. Who is saying these words? If you are on a dark street, and the person is tall and angry, pointing a gun right at your head—raw fear is probably overwhelming you.

But if the speaker of those words, "I'm going to kill you," is a little 2 year old child or grandchild, pointing a plastic squirt gun at you, then you will probably laugh on the inside with not the least fear of dying in the next few seconds.

Your perception of danger generates fear.

For the person who has been mugged at gunpoint or by a gang of hostile young people, fear is not just for the few minutes of the robbery. Fear can haunt you for weeks, months, or even years to follow.

So how do we bring fear under control so it does not dominate us? We must begin by bringing truth to our thoughts which can help us understand how we can face this situation without being paralyzed by fear.

## 1. Admit you have a problem with fear

David in the Bible faced many dangerous situations, and he learned how to deal with fear. People were attempting to kill David, and he responded, "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?" Psalms 56:3-4 NIV

God has given us tools that we can use to combat fear. If we will take the tools He has given us, and use them appropriately, we can have victory over fear.

The first thing David does is admit that he has fear. He says, "When I am afraid." If we are

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### *We must use the tools God has given us to fight fear.*

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running from our fears, they will catch up and overwhelm us. But David takes the first step to conquering fear—he admits that he has a problem with fear.

Admitting that I have a problem with fear also means that I admit that in my thoughts, I perceive something or someone as being dangerous, or in a place of danger.

## 2. Trust God to help you with your fear

So how can trusting God solve one's fear problem? Trusting God is a choice I make in my mind. I allow fear to have a place in my heart and mind when I see danger. By admitting to that fear, and then saying, "But I trust God"—to do what? To get me out of this danger? Perhaps.

David had an assurance in his heart that if he trusted God, he could count on God to help him in this time of danger in his life. I can trust God that He is in control of my life. He knows what is best for me. If I truly believe that God is in control, then I do not have to fear danger.

Trusting God takes us beyond our own understanding and recognizes that God knows more than we do. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

"My mom finally got to a point in the last 2 years of my addiction where she put me in God's hands," shares one of our students. "The fear was still there, but it also caused her to develop a deeper, more personal relationship with God."

We need more than just "Trust God" to win the battle of fear in our minds and hearts. God has promised to give us specific tools that we can use to combat fear.

## 3. Accept God's gift of power

When we find ourselves overwhelmed with fear, we need to stand on the promise of God in 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." NIV

One of the keys to breaking the power of fear, is bringing God's truth into the situation. We must face the fear and say, "This fear is not from God." God does not give us gifts of fear. So why take that gift from anyone else?

What has God given us? He has given us the "spirit of power." How was David able to go into battle against the giant Goliath, when he was much younger and smaller than all the army of Israel? He chose not receive the gift of fear from Goliath. Instead, he chose to receive the gift of power from God.

David didn't brag, "I'm stronger

and tougher than Goliath.” He recognized that his power was God’s power working in him. When he was trying to convince King Saul to let him fight Goliath he said, “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 Samuel 17:37 NIV

As David approached Goliath he said, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head.”

1 Samuel 17:45-46 NIV

David succeeded in winning the battle because he refused to “own” the fear the entire army of Israel had accepted in this situation. In the natural, this was a losing battle for any Israeli soldier, because Goliath was bigger and stronger.

But David did not look at this from the natural point of view, he trusted God and looked to God for the “Spirit of power,” promised by God. He focused his thoughts on God’s power, not Goliath’s power.

We need to reach out to God and receive His gift of power to face the situations that are causing fear in our lives. It does not matter how weak we are, what matters is how powerful is God.

Paul says God spoke to him and told him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV Paul goes on to say, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong.” 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV

Paul chose not to focus on his

weaknesses, though he was quick to admit that he was weak. But he saw this as God’s opportunity to give him the power he needed to face the difficult circumstances in his life.

It is quite clear that God is not afraid of any man, or weapon. He, the Creator of this universe, has powers far greater than any man-made weapon. So the more power you have the less fear you have.

Many of the situations that produce fear in our lives are those where we see something more

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*Our fears signal an opportunity to receive from God the power we need to face the difficult circumstances we face in life.*

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powerful than we are—something or someone who can bring destruction and pain into our lives, or those we love.

Many of the drug addicts who come to Teen Challenge look to the future with fear, wondering, “Will I be able to stay off drugs when I leave Teen Challenge?”

Accepting “God’s gift of power” means that we look to Him for help—we don’t have to fight this problem in our own strength.

#### 4. Accept God’s gift of love

God’s tool box for helping us overcome fear includes more than the gift of power—He also promised in 2 Timothy 1:7 to give us the “spirit of love.” How does love conquer fear?

One of the graduates of Teen

Challenge shared how much fear he had of God when he was living in his addiction. He had been raised in a godly family, attended church regularly, but chose to turn his back on that and got involved in drugs and other destructive activities.

He feared that if he died in his addiction that he would go to hell. That fear plagued him, even after he came to Teen Challenge, and renewed his personal commitment to serve Jesus Christ.

When we begin to understand this gift of love that God wants us to take from Him, it’s much more than a warm, fuzzy feeling kind of love. First, God is love—the total essence of love. It was because of His love for all the people of the world that He sent Jesus to die for us and purchase our freedom from sin—that’s the message of John 3:16.

John talks about this love relationship we can have with God. “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him.... There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

1 John 4:15-18 NIV

The gift of love from God puts us in a deep personal relationship with Him. He gives us love, and that love makes us complete. Perfect love, the love that comes from God, “drives out fear.”

In the days that followed the September 11 attack here in New York City I was able to walk down the streets with no fear, because I knew I was in right relationship with God, and that I was working where God wanted me to work. For those

who perished in that tragedy, and many were Christians, they had the confidence that God would bring them to heaven to live with Him for eternity.

When we have this awesome gift of love from God, other situations around us do not need to overwhelm us. His love can help us conquer our fears.

But His gift of love is not just for us to love Him back. God wants us to love others—John goes on to say, “Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

1 John 4:21 NIV

This same point is made throughout the Bible—it's not just talking about your family members, it refers to all other people. You can

begin to find release from fear for the person who robbed you or in other ways injured you. That release can come as you begin to rehearse the facts over and over in your mind. “God loves this person. He died for their sins and my sins. He wants to forgive them and enter into a genuine loving relationship with them. He wants me to love them the same way He loves them.”

That's perfect love—and most of us are not there. But His love can help us move beyond our fears of that person.

## 5. Accept God's gift of self-discipline

God has not only given us the gift of power, and of love, but also

“self-discipline”—or as other translations say, “self control,” or a “sound mind.” This gift can help us bring our thoughts under control.

Fear often puts our mind in overdrive, and we think of all kinds of dreadful things that could happen to us or our loved ones.

Why is it that we have no fear of dying when we hear the words, “I'm going to shoot you,” spoken by a 2 year old child with a plastic squirt gun?

Our mind tells us this is not a threat. We use logic to assess the words, the speaker of the words, and our ability to respond to the threat.

The battle of fear is fought mainly in our minds. This gift of self-discipline from God is a tool we can

## Peter's Problem with Fear

Don't be surprised if the closer you get to Jesus you still have a problem with fear. You are not the only one. Peter had been traveling and working with Jesus for a significant time.

He personally experienced the miracle of Jesus taking 5 little loaves of bread and 2 fish and multiplying it to feed 5,000 men plus women and children. That miracle should have convinced Peter of God's ability to meet every need in his life!

Later that very same night, sometime between 3AM and 6AM, Jesus comes walking on the water to meet the disciples who are fighting a storm on the Sea of Galilee. “When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It's a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.’”

Matthew 14:26-27 NIV

Peter, always one to seize the moment, says with a surge of courage, “Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you, on the water.” (vs. 28)

When Jesus responds, “Come,” Peter gets out of the boat and begins walking on the water, heading for Jesus.

Imagine the rush of excitement he must have felt, experiencing the miracle of walking on water! The other disciples are simply looking on from the outside, but Peter is right in the middle of the miracle.

But as he gets closer to Jesus, he turns his attention to the wind—fear rushes into his mind and heart, and he begins to sink.

He's so close to Jesus that all Jesus has to do is reach out His hand and catch him. Peter's problem with fear didn't start with his first step out of the boat. He is right close to Jesus

when he takes his focus off Jesus and begins to look at circumstances around him.

The lesson is clear, just getting close to Jesus does not automatically solve all our problems. We can be close to Jesus and still take our eyes off Him, and like Peter, soon find ourselves caught up in fear again.

The key is to keep our focus on Jesus and not doubt His power or desire to help us. The good news of this story is that even though Peter lost his focus, and floundered in fear, Jesus still took his hand and helped him up.

The storm still was raging, but Peter and Jesus walked with no problems back to the boat, got in, and then the storm stopped. We can have peace in our hearts even when the storm is still raging around us.

use to bring our thoughts under control. Disciplining our mind is a tough challenge.

Over 20 years ago I was mugged one night by three young men carrying a gun. In the days that followed, as I walked down the streets, just seeing a young man about the same size and skin color as my attackers would cause my heart to start pounding wildly. I conquered that fear by telling myself the truth—“This young man approaching me on the street is not my attacker. I do not need to be afraid of him.”

It took a lot of self-discipline in my mind to conquer that fear, but truth was the winner. I had to keep speaking truth into my own mind and heart, and not let my feelings of fear control my thoughts.

We may need to sit down with another person and rehearse the facts that relate to our fears. Find scriptures in the Bible that speak to these fears or issues, and make them a part of our thoughts.

Psalm 23 speaks as one example of this. David says, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” Psalm 23:4 NIV

We have a lot of choices to make in our minds when it comes to dealing with fears. The battle is many times not won in a single day—we must continue day after day to speak truth into our hearts.

Fear is often tied to the uncertainty of the future. In the sermon Jesus preached in Matthew 6:25-34, he spoke of the issues of worry and fear, and challenged us to put our trust in God to provide what we need. “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has

enough trouble of its own.” Matthew 6:34 NIV

We need to stay focused on today and what God wants us to do today. As we trust in Him, receive the power, love, and self-discipline that He wants to give us, we can enter into another gift God has for us—peace.

## 6. Accept God's gift of peace

Shortly before Jesus died, He spoke to His followers about peace in the time of fear. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27 NIV

Jesus has given His peace to us—but what are we going to do? Are you going to reach out and take it and wrap it around your heart, your soul, your mind? Or are you going to wrap yourself in the garment of fear?

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:4-7 NIV

Peace comes to guard your heart when we follow all the other advice given in this scripture. Talking to God about the situations that we face, bringing His truth to the context of each fearful situation.

But experiencing God’s peace is more than just receiving a gift. This peace is directly connected to the renewing of our minds, which is

the focus of Philippians 4:8-9 where Paul gives specific steps to develop a new way of thinking. The first point Paul makes is to think about “whatever is true.” Many of our fears are caused by worry—imagining things that might happen, but are not happening right now.

For the mother, living in fear of receiving a phone call from the police, saying, “Come and identify the body of your son or daughter”—that’s not thinking about what is true. That’s thinking about what might happen.

So what can this mother do? What is happening right now? Your loved one is out on the streets, using drugs, or whatever. Face the truth,

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*Overcoming fear is directly related to receiving God's gift of peace—holding on to it for dear life when chaos is all around*

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and then talk to God about it. “God, I don’t know where my daughter or son is right now, but You do. You know exactly where s/he is and what s/he is doing, and I rest on the promise that You will keep Your hand on my loved one. I’ve committed my loved one into Your care. You do whatever You need to do to bring my loved one to a place of change. I’m trusting in You.”

You may have to pray that prayer a thousand times a day, because you find yourself worrying about your loved one, and the danger s/he is in. But as you discipline your mind to focus on what is true—not what might happen—you can begin to experience God’s peace in your heart, even though the situation with your loved one does not show any improvement.

When people with big problems came to Jesus, He often sent them away with the words, "Go in peace." We can stand on that promise. If we bring to Jesus the things that cause us fear, and say, "God I need your help," you can then go in peace—His peace.

The pain may still be present and real because your loved one is still out there on the path of destruction, but God's peace can be there with the pain. You may have to live with the pain, but you don't have to live with the fear. Don't let fear rob you of God's peace.

When fear comes knocking at the door of your heart, you don't have to let it in. If fear is already inside your heart, overwhelming you, it's time to get God's toolbox out and start using the tools—the gifts He has given us to fight fear. We've got to trust God, accept His power, His love, and the gift of self-discipline and the gift of peace.

If we are to effectively use each of these tools, we need to fill our mind and our heart with His truth—the scriptures that deal specifically with the issues causing fear in our lives. We must go beyond knowing—we must put it into action. The battle in our minds may be difficult.

Paul talked about this battle—"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV

It may be a constant battle for a long season. Or the victory may come quickly. We can overcome fear as we put our trust in Jesus to see us through whatever difficulties we face. We can rest in His peace, no matter how big the storm is around us.

## Overcoming Fear Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. What are the situations in your life that are currently causing fear, or have caused fear in the past?
2. Read Joshua 1:6-9.
  - A. Why do you think God had to tell Joshua that he should not be afraid--or terrified (verse 9)?
  - B. What part of God's message to Joshua speaks directly to the problems you are facing?
3. Read Psalm 23, especially verse 4. How does this scripture speak to the issue of fear in your life?
4. Read 2 Timothy 1:7.
  - A. Which of these 3 gifts offered by God do you have the easiest time relating to your fears? Explain.
  - B. Which of these 3 gifts offered by God do you have the hardest time relating to your fears? Explain.
5. Read 1 John 4:15-21. How does this speak to the process of love helping you overcome fear in your life? What are the problems you see with love and fear?
6. What scriptures can you memorize and use to battle the fears you face in your life? What issues of truth do you battle with the most in regards to your fears?



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