

Overcoming Fear

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Addressing fear takes more than applying methods or formulas. It requires a shift in consciousness, a new way of thinking. While preparing to write this article, God told me:

“Fear has everything to do with one’s relationship with oneself.”

I’ve been thinking about that statement for the past week and will try to unpack it for you.

A Fearful Parent

How do you relate to yourself? Take time to think about your answer. Try to put it into words. Do you behave as an over-protective parent who always fears for the welfare of her child? Or do you behave as a judgmental parent who always finds fault with his child? Do you behave as a controlling parent who puts strict limits on her child? In these examples, the parent is you and the child is your life. By substituting these terms, the first example describes a fear-based person who relates to her life by always thinking of potential misfortune or harm. In a real way, we parent ourselves by encouraging or discouraging our growth by the judgments we make about our lives.

When fear is active, then our response to life will be to protect, resist, or contract. We focus on ourselves and on what we risk losing. This focus on self creates a climate of fear within us. In this mindset, we see ourselves as threatened and powerless. We perceive our lives as small bubbles, and everything that exists outside our bubbles are a potential threat. Because we view the world as a threat, we take an oppositional stance against life. We resist all intrusions, both real and imagined, against our protected bubbles.

Moving Beyond Fear

To move beyond fear, we need to change how we see ourselves. Instead of regarding ourselves as tiny bubbles of existence fighting to survive, we choose to view ourselves as part of a larger whole, where we and the whole are not at

odds with each other.

What is this whole? The whole is everything that comprises the universe. It is God who holds it all together. The whole is the greater Life that encompasses your life. It is the continuous flow of creation, decay, death, and transformation in which we all take part, whether consenting or not.

When we focus on the whole, we find it easier to trust because our stories are recognized as part of a larger story. This larger story is about the inherent goodness of God and the constancy of God. When we fix our attention on this overarching theme, what happens to us matters little because we're more focused on participating in God and less focused on preserving our bubbles. We cannot do both. So we entrust our tiny bubbles to God—they were never really ours in the first place—and now identify with the grander, all-encompassing bubble that is God. We overcome fear by entrusting our fragile lives to God and choosing to not focus on ourselves or on what may happen to us.

Moving Away from Self

When we shift our focus from our tiny selves onto God, we learn to trust that God is bigger than our little stories. We take on a new story that is no longer about us, but about God's activity in us and through us. The larger story of God's sweep across all lives subsumes the smaller stories of our single selves.

We learn to trust the flow that carries us from event to event, from change to change, through difficulty and pain. We entrust ourselves to the whole, to the flow that is Life. We entrust ourselves to God, believing He will bring us to our destination. Our destination, in case you wondered, is God Himself.

How do we do this when we've spent our entire lives focused on ourselves? It means laying down our stories and our control over those narratives. It means giving God control over our stories and letting Him direct them. When we don't like the direction He is taking us, we trust instead of resisting.

Trusting Life and God

Because of this new identification with the larger story, we can learn to no longer fear life, but trust it, even embrace it. From this new vantage point, we can define life as participation in the flow of God that requires our willingness to be transformed. If we're to trust life, then we need to accept all stages of existence, including decay and death. Pain and suffering are an unavoidable part of life. Instead of resisting them, we learn to accept them as part of the whole, no longer judging them as needless or terrible. God inhabits both suffering and joy. He inhabits the entire spectrum of life.

When we resist life, we won't grow. In my book, *Four in the Garden*, the Teachers tell Cherished, "Nothing is ever annihilated. When Creator destroys something, its substance is merely transformed. The rhythm of the universe is transformation." Natural phenomena demonstrate this principle of transformation. Since this principle is elemental to life, then we ought not to resist it. When we accept change and hardship, then we move through life with grace and peace, and are transformed by it. God's purpose is that we be transformed more and more into His image (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Connection

When we perceive our connection to this larger whole, then our lives have greater meaning. We see ourselves as an integral part of things rather than separate from them. When we're connected, we don't feel as threatened, so we have less reason to resist or fear. Our little self becomes hidden in God (Colossians 3:3) and embraced by God. Life is less scary because we are in God and with God. We choose to believe in the goodness of God to sustain us along the journey, no matter where our journey takes us.

A focus on self reinforces our perception of separateness. Separateness creates isolation. It's the sense of isolation that creates fear. We believe we are alone and must fend for ourselves. Thus, we must protect and defend our tiny bubbles of existence. That's why we need to shift to a viewpoint that is larger than self. We can enhance our sense of connection by reminding ourselves we

are not separate and by telling ourselves we are already connected to God. We can't grow in our relationship with God if we believe we are always disconnected from Him.

A Larger Vision

A larger vision of connection to and participation in God frees us from fear because we no longer have to worry about our bubbles. God invites us to share in His being and to let go of our tiny self-bubbles, to join Him in the flow of His Spirit. Our focus shifts from our little lives to the greater Life that is God. We move from a self-centered focus to a God-centered focus. When we fear, we focus inward and contract. When we trust, we focus outward toward God and expand.

When we're connected, God ceases to be "out there." We become joined with Him in relationship. Our life becomes connected to His Life. When God interacts with us, it will be from the inside out, not the other way around. He meets us at the intersection where spirit touches Spirit, where deep touches Deep.

The Trusting Parent

At the proper time, a parent gives up control over her child when her child has matured. When this time comes, the parent allows his child to make mistakes and learn from them, to experience the world without parental supervision. She entrusts her child to God, believing that God will take care of her child. Like a trusting parent, we need to give up control and entrust our lives to God. We transfer our parental rights to God, allowing God to be the parent over us, a parent more patient and loving than we could ever be. We release our tight grip on our lives and choose to have a loose grip, instead, allowing God freedom to have His way.

As we relax our grip, we release fear. At the same time, releasing our grip is terrifying to our egos. It's illustrated by the difference between clutching the side of a deep swimming pool or floating in the middle. We fear the depths

may swallow us, so we clutch something for security. We will never learn to trust if we never let go. God coaxes us to release our tight grip on life and trust Him to keep us afloat. Real trust clings to nothing, but believes God is our life-vest each moment.

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