

The Insidious Self

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Our greatest enemy follows us wherever we go, and yet we consider it our best friend. It is our self. Time and time again, our self gets us into trouble because it's insecure and fearful. In spite of this, it gives us our marching orders, setting the direction of our lives. And we listen to it, allowing it to control us.

Because our self is insecure, it worries about anything that might threaten it. It worries about instability, loss, rejection, betrayal, and its ability to cope. Much of our insecurity arises from the fact that we can't control these things or entirely protect ourselves from them. Our predisposition to worry affects our everyday choices.

Fear Controls Us

We make decisions that mitigate our fears. We stay in the abusive relationship because we are more terrified of being alone or because we think no one else will have us. We don't speak up because we're afraid of confrontation or retribution. We stay in our hated job because we can't see how to provide for our family any other way. We let people take advantage of us because we're afraid of offending them, hurting their feelings, or them rejecting us.

Much of the time, we don't realize how fear drives our choices. We act and react without introspection. We don't examine our decisions to see if fear is at work. Is fear causing us to rule out available options? Do we shrink back from taking risks because of fear? What are we telling ourselves to justify our choices? What we think is a wise course of action may actually be a strategy to keep us safe from what we fear.

My major insecurity is fear of rejection. From the beginning, I felt different from the rest, out of place, unable to relate to my peers. As a result, I kept aloof, thinking that people wouldn't accept me. In high school, I ate my lunch with the outcasts. I hardly spoke, even to them, because I feared saying anything that might cause people to reject me. In P.E. class, a budding

friendship with a classmate encouraged me, but when he suggested we practice throwing and catching a baseball, I knew our future friendship was doomed. Sure enough, once he saw my ineptitude at sports, he never interacted with me again. Years later, I wrestle with this insecurity on a regular basis. What I have since learned is that the presence of fear doesn't mean it has to control me. I acknowledge the fear, but empower myself to take risks, believing I can survive rejection because I know I'm accepted by God, myself, and others.

Guilt Trips Us

Another weakness that trips us up is guilt. Whereas fear is focused on the future, guilt finds its focus in the past. Our decisions are tied to what's taken place in the past and our judgments of those events. We make guilt-induced choices because we feel indebted to others or bad about our past behavior. We overcompensate for our failings by going the extra mile and allowing others to take advantage. We may even be aware of this dynamic but tell ourselves that it's a necessary penance for our sins.

In my life, I allowed guilt to have power because my soul was too fragile. The most effective manipulation was for someone to say, "If you were truly my friend, you would do this for me." I had no choice but to comply. The alternative was to be rejected as a "bad" friend. I have learned a lot about boundaries since then. "No" is not a bad word and can be used with grace and respect. In addition, maturity must make room for self-nurture, which can't happen when we allow others to direct our lives.

Transferring Control

When self is in control, then ego sits at the steering wheel. We are driven to and fro by our fears and insecurities. If we can recognize how counterproductive it is to allow self to be in charge, then we might be ready to set self aside and rely less on our ego. By this I mean we reduce the influence of fear, guilt, and insecurity in our lives. We move away from trusting in

ourselves to trusting more in God who is more reliable than our feeble egos and who can empower us to push past our fears.

It's not enough to identify our fears if we can't overcome them. As one who has spent time in therapy, I recommend it for everyone, but therapy can only take us so far. God can see deep into our souls and uncover those wounds that impair us. Not only that, but God can mend those wounds as no one else can. Fear is not a wound. It is a weakness, like bad eyesight, that handicaps us if we let it. With the help of eyeglasses, we can clearly see. So with fear, we can overcome it with God's help. Fear doesn't go away completely; it still whispers in our ears. But we can learn to ignore its threats and take risks and live the abundant life that Jesus spoke about (John 10:10).

In my book, *Four in the Garden*, Creator tells Cherished, "When fear is strongest, you won't trust. When trust is strongest, you won't fear." If we can learn to trust in God, then fear will have less hold on us. People who have great trust in God fear nothing. That's because they know that God can take care of them in any circumstance, no matter how terrible. They rely on Him for strength and peace that will sustain them through any adversity. But even during times of contentment, they still rely on Him knowing that living for Him is far better than living for their egos.

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