Fear & Phobias

From Panic to Peace

By June Hunt

Isa 41:10

DEFINITIONS

A. What Is Fear?

- Fear is an agitated, emotional reaction to impending pain or danger, which may be real or imagined.¹
- Fear can be rational or irrational, normal or abnormal.

2 Tim 1:7

“Can I overcome being so continually fearful?”

Yes. Based on the Bible, continually trusting in the Lord enables you to face life with confidence, moving from fear to faith.

Ps 34:4

B. What Is a Phobia?

- A phobia is a persistent, irrational fear of an object or situation.²
- The word phobia comes from the Greek word phobos, which means “fear, flight or dread.”³

If you are thinking . . . I don’t have the strength to overcome this fear!

Realize that you are not to live out of your own strength, but out of the Lord’s supernatural strength.

Phil 4:13

C. What Is a Phobic Disorder?

- A phobic disorder is a persistent, irrational fear that impairs a person’s ability to function normally.⁴
• A phobia may be considered a mental disorder or neurosis.
• If a phobia causes no major disturbance in a person’s lifestyle, it is not considered a disorder.

If you are thinking . . . It’s impossible for me to function without fear!

Realize that the Bible says that with God, nothing is impossible.

Luke 1:37

D. What Are the Types of Phobias?^5

• Simple Phobias—Fear of a Specific Object or Situation, such as a fear of elevators, flying, heights, insects.
• Social Phobias—Fear of Embarrassment (sometimes called social anxiety disorder) such as stage fright, fear of speaking, eating in public, using public lavatories, making decisions.
• Agoraphobia—Fear of Fear, which is the fear of open spaces; literally, “marketplace fear”; it is being so fearful of going to public places or being trapped in strange places that one becomes homebound.^6

If you are thinking . . . I can’t break this pattern of fear—I feel paralyzed by this phobia.

Realize that God possesses the power to break any pattern and transform any life.

Ps 46:1

E. What Is a Panic (or an Anxiety) Attack?

The initial stimulus that causes a panic attack doesn’t need to reappear to cause another panic attack. A panic attack can have a life of its own when it feeds on the fear of having another attack.

• A panic or anxiety attack is a sudden, fearful reaction with overwhelming feelings of anxiety, loneliness, craziness and doom.^7
• A panic or anxiety attack is fear that is out of control.

If you are thinking . . . I don’t have the power to stop my panic attacks.

Realize that when you have the power of Christ in you, you have everything you need for victory in your life.

2 Peter 1:3

CHARACTERISTICS

Most people with phobias are not as afraid of the object of their fear as they are of the symptoms of their fear.^8
Differences Between . . .

- **Normal Fear**
  - apprehension
  - nervousness
  - uneasiness
  - heightened senses
  - hyperalertness
  - increased energy

- **Panic Attacks**
  - trembling
  - cold hands
  - dizziness
  - choking
  - sweating
  - ringing ears
  - rapid heartbeat
  - hot flashes or chills
  - hyperventilating
  - chest pain
  - nausea
  - diarrhea

  *Ps 55:4-7*

CAUSES

A. **Surface Causes of Panic Attacks**

- **Former Experiences**
  - Traumatic experiences
  - Parents who displayed excessive fear
  - Scare tactics used by others
  - Underdeveloped sense of self-worth

  *1 Cor 13:11*

- **Emotional Overload**
— Denial of your own feelings
— Internalization of stress (anxiety)
— “People pleaser” personality
— Strict or perfectionistic home environment

\[1\ Peter\ 5:6-7\]

**Avoidance of the Threatening Situation**

— Continuing to reinforce the fears
— Reinforcing the negative thought patterns
— Giving no opportunity for change

\[2\ Tim\ 1:7\]

**Runaway Imagination**

— Assuming the worst will happen
— Expecting life to be threatening
— Assuming you have no control over the situation
— Believing you can never change

\[Col\ 3:2-3\]

**B. Root Cause**

**Wrong Belief:**

“Since I have no control over my panic, the best solution is to avoid this fearful situation.”

**Right Belief:**

My real fear is not the situation, but my embarrassing panic over the situation. Christ living in me is the perfect expression of love, and perfect love drives out all fear.

\[1\ John\ 4:18\]

**STEPS TO SOLUTION**

**A. Key Verse to Memorize**

\[Isa\ 41:10\]

**B. Key Passage to Read and Reread**
C. The Transforming Power of Truth

Fear:

“I can’t help this feeling of intense fear!”

Fact:
This feeling is a bluff to my mind and body. It is not grounded in truth.

Ps 27:3

Fear:

“I have this feeling of doom—a feeling that I am going to die.”

Fact:
The time of death is in God’s hands. I will choose to trust Him.

Job 14:5

Fear:

“I fear what others are thinking about me.”

Fact:
My peace comes from pleasing God, not in pleasing man.

2 Cor 5:9

Fear:

“I am hopeless and can never change.”

Fact:
In Christ, I am a new person. Nothing is hopeless.

2 Cor 5:17

Fear:

“I am so nervous, I can’t think clearly.”

Fact:
God will guard my mind and give me peace.

Phil 4:7
Fear:

“To be safe, I have to be in control.”

Fact:

God is in control of my life, and He is with me step by step.

*Deut 31:8*

Fear:

“I feel trapped with no way of escape.”

Fact:

God always makes a way of escape.

*1 Cor 10:13*

D. Desensitize

If you are overly sensitive to an object or situation, “desensitization” can be the key to open the door to freedom. Desensitization is the process of elimination of abnormal fearful responses by gradually increasing your exposure to that fear. Repeat the same step day after day for a week or two or until you no longer have a strong emotional reaction. A slight reaction is permissible to move to the next step.

*1 Peter 1:13*

- **Gradually increase your exposure to the** fear.
  
  Example: fear *of flying*—simple phobia
  
  — Look at pictures of airplanes.
  — Drive to an airport to watch planes take off and land.
  — Spend time walking around inside an airport.
  — Go inside a plane that is boarding.
  — Sit in an airplane seat.
  — Take a short flight with a friend.

- **Practice facing your** fear.
  
  Example: fear *of social gatherings*—social phobia
  
  — Practice asking a salesperson questions.
  — Initiate saying hello with a smile.
  — Listen carefully to what is said by others.
  — Ask simple questions of others about themselves.
  — Make brief comments about yourself.
— Develop a genuine interest in others.

• **Repeat each step over again until it evokes little reaction.**

  Example: fear of the outdoors—agoraphobia

  — Open the front door and leave it open.
  — Stand in the open door for as long as possible.
  — Go out the door and stand on the porch—breathe deeply.
  — Walk down the sidewalk to the edge of your property.
  — Walk around the outside of the house.
  — Sit in the car while it is in the driveway.
  — Have someone drive you around the block.
  — Drive yourself around the block.
  — Go to the mall and sit in your car in the parking lot.
  — Go to the mall when it will not be too crowded and walk around.
  — Go into a store and greet a sales clerk.
  — Make a small purchase.

  Each step of the way, say,

  *Ps 118:6*

  *Deut 31:6*

E. **From Fear to Faith**

• **Begin** with a healthy fear (awe) of God.
  — Believe in God’s right to have authority over you.
  — Believe in God’s control over your circumstances.

  *Prov 1:7*

• Be **aware** that fear is not part of God’s plan for you.
  — Fear is not trusting God.
  — Fear is not appropriating the grace of God.

  *Ps 27:1*

• Be **willing** to analyze your fear honestly in order to discover the real source of your phobias.
  — Fear of rejection . . . Do you need to be loved and accepted?
  — Fear of failure . . . Do you need to feel significant?
  — Fear of exposure . . . Do you need to feel secure?
• Be **aware** of the power of God’s love for you.
  — God’s love provides you with complete acceptance.
  — God’s love provides knowledge of your self-worth.
  — God’s love provides eternal security.
  — God’s love provides the power to overcome all fear.

  *1 John 4:18*

• Be **committed** to developing your faith in God’s love.
  — Be in a Bible study.
  — Be in daily meditation and quiet time.
  — Be in fellowship with Christians.
  — Be willing to testify to God’s faithfulness in your life.
  — Be obedient to God’s promptings in your spirit.
  — Be focused on serving others.

  *Ps 1:2*

• **Begin using** truth from God’s Word to rein in your imagination the moment it starts spinning out of control.

  *Ps 56:3*

**More Helpful Scriptures to Memorize**

*Ps 27:1; (1 John 4:4); (Ps 46:1)*

• Be **willing** to face the situations you fear through faith in the power of Christ.
  — Know that Christ is always ready to respond.
  — Acknowledge His actual presence, and call for His help.
  — Give your fear to Him, and receive His powerful love.
  — Act in love toward others by focusing on their needs.

  *1 Thess 5:24*

• **Become free** from your fear and strengthened in your faith.
  — Become more trusting.
  — Become more gentle.
  — Become more peaceful.
  — Become more joyous.
  — Become more Christlike.
F. Do’s and Don’ts of Support

Prov 18:24

Don’t feel you need to understand in order to help.
   Do . . . Know that what phobic people are experiencing is real.
Don’t think they are doing this for attention.
   Do . . . Realize they are embarrassed and want to change.
Don’t be critical or use demeaning statements.
   Do . . . Be gentle and supportive, and build up their self-confidence.
Don’t assume you know what is best.
   Do . . . Ask how you can help.
Don’t make them face a threatening situation without planning.
   Do . . . Give them instruction in positive self talk and relaxation exercises.
Don’t make them face the situation alone.
   Do . . . Be there and assure them of your support.
Don’t begin with difficult situations.
   Do . . . Help them to begin facing the fear in small increments.
Don’t constantly ask, “How are you feeling?”
   Do . . . Help them see the value of having other interests.
Don’t act disappointed and displeased if they fail.
   Do . . . Encourage them and compliment their efforts to conquer their fear.

Prov 3:27

Focus on your fear and your panic will increase. Focus on your Shepherd and your heart will be at peace.

—June Hunt

EXCHANGE PANIC FOR PEACE

Focus on the 23rd Psalm when Fear Occurs

- Imagine a grassy pastoral scene and the Lord there with you. Slowly say, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” Repeat three times.
Ps 23:1
- Imagine yourself lying down beside a calm pool of water.

Ps 23:2
- Take several deep breaths and slowly say, “My Shepherd restores my soul.”

Ps 23:3
- Realize you are not trapped. Slowly say, “I will fear no evil—The Lord is with me.” Repeat three times.

Ps 23:4
- Put your hand in the Lord’s hand and together walk past your enemy.

Ps 23:5
- Thank the Lord for the way He will use this for good in your life.

Ps 23:6

NOTES

5. See Kracke, “Phobic Disorders,” 871-72. Kracke renames the simple phobia as specific phobia.
8. *Agoraphobia*.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


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