

The One Quality That Can Transform Your Crippling Fears

For the first 10 years of my marriage, I struggled with the fear of abandonment. My father and my first pastor had both left their wives for younger women. Because of what I had experienced, I allowed fearful thoughts to linger unchecked in my mind. They didn't yell; they whispered, *Eventually all men leave. Don't let them get too close. Then they can't disappoint you.* This kind of thinking caused me to even resist small displays of affection. When John hugged me, it wasn't long before I'd start patting him so I could pull away.

One day after one of my pat-and-pull-aways, John asked me point blank, "How long will we have to be together before you realize I'm not going to leave you? Are you going to wait until we're 70?" I was stunned.

"I'll wait as long as it takes," he continued, "but we're going to miss out on a lot of fun in the meantime."

I realized I was making John pay for the disappointments I had with other men. I thought, *Why should John have to pay for their shortcomings? That's not fair. In an effort to protect myself, I am sabotaging our relationship.* My fear of losing John in the future was robbing both of us in the present. I decided then that I would rather love John completely, even at the risk of losing him, than love him halfway and look back with regrets on what might have been.

Fear and distrust keep us from thriving in marriage, for fear tenaciously clings to the past while refusing to believe something better can arise in the future. If we want God to do a new thing in our marriages, we must choose to abandon fear and accept what love will forecast for our futures. Fear

expects failure, while love ultimately can never fail.

Fear is a spiritual force in direct opposition to God's love and protection in our lives. It is the opposite of love, for both love and fear operate from belief in the unseen. Love challenges us to doubt what we see and believe for what we cannot. Fear urges us to believe what is seen and doubt the unseen. When faced with the fear of failure or the hope of love, we can choose to believe one or the other, but never both. Fear displaces love; love casts out fear: " ... perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. Whoever fears is not perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:18–19).

Love's ability to transform is greater than fear's ability to ensnare. The perfect love that expels fear is only found in the experience of God's love. Through the power of His love, we can forsake concern for self because we know that God will faithfully tend to our needs. But if we don't spend time in God's presence, we cannot have an intimate knowledge of His loving nature, for His faithfulness manifests in His presence.

Without knowledge of God's true nature, we will live in constant fear of abandonment by Him or by spouses, which is a twisted form of punishment. As we grow more and more secure in God's love for us, we can become free from fear and offer selfless love to our spouses. " ... let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7–8).

The stronghold of fear is what causes us to say things like, "If my spouse ever cheats on me, I will never forgive him." Such vows, which are intended to shield us in the future, keep us from embracing the power of God's love today. We must learn to trust God to care for our hearts, even if a spouse wounds, rejects or betrays us. God has asked us to surrender our fears to Him. Refusal to do so tells God we don't believe He is

capable of directing our lives. We cannot submit to Jesus's lordship without surrendering our fears.

What fears are you holding on to? Dear one, let them go and watch the love of God transform you from the inside out and free you to step into your destiny. On the other side of your fear, you will discover the life you so deeply long for. {eoa}

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