

KRISTEN WETHERELL

*fight  
your  
fears*

TRUSTING GOD'S CHARACTER AND  
PROMISES WHEN YOU ARE AFRAID

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PROMISES WHEN YOU ARE AFRAID

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To my faithful parents,

*Jennie and Ed:*

The Lord Jesus has used you mightily  
to teach me to fear him and cherish his Word.

I love you both!

# CONTENTS

Foreword 13

Introduction: From One Fearful Person to  
Another 15

## SECTION ONE THE PROBLEM OF FEAR

1 } I Am God  
(When You Aren't Afraid Enough) 23

2 } I Have Saved You  
(When You Fear Condemnation) 37

## SECTION TWO GOD, WHO IS WORTHY TO BE FEARED

3 } I Am Sovereign  
(When You Fear Not Being in Control) 55

4 } I Am Good  
(When You Fear the Worst) 71

**SECTION THREE**  
**GOD'S PRECIOUS AND VERY GREAT PROMISES**

**5** } **I Will Provide**  
(When You Fear You Won't Have Enough) **89**

**6** } **I Will Protect You**  
(When You Fear Evil) **103**

**7** } **I Will Never Leave You**  
(When You Fear Loneliness) **117**

**8** } **I Have Accepted You**  
(When You Fear Failure) **133**

**9** } **I Will Judge You**  
(When You Fear Man) **149**

**10** } **I Am Alive**  
(When You Fear Death) **165**

Conclusion: Fight Your Fears . . . and Keep  
Fighting 179

Thank-Yous 181

Appendices:

Appendix A: Recommended Books 185

Appendix B: Scripture Memory Cards 189

Notes 197

## FOREWORD

**L**ONG AGO, a counseling professor taught me that fear lies at the core of any unhelpful or ungodly reaction. The scales fell from my eyes in that moment, and I saw how fear had lurked beneath many of the repetitive sinful patterns of my life, pulling the strings that led me to control, lash out in anger, and even turn inward under heavy self-condemnation. I'd done anything and everything I felt might protect my own heart from pain, but by not naming my responses as fear, I'd nurtured it, fueled it, and used it as a weapon in relationships.

Naming fear, I soon discovered, was only the first miniscule step. I had to claim and confess it as self-idolatrous sin, a soul-eating plague rather than the silly, inconsequential plaything I'd made it. Fear, in other words, had inflamed my pride and made God impotent and small. Fear had told me lies about God my entire life and, cleverly enough, kept me from the very One who could drive fear from my heart.

Because love drives out fear, and God is love.

You may wonder, as I did, what love has to do with it. I would much prefer an ability to control the future or to avoid the pricks and pains of life. I'd like a security I can see and touch and a sure plan on exactly how everything is going to turn out well in the end. But the Bible says perfect love is the way fear is cast out, and what this means is that *God's demonstration of love* is the way fears are conquered.

The more I have risked drawing close to God, believing he accepts me as fully as he accepts Christ, the more I've known security. I've learned to tell him my fears without wondering if he's impatient with me, and more importantly, *I've learned to tell my fears about God*. Like a child facing a bully on the playground, I eyeball them and say, "My dad is bigger and stronger than yours, and he is always for me."

Perhaps you are just now recognizing that fear strikes at the heart of what you do or how you respond to others, or maybe you've known fear all your life. Perhaps you fear God himself, and not in a good way. Perhaps you've been so hurt by other people that you've hardened a shell of protection around yourself. Perhaps you fear you won't have enough, whether it's love or capacity or food to eat. No matter where you are, I'm so glad you're going to read these words from Kristen. She does what is needed: She gives us God himself. She tells us about him so that we can tell our fears about him too. So read, savor, and soak in the truths of who he is, friends, and let his perfect love fight your fears to their death.

—Christine Hoover  
Author of *With All Your Heart: Living Joyfully  
through Allegiance to King Jesus*  
[www.gracecoversme.com](http://www.gracecoversme.com)

# INTRODUCTION

## *From One Fearful Person to Another*

*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.*

*Psalm 56:3*

**W**HAT IF I told you that your problem with fear isn't that you are too afraid but that you aren't afraid enough?

And what if I told you that your goal isn't to become fearless?

I'll bet that you and I could fill this page with a list of our fears. Fears about the future; fears about our health, jobs, and families; fears about inadequacy and failure (or maybe success); fears about how much *fear itself* seems to affect our decisions, plans, and growth in the Christian life.

And fears about what God thinks about our fears.

I'm not coming from a place of having totally figured this out and wanting to impart my secrets to you here, but as a fellow Christian who is fighting the good fight alongside you.

Fears color my thoughts on a daily basis: *Will my daughter and I be safe today as we're out and about? What if someone breaks into our house tonight? What if my Lyme disease comes back?* We all have lingering fears that we can't seem to shake. And then there are more acute fears connected to circumstances: *What if our plane is hijacked? What news will the doctor deliver today? What if my boss tells me I'm fired? What if...*

The what-ifs are never ending.

The enemy of our souls uses fear as a killjoy and peace-stealer, blinding us to what is ours in Jesus Christ, and I am convinced that the methods we often employ to deal with our fears are unrealistic and powerless to help us.

That's one of the reasons I wrote this book.

## What This Book Won't Do

When it comes to fear, there are a few qualifications we should make. First, we cannot deal with fear simply by choosing fearlessness. Often, we look within ourselves for strength and bravery (or we look to self-help experts, who tell us to look within ourselves). But the trouble with this is that *we are the problem*. Looking within ourselves for a solution to fear is like a drowning swimmer trying to scrounge up more energy when what they need is rescue. Self-help is a powerless method of dealing with fear.

Second, our ultimate goal in fighting fear is not to become fearless, but to know and love and *fear* the One who empowers us in the fight. The Christian life certainly includes the benefits and blessings of walking with Jesus (such as the power to fight fear), but it's *knowing Jesus* that is our primary aim. When fearlessness is

our aim, it's easy for us to see him as a means to this end, as some kind of divine self-help expert who can aid us in reaching our goals. Instead, in our fight against fear, our ultimate goal is to know and love and *fear* Jesus. We'll focus on this goal throughout the book.

Third, fighting our fears is a process that tends to happen gradually. Yes, Jesus has completely broken fear's power, but this does not mean that fear is no longer a problem for those who have faith in him. Has Jesus defeated sin and the devil? No doubt. And can Jesus do an astounding and dramatic work in our souls to free us from certain fears? Absolutely. But the issue remains that Christians live in a now-but-not-yet reality, and while sin's power is indeed broken, its presence is ongoing. Sanctification—transformation into Christlikeness—happens gradually. The expectation that *Jesus automatically equals fearlessness* is unrealistic and therefore can be defeating for Christians who can't seem to overcome their fears.

So here's what this book won't do: It most likely won't help you become fearless.

That's what some other books on fear will promise you—but that's not the way the Christian life generally works. God gives us all kinds of commands that are impossible for us, in our own strength, to keep:

- “Go, and from now on sin no more” (John 8:11).
- “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4).
- “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

So when Jesus says, “Fear not” and “Do not be afraid,” he knows full well that we won't obey him perfectly. We will continue to

struggle with fear in this life. But that’s exactly why we need him. That’s why he came—to do the impossible for us. To give us what we need to obey his commands. To rescue us and give us grace and power to fight our fears.

To help us know him, trust him, treasure him, glorify him, *fear him*.

And that’s my prayer for this book: not that it will promise total elimination of your fears, but that God will use it to help you fight your fears as you learn to trust his character and promises.

## Fear and God’s Word

The Christian life is a battle, and Scripture calls itself a sword. When we are afraid, what we need isn’t powerless self-help, misdirected goals, or an overpromise; what we need is an effective weapon with which to fight our fears. We need *truth*. So many fears are rooted in untruths that we must wield God’s powerful, unchanging Word of truth against what we’re thinking and feeling. We must fight the good fight with “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). We must fight fear with an even greater fear.

So here’s where we’re going: First, we’ll explore the problem of fear. *Where does fear come from? Is all fear bad? What is the key to becoming less fearful?* Then we’ll open God’s Word to see *who he is*, and after that, *what he’s promised*, specifically six of God’s precious and very great promises (2 Peter 1:4) that directly address six of our greatest fears.

We’ll see how the antidote to fear isn’t self-esteem or fearlessness but our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who is worthy to be feared.

Each chapter will seek to answer two questions: “How is this promise fulfilled in Jesus?” and “With the help of Christ, how can I learn to trust this promise?” At the end of each chapter, we’ll get practical with how God’s promises equip us to fight fear, adapting some concepts from Puritan preacher John Flavel’s book *Triumphing over Sinful Fear*:

- **Ponder:** We’ll memorize verses to wield in our fight against fear.
- **Preserve:** We’ll consider who God is and how he’s been faithful.
- **Prepare:** We’ll think about how God promises to be with us in the future.
- **Pray:** We’ll respond in praise, confession, and thanksgiving and ask God for his help.

## Fear Not

Friend, all of God’s promises apply to you when you are united to his Son by faith. Jesus Christ purchased his people by his blood shed on the cross, and when you trust in him, everything that’s his becomes yours, including all the promises of God that he fulfilled. My senior pastor, Colin Smith, says, “Your strategy for fighting your fear will be to confront it by looking through it and beyond it to Jesus Christ and putting your trust in him.”<sup>1</sup> If you’ve never considered him before now, I pray you will find in Jesus all you’ve been searching for and that this book will help you do that.

So consider your fears: Are you afraid of what tomorrow might bring? Of the diagnosis? Of putting food on the table and a roof

over your family's head? Are you scared of what other people think of you? Does the reality of death terrify you?

Then you're in the right place. When God commands us to "fear not" in Scripture, thankfully that command comes with a promise: "What is impossible with man is possible with God" (Luke 18:27). Let's trust that promise and begin.

SECTION ONE

*the problem  
of fear*

## I AM GOD (When You Aren't Afraid Enough)

*The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.*

*Psalm 25:14*

**M**Y FIRST GOAL in this book isn't to help you feel less afraid—it's actually to make you *more* afraid. Let me explain: The root of our problem with fear isn't that we are too afraid, but that we aren't afraid enough of the God who is worthy to be feared.

Recently, I had a conversation with a woman who seemed certain about her ideas of God. She explained that God lives in every one of our souls and that he's whatever each religion says he is. These seem like two different viewpoints, but they have the same foundation: *God is whomever we want him to be.*

This is a common belief. Our contemporary culture celebrates a definition of “god” that works for the individual, calling ultimate truth an imposition and an attack upon human freedom. We are all on our own spiritual journeys, people say, and therefore, we will all have our own grasp of who God is.

But what if the truth about God is absolute and clear? What if we don’t need to wonder about him because he has revealed himself to us?

This would change everything, and it has. We can know who God is because he has told us in our Bibles. Far more than a history book or pages of information, the Bible is God *speaking*, revealing to us precisely who he is so we’re not left guessing and groping around in the dark. Pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards once said, “’Tis rational to suppose, that when God speaks to the world, there should be something in his word or speech vastly different from men’s word.”<sup>1</sup> And there is—our God communicates with us uniquely and powerfully through Scripture, which is this “vastly different” word. It is God’s inspired Word that is without error: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–18).

We can know, without a doubt, who God is *because he has told us*.

## The Beginning of Wisdom

When it comes to knowing what we’re afraid of and why we’re afraid, the truth that God speaks to us in the Bible matters. Since God has wonderfully revealed himself to us through his Word,

our exploration of fear must start and end by looking at him, not at ourselves. Of course, this seems counterintuitive: *Don't I need to look at myself to grasp why I'm afraid?* But like any sick person who can't discern the nature of their sickness, and who can't heal apart from a doctor's diagnosis and treatment, we must look to the Great Physician for help and healing. We must begin with the God who speaks.

This is why it is such good news that God hasn't left us wondering about him but has revealed himself through his Word. We'll only see ourselves rightly if we see him rightly, and we'll only learn to fight our fears as we learn of God and listen to his diagnosis and treatment—his very words. This is why King Solomon wrote in Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”

Do you want insight into your fears? Do you want wisdom about how to fight them? True wisdom and insight are found in learning to fear God.

## God, Who Is Worthy to Be Feared

So then, let's take a look at some verses that tell us who God is. If you're like me, when you see a large chunk of Scripture in a book, you might be tempted to skim these or skip them altogether. But I encourage you not to. Read these verses slowly and carefully. Let them sink in.

Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

Exodus 15:11

The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven.

1 Samuel 2:10

Will not his majesty terrify you, and the dread of him fall upon you?

Job 13:11

Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you?

Psalms 71:19

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Psalms 145:13

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

Isaiah 40:28

It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.

Jeremiah 51:15

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Romans 11:33

He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

1 Timothy 6:15–16

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Revelation 1:8



What do these Scriptures tell you about God? That his character is unblemished, his works are wonderful, his justice is perfect, and his purposes cannot be thwarted. That the Creator who delicately knit you together in your mother’s womb also formed the depths of the sea and the heights of the mountains. That the Maker who fashioned the tiniest of insects also designed the entire solar system, and that the Almighty One who said, “Let there be” in the beginning upholds it all to this day. Our God is awesome in power, unmatched in wisdom, and beautiful in his glory. He is transcendent and holy, holy, holy—above and apart from all things.

God’s holiness leads us to recognize our lowliness before him. John Calvin said that “man is never sufficiently touched and affected by the awareness of his lowly state until he has compared himself with God’s majesty.”<sup>2</sup> When we glimpse God in his greatness, we can’t help but wonder along with King David, “What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:4). God is not like us; he is holy and

awesome. When we behold God's majesty and hear testimonies of his greatness in Scripture, there is only one right response, and it's the response he intends for us to have: The God of the universe is infinitely worthy to be feared.

### What Is the Fear of God?

And what does this kind of fear look like? The fear of the Lord means *to worship God with the reverence and awe his glory deserves*.

Since the creation of man, God's intention was that we fear him. Out of the overflow of God's infinite fullness, he created us to walk closely with him in love and obedience (Genesis 1:26–27; 3:8) and to be in perfect fellowship with him and with one another. God wasn't obligated to make anything—he was fully satisfied in himself<sup>3</sup>—rather, he desired to share himself with, and reflect himself through, all he would make. So his incomparable perfections overflowed in a life-giving display of creativity and generosity. God made, and it was good (Genesis 1:31). The only fear humankind knew was of the One who made them—a *worshipful reverence and awe of his glory*.

In Deuteronomy 10, Moses beautifully describes this good and godly fear:

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?

vv. 12–13

To fear God means we desire him above all else. It means we follow him eagerly, out of love. It means we serve him, and him only, with all of our strength, trusting his character and purposes and obeying his words. It means we worship him with the reverence and awe his glory deserves.

Yet, when I look at this passage it's clear to me that I *don't* fear God as I ought, that no one does, for that matter.

If fearing him means walking in all his ways and loving him with all my heart and soul, then I've failed miserably.

We all have.

## Distorted Fear

God's beautiful glory beckons us to respond in worshipful fear, but something has gone seriously wrong. Rather than revere him, our world defames him. Rather than delight in him, we worship ourselves and the things God has made. And rather than obey him without question, we do so only when it's convenient for us—

No, we do not fear God as we ought to. Instead, we fear anything and everything he has made.

What happened?

When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, sin entered the world and corrupted everything, including what and whom we fear.<sup>4</sup> Because of sin's effects, God gave us a protective response system for legitimate dangers, what John Flavel calls *natural fear*. Natural fear "is not always sinful," Flavel says, "but it is always the fruit and consequence of sin."<sup>5</sup> There's a reason that firefighters wear suits, zoo animals require cages, meteorologists warn against hurricanes, and our protective instincts kick in when our kids are

in danger. These are fearful situations brought about by sin's brokenness, and God has given us the ability to respond accordingly. Jon Bloom describes this as God's mercy:

When fear moves us to avoid things that are truly dangerous, we experience just how merciful a gift it can be. God created fear to help keep us free. He meant it to protect us from all manner of real harm so we can remain as free as possible to live in the joy he intended.<sup>6</sup>

Even as sin corrupted creation, our merciful God gave us instincts against its fruit, and we should be thankful for this gift of protective, natural fear. At the same time, we should mourn for what sin did to the human soul. Sin turned awe of God into terror before him, reverence into rebellion against him, and worship of God alone into idolatry. *Sin distorted the fear of the Lord.*

We see this in Adam and Eve's response to their disobedience as they hid from their Creator, with whom they previously had walked in fellowship. Instead of going to God for forgiveness, "the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8). If God had not sought out the couple, Colin Smith writes, they would have remained hidden:

The natural sequel to sin is not repentance, but hiding. The sinner's first impulse is to run from God.<sup>7</sup>

Can you think of a time you tried to hide your sin from God or ran from him? I see this response in our young daughter, who runs

away and pretends she doesn't hear us when she has done something wrong. The fear of the Lord that was intended for our joy and freedom—worship with reverence and awe—sin has twisted into something enslaving, something condemning. Sin makes us unholy enemies of a holy God as we attempt to hide ourselves from what our sin deserves.

### Terrified Fear of God's Wrath

To be God's enemy is the most terrifying of all fears “for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18). The consequence of Adam and Eve's sin was physical and spiritual death, alienation from their Creator, and the corruption of the creation—all of which we inherited, and all of which make us God's enemies and condemn us before him: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned . . . one trespass led to condemnation for all men” (Romans 5:12, 18).

God's wrath is his right and just response to the sin that offends his holiness. In John Stott's words, “God's holiness exposes sin; his wrath opposes it. So sin cannot approach God, and God cannot tolerate sin.”<sup>8</sup> The doctrine of sin is unpopular in our world and even our churches because it is offensive, difficult to swallow, and intimidating, as it should be. But to ignore or belittle the reality of God's wrath doesn't mean it disappears. To deny it is our *death*. R.C. Sproul writes,

Do we consider the wrath of God as a primitive or obscene concept? Is the very notion of hell an insult to us? If so, it is clear

that the God we worship is not a holy God: Indeed He is not God at all.<sup>9</sup>

God is holy, and sin is anything but. God created us to commune with him, but instead we cower. Sin twisted the fear of our Creator from worshipful reverence and awe of him into rebellion against him, idolatry, and as a result, terror before him. The once awesome fear of the Lord has become awful to us—

And when we no longer fear God as we ought, the result is that we fear lesser things too much.

The root of our problem with fear isn't that we're too afraid, but that we aren't afraid enough of the One who is to be feared.

### Learning to Fear God

If the fear of God means worshiping him with the reverence and awe his glory deserves, and if sin has distorted this fear, then where do we go from here? What hope is there for sinners who have chosen our own way and idolized lesser things, placing ourselves under the terrifying wrath of God and bearing the fruit of fears upon fears?

How can we learn to be afraid in the best way and return to a good and right fear of the Lord?

We can't—not on our own, at least. But nothing is impossible with God. He seeks the guilty and ashamed, inviting us out of hiding and into the fear-exposing light of his presence. He grants us a glimpse of his greatness, and a grasp of our lowliness, that leads us to fall on our knees and cry out for his mercy and forgiveness. The God who is to be feared is also the Great Physician, who is

more than able to work a miracle in us, healing what has been distorted by sin.

Our all-powerful, infinite, awesome God gives us this wonderful promise in Psalm 25:

For your name's sake, O Lord,  
pardon my guilt, for it is great.  
Who is the man who fears the Lord?  
Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.  
His soul shall abide in well-being,  
and his offspring shall inherit the land.  
The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him,  
and he makes known to them his covenant.

vv. 11–14

Those who confess their sin to God—“pardon my guilt, for it is great”—know the beginnings of what it is to fear him. Those who come to him with a broken and contrite spirit, the Lord promises to instruct. And those who acknowledge their lowliness before him will be ready to receive the covenant of his friendship, secured by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

To him, we turn next.

## LEARNING TO TRUST



**PONDER.** Memorize Psalm 25:14: “The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.”

**PRESERVE.** How have you related to God in the past? How do you relate to him right now? What words would you use to describe him?

**PREPARE.** To see ourselves rightly, we must see God rightly, and he uses his Word to show us who he is and who we are. How could you make Bible reading a more consistent part of your every day?

**PRAY.** *Holy God, there is no one like you. You and you alone are perfectly righteous, infinitely wise and powerful, and without limits. I know I have not feared you as your holiness deserves. Make me more and more aware of the sin within me that offends you. Give me a desire to seek you through your Word, to know you truly, and to fear you as you always intended me to. Show me my need for your intervention, that only you can change me, and lead me to Jesus. In his name, amen.*



*The friendship  
of the Lord  
is for those who fear him,  
and he makes known  
to them his COVENANT.*

PSALM 25:14