

Excerpts From
Fearless: Imagine Your Life Without Fear
By Max Lucado
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Walk Out on Fear

We fear being sued, finishing last, going broke; we fear the mole on the back, the new kid on the block, the sound of the clock as it ticks us closer to the grave. We sophisticate investment plans, create elaborate security systems, and legislate stronger military, yet we depend on mood-altering drugs more than any other generation in history. Moreover, “the average child today . . . has the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the 1950s.”¹

Fear, it seems, has taken a hundred-year lease on the building next-door and set up shop. Oversize and rude, fear is unwilling to share the heart with happiness. Happiness complies. Do you ever see the two together? Can one be happy and afraid at the same time? Clear thinking and afraid? Confident and afraid? Merciful and afraid? No. Fear is the big bully in the high school hallway: brash, loud, and unproductive. For all the noise fear makes and room it takes, fear does little good.

Fear never wrote a symphony or poem, negotiated a peace treaty, or cured a disease. Fear never pulled a family out of poverty or a country out of bigotry. Fear never saved a marriage or a business. Courage did that. Faith did that. People who refused to consult or cower to their timidities did that. But fear itself? Fear herds us into a prison and slams the doors.

Wouldn't it be great to walk out?

Imagine your life wholly untouched by angst. What if faith, not fear, was your default reaction to threats? If you could hover a fear magnet over your heart and extract every last shaving of dread, insecurity, and doubt, what would remain? Envision a day, just one day, absent the dread of failure, rejection, and calamity. Can you imagine a life with no fear?

Look Into the Storm

The disciples fought the storm for nine cold, skin-drenching hours. And about 4:00 a.m. the unspeakable happened. They spotted someone coming on the water. “‘A ghost!’ they said, crying out in terror” (v. 26 MSG). They didn't expect Jesus to come to them this way.

Neither do we. We expect him to come in the form of peaceful hymns or Easter Sundays or quiet retreats. We expect to find Jesus in morning devotionals, church suppers, and meditation. We never expect to see him in a bear market, pink slip, lawsuit, foreclosure, or war. We never expect to see him in a storm. But it is in storms that he does his finest work, for it is in storms that he has our keenest attention.

Jesus replied to the disciples' fear with an invitation worthy of inscription on every church cornerstone and residential archway. “‘Don't be afraid,’ he said. ‘Take courage. I am here!’ ” (v. 27 NLT).

Power inhabits those words. To awaken in an ICU and hear your husband say, “I am here.” To lose your retirement yet feel the support of your family in the words “We are here.” When a Little Leaguer spots Mom and Dad in the bleachers watching the game, “I am here” changes everything. Perhaps that's why God repeats the “I am here” pledge so often.

The Lord is near. (Phil. 4:5 NIV)

You are in me, and I am in you. (John 14:20 NIV)

I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matt. 28:20 NIV)

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:28 NIV)

Nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. (Rom. 8:38 NLT)

We cannot go where God is not. Look over your shoulder; that's God following you. Look into the storm; that's Christ coming toward you.

What Courage Does Not

There's a stampede of fear out there. Let's not get caught in it. Let's be among those who stay calm. Let's recognize danger but not be overwhelmed. Acknowledge threats but refuse to be defined by them. Let others breathe the polluted air of anxiety, not us. Let's be numbered among those who hear a different voice, God's. Enough of these shouts of despair, wails of doom. Why pay heed to the doomsdayer on Wall Street or the

purveyor of gloom in the newspaper? We will incline our ears elsewhere: upward. We will turn to our Maker, and because we do, we will fear less.

Courage does not panic; it prays. Courage does not bemoan; it believes. Courage does not languish; it listens. It listens to the voice of God calling 366 times⁵ in Scripture, once for every day of a leap year, “Fear not!” It hears Christ’s voice comforting through the hospital corridors, graveyards, and war zones:

Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven. (Matt. 9:2)

Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid. (Matt. 14:27)

When reports come in of wars and rumored wars, keep your head and don’t panic. (Matt. 24:6 MSG)

Let not your heart be troubled. (John 14:1)

Don’t let your hearts be troubled or afraid. (John 14:27 NCV)

Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Luke 12:7)

Don’t be afraid. (Luke 12:7 NIV)

Pull Back the Curtain on Fear

It’s our duty to pull back the curtains, to expose our fears, each and every one. Like vampires, they can’t stand the sunlight. Financial fears, relationship fears, professional fears, safety fears—call them out in prayer. Drag them out by the hand of your mind, and make them stand before God and take their comeuppance!

Jesus made his fears public. He “offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death” (Heb. 5:7 NIV). He prayed loudly enough to be heard and recorded, and he begged his community of friends to pray with him.

His prayer in the garden becomes, for Christians, a picture of the church in action—a place where fears can be verbalized, pronounced, stripped down, and denounced; an escape from the “wordless darkness” of suppressed frights. A healthy church is where our fears go to die. We pierce them through with Scripture, psalms of celebration and lament. We melt them in the sunlight of confession. We extinguish them with the waterfall of worship, choosing to gaze at God, not our dreads.

The next time you find yourself facing a worst-case moment, do this. Verbalize your angst to a trusted circle of God-seekers. This is an essential step. Find your version of Peter, James, and John. (One hopes yours will stay awake longer.) The big deal (and good news) is this: you needn’t live alone with your fear.

The Decaffeinated Life

If only we could order life the way we order gourmet coffee. Wouldn’t you love to mix and match the ingredients of your future?

“Give me a tall, extra-hot cup of adventure, cut the dangers, with two shots of good health.”

“A decaf brew of longevity, please, with a sprinkle of fertility. Go heavy on the agility and cut the disability.”

“I’ll have a pleasure mocha with extra stirrings of indulgence. Make sure it’s consequence free.”

“I’ll go with a grande happy-latte, with a dollop of love sprinkled with Caribbean retirement.”

Take me to *that* coffee shop. Too bad it doesn’t exist. Truth is, life often hands us a concoction entirely different from the one we requested. Ever feel as though the barista-from-above called your name and handed you a cup of unwanted stress?

“Joe Jones, enjoy your early retirement. Looks as if it comes with marital problems and inflation.”

“Mary Adams, you wanted four years of university education, then kids. You’ll be having kids first. Congratulations on your pregnancy.”

“A hot cup of job transfer six months before your daughter’s graduation, Susie. Would you like some patience with that?”

Life comes caffeinated with surprises. Modifications. Transitions. Alterations. You move down the ladder, out of the house, over for the new guy, up through the system. All this moving. Some changes welcome, others not. And in those rare seasons when you think the world has settled down, watch out. One seventy-seven-year-old recently told a friend of mine, “I’ve had a good life. I am enjoying my life now, and I am looking forward to the future.” Two weeks later a tornado ripped through the region, taking the lives of his son, daughter-in-law, grandson, and daughter-in-law’s mother. We just don’t know, do we? On our list of fears, the fear of what’s next demands a prominent position. We might request a decaffeinated life, but we don’t get it.

Fear Sells

Fear’s been making a good living lately.

Here’s a test. How far do you have to go to hear the reminder “Be afraid”? How near is your next “You are in trouble” memo? A flip of the newspaper page? A turn of the radio dial? A glance at the Internet update on the computer monitor? According to the media the world is one scary place.

And we suspect a campaign to keep it that way. Fear sells. Fear glues watchers to their seats, sells magazines off the racks, and puts money in the pockets of the system. Newscasts have learned to rely on a glossary of trouble-stirring phrases to keep our attention: “Coming up, the frightening truth about sitting in traffic.” “The man who let his wife shop too much.” “What you can do to avoid the danger.” “What you may not know about the water you drink.”

Frank Furedi documented an increasing use of fear in the media by counting the appearances of the term *at risk* in British newspapers. In 1994 the term appeared 2,037 times. By the end of the next year, the total had doubled. It increased by half in 1996. During the year 2000 *at risk* was printed more than eighteen thousand times.² Honestly, did world danger increase ninefold in six years? We are peppered with bad news. Global warming, asteroid attack, SARS, genocide, wars, earthquakes, tsunamis, AIDS . . . Does it ever stop? The bad news is taking its toll. We are the most worried culture that has ever lived. For the first time since the end of the Second World War, parents expect that life for the next generation will be worse than it was for them.³

The Heart of the Matter

As heart surgeries go, mine was far from the riskiest. But any procedure that requires four hours of probes inside your heart is enough to warrant an added prayer. So on the eve of my surgery, Denalyn, I, and some kind friends offered our share. We were staying at a hotel adjacent to the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio. We asked God to bless the doctors and watch over the nurses. After we chatted a few minutes, they wished me well and said good-bye. I needed to go to bed early. But before I could sleep, I wanted to offer one more prayer . . . alone.

I took the elevator down to the lobby and found a quiet corner and began to think. *What if the surgery goes awry? What if this is my final night on earth? Is there anyone with whom I should make my peace? Do I need to phone any person and make amends?* I couldn't think of anyone. (So if you are thinking I should have called you, sorry. Perhaps we should talk.)

Next I wrote letters to my wife and daughters, each beginning with the sentence “If you are reading this, something went wrong in the surgery.”

Then God and I had the most honest of talks. We began with a good review of my first half century. The details would bore you, but they entertained us. I thanked him for grace beyond measure and for a wife who descended from the angels. My tabulation of blessings could have gone on all night and threatened to do just that. So I stopped and offered this prayer: *I'm in good hands, Lord. The doctors are prepared; the staff is experienced. But even with the best of care, things happen. This could be my final night in this version of life, and I'd like you to know, if that's the case, I'm okay.*

And I went to bed. And slept like a baby. As things turned out, no angel came. I saw no fedora. I recovered from the surgery, and here I am, strong as ever, still pounding away at the computer keyboard. One thing is different, though. This matter of dying bravely?

I think I will.

May you do the same.

For more on *Fearless: Imagine Your Life Without Fear*

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