

Understanding Fear¹

Dave Thurston

Fear	<i>Uneasy, worried, nervous, anxious, tense, tight, spooked, haunted, scared, afraid, panicked, terrified and petrified.</i>
What fear communicates.	Something you value is under threat. The future holds the potential for loss. Fears are probably the single best map for what you actually value and treasure.
How fear makes us relate.	Our fears not only tell us what we love, they push us toward extremes in relationships. Fear urges us to either jump back from others or cling to them like driftwood in a shipwreck, depending on our perception of what will most likely keep us safe.
How fear motivates.	Fear motivates us to seek safety, control and certainty. All three, however, can go bad in a hurry when a lion isn't stalking you. Safety is great, until you cling so tightly to it that you are no longer willing to step out of your zone of (perceived) refuge even to love others or obey God. Fundamentally, the problem with all three of these methods of guarding against our broken and dangerous world is that they present a frightfully strong temptation to trust ourselves rather than God.
How to...	
Identify fear	Physically, strong fear tends to cause shortness of breath, increased heart rate, clammy palms, tensed muscles, and racing thoughts. Nervous twitches (in the face or constant fidgeting of hands or legs) is not uncommon. Milder, more baseline fear might show up as digestive issues (ulcers and irritable bowel syndrome can both result from long-term anxiety), headaches, fatigue etc, etc. OCD, "What if" questions.
Examine fear	In what contexts do I feel this fear? <i>What factors press your buttons? Is there a particular location? Are there certain times of the year or particular activities when fear manifests itself?</i> What are you doing with your fear? <i>What do you find yourself doing in response to fear, in response to places, people, times or activities? i.e. self-medicate, alcohol, Facebook etc.</i> What are you valuing? <i>What would I care if X happened? Listen to your fears; they are telling you something very important about the shape of your hopes, your dreams and most fundamentally, your worship.</i>
Evaluate fear	Is my reaction to this fear godly and constructive, or am I acting in destructive and sinful ways? How likely will this feared event come to pass? What is God wanting you to understand about your fear?
Act in response to fear	Fear questions God's love. A narrative to hold on to is Mark 4:35-41 The disciples were mega afraid and asked... <i>Don't you care if we drown?</i> Jesus rebuked them, after stilling the storm, for their little faith. Go through this process. Exercise. Face your fears. Go on the offensive in any part of your life where you are self-medicating.

¹ Based on *Untangling Emotions* J. Alisdair Groves & Winston T. Smith p151-167.