

Related to the word courage is encourage, meaning to hearten or put heart into. Look to God to give you heart and you will be able to meet fear with Divine assurance.

In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

Banishing Fear

One way of overcoming fear is to put yourself at the service of others.

Peter, for instance, was so fearful at the time of Christ's trial that he denied Him three times. Transformed by the power of God, he became the leader of the early church and later embraced the crucifixion he once dreaded.

Mary Kinsolving of New York tells how she came to understand "that I could overcome my own fears by trying to help someone else."

As a girl she was afraid of crossing the street after having been hit by a car. An elderly woman, noticing her fear one day, came up to her and said, "I don't see very well. May I hold your hand when I cross the street?"

But after crossing, the old woman recrossed the street without trouble. She had pretended poor eyesight to help a fearful girl. Her gesture left a lasting impression.

At one time singer-songwriter Deanna Edwards of Colorado was fearful of using her talents in a hospital setting. Today, as a therapist, her music helps bring healing and hope to hundreds of patients and their families.

"Once I began to allow my love to outgrow my fear, volunteer service became very important to me," she says.

As Scripture reminds us, "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 Jn. 4:18).

Other Resources

Here are some other things you can do to overcome the fears and worries that keep you from being all that God wants you to be.

■ **Turn to prayer.** President Abraham Lincoln was fearful about many things as the Civil War tore the country apart. His much-used Bible falls open easily to Psalm 34, where a finger smudge can be found by this line: "I sought the Lord and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears."

■ **Try controlling the fear.** Some people find simple relaxation techniques helpful. These include deep breathing, tensing and then relaxing selected muscles, and visualizing positive images.

"You can cope by saying, 'I'm anxious, but I can handle this'," says Albany psychologist Alan Cohen.

■ **Meet the fear head on.** Writer Malcolm Boyd used to fear public speaking. His legs shook, he sweated and couldn't concentrate. So he decided to solicit more speaking engagements, write his remarks on cards and then rehearse thoroughly.

"It worked," he says. "After a half-dozen such speaking engagements—agonizing for me—I began to enjoy public speaking..."

■ **Build your confidence.** Members of an American Cancer Society support group for women living with cancer took part in a rigorous wilderness trip sponsored by Outward Bound to help them overcome the fear that comes from feeling helpless in the face of a terminal illness.

The feeling "that we're always there for each other" has carried over into the support group, says one woman.

■ **Act decisively.** When you're "scared to death," gather up the courage to take the first step and then follow through advises Mother Angelica, a nun who started a major religious television network on little more than faith and energy. "Being afraid is not a problem, the problem is doing nothing when you're afraid," she says.

■ **Talk through your fear.** Crisis counselor Phyllis Keys of California remembers receiving a lot of calls from frightened people after a severe earthquake. The calls, she said, came mostly "from people who just needed to talk to somebody about their fears." Frequently friends and family members can be helpful in talking through fearful situations.

■ **Join a support group.** Information on support groups is frequently available from local mental-health agencies, libraries, hospitals and churches. The National Self-Help Clearinghouse in New York maintains up-to-date listings of self-help organizations.

■ **Seek professional help.** If your fears persist and are getting in the way, search out a professional counselor. Ask your family

doctor, a friend, or a trusted priest, minister or rabbi for recommendations.

Fear is the enemy of happiness. It can make us suspicious, self-centered, immobile and full of self-pity. In this way, we are put in hell little by little. But we were made for heaven and there is always grace. God's love is bigger than all of our fears. Trust in God and take heart in the scriptural message:

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalms 27:1

Do Not Fear

Do not fear what may happen tomorrow. The same loving Father who cares for you today, will care for you tomorrow and every day.

Either He will shield you from suffering or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it.

Be at peace, then, and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginings.

St. Francis de Sales

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Be Not Afraid

Fear not for I am with you.

Isaiah 41:10

On a warm Florida evening, Sharon Komlos was driving home to her husband and three children when a car pulled alongside hers and a man fired a gun at her. One bullet immediately blinded her in what was the start of a brutal ordeal during which she was raped and stabbed.

During her hours of captivity she fought down fear and struggled with her assailant. She fought against fear again during a long recovery, refusing to give in to self-pity. She still fights against fear.

"I've never operated on fear in my life, and I refuse to do so because of this incident. How can I live a healthy life if I worry every time I'm alone?" she writes in "Feel the Laughter."

The Faces of Fear

Although Mrs. Komlos has every reason to be afraid, she will not allow fear to keep her from filling her God-given mission in life. Her example is an inspiration to anyone who has ever experienced the inner tension, the tight muscles, the clammy hands, the dry mouth, the pounding heart, the finicky stomach that are the physical symptoms of fear.

But what is fear really? How can it get such a grip on us that it keeps us from doing what God wants us to do? Can fear be overcome?

Yes, fear can be overcome. The process starts with an understanding of some of the components of fear.

Fear itself is an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by the anticipation of or

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awareness of danger, according to one dictionary.

Anxiety is extreme and overwhelming fear which can paralyze us and hinder our ability to act, to make decisions and carry out our mission.

Panic is sudden, severe, overpowering anxiety often marked by lightheadedness, heart palpitations and a sense of impending doom.

A phobia is irrational dread of an object, person, act or situation. Some people are afraid to leave home; others can't get into elevators, fly in airplanes or walk in public places.

Consider the differences in the stories of Daniel Goleman, the psychologist-author of "Vital Lies, Simple Truths," and Carol, an American tourist in Italy.

"Just once in my life have I been paralyzed by fear," Goleman writes. The occasion was a college calculus exam for which he had not studied. He remembers sitting motionless staring at the exam questions. "What strikes me most about that dreadful moment was how constricted my mind became," he notes. "At the hour's end I rose, a zombie, leaving my blank exam book still open."

Carol's experience with fear came while riding in a darkened train through a long mountain tunnel.

"I remember feeling like I was in a steel black box, hurtling through space, without any sense of direction. I was sure I could no longer breathe and that I was being buried alive."

She was experiencing claustrophobia.

Fear Is Normal

Fear is a normal human emotion and at times a useful one.

For instance, nervous tension before giving a speech, appearing in court, going on a job interview, or in anticipation of retirement could help us to prepare more thoroughly.

Professional basketball player A.C. Green describes what it's like when fear and a worthy opponent act as motivators:

"It becomes the most important thing in your life not to let any loose ball go past you, not to let any rebound go to the opponent."

The fear of being mugged could lead us to

Youthful Fears

Parents are responsible for providing a secure environment for their children. But no matter how good a job parents do, young people inevitably will experience fear.

For children, an important issue is dependence; for adolescents it's independence. So while the young may feel some of the same fears which adults do, they also have fears of their own.

What are children afraid of? For a three-year-old, maybe monsters or wild animals. For all children, abandonment and the death of a parent; for many, getting a bad report card or seeing parents argue; for all too many, street violence, crime and drugs.

But what the young child fears most is being humiliated; for instance, being sent to the principal's office.

Explains Harvard child psychiatrist Ann Epstein, a child's self-image is shaky and his sense of guilt "is much stronger and more moralistic than in adults. So the idea of getting caught doing something bad, in the child's mind, may mean to them that they will always be seen as bad, or if they're embarrassed, that they'll never attain their dignity again."

take prudent precautions or avoid desolate areas in the middle of the night if possible. Fear of a job lay-off might encourage someone to seek retraining or develop other skills.

Fear Can Destroy

But fear can be destructive. It can get so out of hand that it can destroy our life and poison personal relationships. It can even smother one's inner spirit and the motivation to change things for the better.

Fear of major surgery, for instance, keeps some people from getting needed treatment.

Fear of nuclear war keeps some people from doing anything at all to advance the cause of peace.

Fear of crime can paralyze almost any community, like the Houston neighborhood where the elderly are afraid to leave their homes. "I worry about going to the store," says Glenn Roberts, a retired longshoreman. "They'll

As for adolescents, a big concern, says family counselor Eda LeShan, is to be popular and accepted. There's a "fear of not doing the things that others are doing because you're afraid they won't like you."

Teens also have fears about the future, about career choices, and whether to continue schooling.

One study showed ninth graders ranking school performance tops, with personal appearance another big fear.

Kathleen McCoy, researcher on teen depression, says "a significant loss" is a real fear—death, divorce, the loss of a friend.

Parents are a major source of support for their children. Counselors advise that you listen for the real fears the young may be trying to express.

In children, the fear may be disguised and will take patience to uncover. Adolescents may push you away, but that doesn't mean they no longer need you. "Be there" for them.

Says California counselor Mudita Nisiker, "Parents can give their advice—after they've listened and really know what's troubling a child."

knock you over the head for a dollar."

Fear of other races or groups is the seedbed of prejudice everywhere and keeps some people locked into less desirable neighborhoods.

Fears imprison and "keep us from forward movement on the road to maturity, happiness and true love," in the words of Father John Powell, S.J., a popular writer.

Facing Up to Fear

Whether our fears are great or small, logical or apparently illogical, rational or irrational, sudden or longstanding, with God's help we can find the courage to face them with calmness, firmness and determination.

God doesn't ask us to come to Him perfect and without fear. He works with us, fears and all, like "clay in the hand of the potter" (Jer. 18:6).