

Give Me your fears

You will get courage and hope in return

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Koert Koster

Fear numbs the mind and can paralyse us. In the worst case, it enforces complete passiveness. Hope, on the other hand, creates life and movement. It makes us active. It makes people look forward to the future.

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Nawoord

Preface

Fear seems to be a basic trait that goes with our post-modern existence. Humans have abandoned all of their securities and the belief in one single truth. That is why they are insecure. Insecurity leads to fear, fear for the unknown, for example. If fear is a bad advisor, it is high time to look elsewhere. Elsewhere with a capital E, that is, of course.

Sin no longer is the basic trait of human existence. Sin – or the feeling of being in sin – has given way to an undetermined fear. For generations, people have lived with the deep realisation that they are in sin. This realisation held them in a grip, sometimes all their life, usually fed by homilies at the local churches. Man had to come clean with this imperfection, if they wanted to appear before God upon dying.

Nowadays, this religious notion no longer bears any significance. Naturally, the current generation has to come clean with the concept of finality. Man today does not view finality in the context of a final, earthly, life, with human limitations. *Sin* was replaced by a non-religious feeling of Man's shortcomings. *Weakness* replaced sin. The crux of Man today is not 'how do I come clean with an uneasy conscience and a holy God?', but: 'How do I get rid of fears that affect me during my earthly life?' in other words, for Christians it is more like: 'how do I get through life on earth?' than it is: 'how do I end up in Heaven?' The way transience is treated, is more dominant. As medical science offers us possibilities of reaching old age in fair health, we do want to reach that old age, too.

I wrote this book from the first hand experiences that people's fears gave me. Many people live in fear. More than that: it is

unlikely that there are people, who are completely free of fear. Besides, there are many kinds of fear that can keep Man a grip. I can see that in the world around me. As I am interested in Man in general, I also take interest in a psychological phenomenon that is so inherently present in Man. This phenomenon, 'fear', Seems to hold people in a grip for short – sometimes longer – periods in life.

I am also fascinated to learn how people in the Bible deal with their fears. Perhaps I can benefit from that, in moments I experience fear. For I see, that the Bible does not only answer my 'sin issue', but also the deeply rooted 'issue of human fear'. Precisely because I have experienced – and still experience – fear in my own life, to me it is a challenge to write about this phenomenon. This topic might perhaps help others – and myself – to gain insight in an undefined psychological phenomenon. To me it is very worthwhile to think about this from a Biblical perspective. In addition, I get another opportunity to say something about the Person who experienced mortal fear. By the path of fear – paired with total rejection and solitude – He was able to become the world's Saviour. That gives me hope.

One more thing about my motivation: The Passion of Jesus inspires me to write about this essential subject. It was an eyeopener for me to see that Jesus not only took my sins upon Him, but that he also carried my fears. That message I would like to share with you.

This preface is the right place for a word of thanks. Especially thanks to those, who tried to cure me of my fears. The conversations that I was allowed to have – also within the context of social care -, have been valuable, in this regard. They

were allowed to show me the way and help me along on the path to the liberation of fears.

Besides that, I want to thank those, who gave me both the time and the opportunity to process this manuscript into a whole, i.e. my wife and my son. Marleen has reviewed all questions and commented on them. She also read a random number of pages and sometimes commented on the text.

Lastly, I want to thank my revisor, Arjen Bakker, for the fact, that he took it upon himself again to provide comment on my work, to edit it and correct it. Naturally, as author, I myself am responsible for the end result.

Hazerswoude-Rijndijk, July 2015

Koert Koster

'Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery' (cf. Hebr.2:14,15 – ESVU w)

Introduction

This book – like several of my other ones – is written in a personal style. That means: Among other things, I use examples from my own life to show how the ‘experiencing of fear’ works, as I see it. With that, this book aims to be *of practical nature and legible to all*.

The ‘cases’ I enter into this book, I predominantly get from the Bible. In the Bible, we mainly meet everyday people who deal with emotions, such as the emotion of fear. The Bible is a thoroughly humane book, that contains stories that not only make you think, but in which we recognise ourselves. People not only have an exemplary role by exemplary behaviour, but also by showing how sometimes they wrestle with their emotions.

For this reason, this book¹ consists of a number of descriptions of stories about people, who experienced what feeling fear is like. They face growing feelings of fearing God, other people, but at times fearing their own self, too. Because what third parties are capable of, pretty much all the people who have ever lived are capable of, as well. The Bible authors hold up a mirror to us, with their characters and persons. A mirror, showing how it can be, how it can be different, and, perhaps, how it should not be at all.

As far as the structure of the book is concerned, the following applies:

¹ This book, because of the rather random choice of stories and Bible quotes, is no systematically complete book about ‘fear in the Bible’. That would require way too much work and studying, and that would not contribute to ‘less fear and more hope’ for its reader. For this book wants to be narrative, contemplative and encouraging. Therefore, it makes for good reading.

In *chapter 1* I will write from my *personal experience*, with the fierce emotion of fear. I am no stranger to fear and fright of people or things. Therefore, I can be next to those, who have known, or still know fear, as a fellow-sufferer. As 'partner in fear' I can sympathise with people who suffer from a fear or panic disorder. It is this receptiveness and vulnerability that I want to share, by listing concrete examples out of my own life, concerning both the past and the present. In addition, I will list concrete and realistic fears, that relate to my human history and experience.

Chapter 2 is about *fear as an 'umbrella term'*. This chapter is of a slightly more theoretical nature. I briefly address so-called psychiatric disorders. Fear and panic disorders are good examples. Very many disorders and phobias are counted amongst the concept of fear or fear disorders. There are many different kinds of fears. We all know the 'healthy fear', which people experience at moments when they are in apparent danger. Fear is like an antenna that sends out a warning, so people can escape danger, or avoid it in time. Phobic distress, however, is one that is disproportionate. It is a disorder that has lost all sense for reality. This unhealthy kind of fear also has many guises. This makes the concept of 'fear' diverse and diffuse².

In *chapter 3*, I will *make connections with the Bible*. In it, I will discuss *expressions and sayings* themed around 'fear', which can be found in the Bible and have found their way into everyday

² Van Dale's dictionary distinguishes between different fears, as well. It describes fear as a 'feeling of constriction and apprehension, caused by a (substantial or presumed) impending harm or danger...' With this definition, it is also mentioned, that Römke believes that fear does not have a particular content, whereas apprehension might. (Van Dale, Utrecht/Antwerp 1999, 13th edition, page 198).

language in The Netherlands. With each of the short discussions, I will refer to Bible verses, if possible, and give examples of people and their fears. I will use one particular translation of the Bible, the *English Standard Version* (ESV). Quotes will be taken from this ESV, unless a different source is mentioned.

In chapters 4 and 5, I will discuss the meaning of people from the Bible in more detail. We are allowed to learn from how they dealt with their fears. On top of those experiences, the Bible can point towards confirmation of human life by God himself. Because, no matter what, we were meant to be, and we are allowed to exist!

Chapter 4 is mainly about the *Old Testament*. In it, we encounter both healthy and unhealthy fear (or apprehension) of the Lord. There are people who fear the Lord, while there is no need for it. But there are also people who do not fear the Lord, where it would be justified. Besides that, there are people of faith who experience fear for people – and the evil – surrounding them. Various examples and Bible verses are mentioned and discussed in this chapter, with special focus on Abraham, Job and Moses.

In chapter 5 I will be zooming in on various persons around Jesus in the *New Testament*. They are mainly people of faith that are confronted with their limits and limitations. During their circumstances, they experience human shortcomings. They sometimes are put on the spot and are startled because of unexpected encounters. The apparition of angels and the risen Lord Jesus Christ at first scare the disciples. The part and attitude Jesus then takes on – with the position He assumes – are contributing factors towards how contacts and emotions are developed further.

Chapter 6 is called 'Give Me your fears'. The title is derived from a famous hit sung originally by Udo Jürgens (note by translator: as far as I know, no version in English exists yet) was made famous in the Netherlands by André Hazes in the nineties. The song was covered later by another Dutch singer, called Guus Meeuwis. The song also worked well during one rendition of the annually performed musical called 'The Passion', which was performed just before Easter, in recent years. Not without reason, either. The song has everything going for it, to justify it being applied to the Passion of Jesus Christ. He took away our fears, in order for us to receive hope, instead. In chapter 6 I will quote and discuss the song, to then apply it to Christians that are allowed to cast all their fears and worries with confidence, because He will take care of it, anyway. (Cf. 1 Peter.5:8).

Logically, the theme of chapter 6 is followed by *chapter 7*, where not so much fear, but hope is predominant: 'You will get Hope in return'. Let it go for a bit, and then directly go for it. Casting fear upon Jesus can happen at the same time as accepting hope. We could call this a *jolly trade*. Jolly, for people, who *trade fear for hope*. Jesus receives our fear, we receive hope.

In chapter 8 I will close, by discussing the theme 'Hope for the future'. The part of the Bible that I base this chapter on, can be found in the book of Jeremiah (Jer. 29:11). The hopeful future God promised the Israelites when they lived in exile in Babel, can offer a perspective to everyone who is living in captivity and fear.

1. Getting personal

A while ago, someone who has worked in health care for years, asked me: 'Koert, do you know what the reason is, why people don't try to do certain things?' 'No, I said, not knowing what he was getting at. The then continued: It is a four-letter word that starts with F and ends with R'. Then it was not so hard to guess anymore: 'Fear'.

I often remembered that moment. I believe that my knowledge is correct. People may, or indeed may not, be driven by fear. Fear has become a baseline for postmodern Man. Since so many matters in life are uncertain, and all grip is gone, the foundation was laid for the unfathomable emotion that is fear.

Nowadays, I cannot say that my life is controlled by fear. But I have to admit, that situations can occur, which make me feel displeasure, and even fear. We all have our own shortcomings. Perhaps we should even say, that we all have our own phobias. Sometimes, Man can be overcome by a certain degree of fear, without an apparent reason.

Let me give an example: Last Summer, I sat all the way in the back of a bus, with my wife and son. We were travelling from Cadzand to Sluis in the Netherlands, to proceed from there towards Knokke (Belgium). Although I do not suffer from claustrophobia or hyperventilation at all, I was struck by this vague, oppressive feeling. My thoughts literally made me feel anxious. When I asked my wife if she felt physically uncomfortable as well, she confirmed my perception. It really was stifling. In that sense, it had not been just me who felt it. The 'perception of fear' that emerged from this, however, also was real, even if it was fed by partially unreal situations

occurring elsewhere in the world. Inside this jam-packed bus, my thoughts jumped to suicide attacks in Israel, but also to traffic accidents involving coaches. I would rather want to be standing at the exit with my wife and my son, than sitting all the way at the back of the bus, where, should anything happen, would be among the last to get out.

Fears in the past

Big fears, that were not unknown to me when I was a little boy, are the following: My dad died young of leukaemia. At that time, he was 34 years old, while I was eight. This single impression left a lasting impression all through my life.

Since then, I have always feared death. For a long time, I woke up with that feeling every morning, and went to bed with it at night. In my sleep, I would dream about this intangible phenomenon. Fear paralysed me as I lay in bed and felt tempted to look underneath my bed to check if all was well there and there were no dead people there. I used to sing away my fears, or I would listen to songs about Jesus, who had conquered death.

There were moments during the night, when it seemed as if *death paralysed me and fear grabbed me by the throat*. It was almost as if I struggled to get up from a stranglehold that squeezed my throat tightly, while I was sleeping. I felt uncomfortable, it was as if I was suffocating, while I was breathing 'normally' anyway. Yet, I experienced it as if I was being pushed into my mattress and my pillow. I could say that I was having demonically charged nightmares, but I cannot say that I was burdened by demons. I do, however, believe, that this fear of death and of the dark nights did not come from God. I

think that there were moments of temptation. God wanted to take away my fears, I just did not know how...

Music at that time, was an important medium to sing away my fears with. Listening to music was a welcome distraction, that would calm me down. Sound drove away the darkness of fear. In my parental home I would climb on a rattan chair, that I would position in front of the counter cabinet, so I could put on a record by Dutch religious singing duo Elly & Rikkert. I did extensively cover this elsewhere³.

Learning to let go: an anecdote

A while ago, I wrote a book about mourning and dealing with grief. As I put the last words to paper, I understood that it would not be the last time I was mourning. Mourning has to be learned, all your life.

Sometimes you need to be taken by the hand and helped along on your way. Man can learn step by step what letting go entails. In my case, it happened on Ascension Day, 2015. My wife, Marleen, had been away to the Dutch town of Hoogeveen on a Wednesday, shopping for some clothes. But not only that. She had hatched a plan. She had attended a party shop to buy three sturdy balloons, filled with helium.

As she came home, she asked me whether I would like to go to the Reest church, the three of us, including our son, to visit my mum's grave. My mother died two and a half years ago after having been ill for three and a half years. She died of cancer. I had not yet visited her grave since she had been buried, simply

³ In my book 'Jesus, the living Hope' I covered my childhood quite extensively, in which Elly & Rikkert' songs played an essential part.

because I did not have the courage to do it. And now there was this proposal. It would become a special way to pass Ascension Day.

I had to process this idea, which surprised me enormously. At first, I thought of our son, Jens. A lot of questions arose in me. Would having this experience at the age of four be good for him and his development? Or at least not bad? And how would it affect me?

Anyway, that Ascension Day, it was not discussed or thought about out loud. We decided to go to the burial site. First, the three of us went to work in the kitchen of my parental home. Marleen had prepared herself very thoroughly, as a good teacher does. My son and I were each given a piece of paper, so that both of us could write something, separately. Make a drawing, for instance, a poem, or just thoughts. It was all about remembering my mum, Jens' grandmother. Kind of like a 'message to my mum, or to our Lord God'.

After creating our work of art as we saw fit, the idea was to then tie it to a string underneath one of the balloons. We folded our page-size paper together and perforated them with one hole each, to then attach them to the balloons, which stuck to the ceiling, because of the gas. But, guess what? The helium-filled balloons could not keep afloat carrying the extra weight, 'collapsed' under the weight and slowly descended. If we were to see these balloons ascend towards Heaven, we should either shorten our message, or cut the paper to a size that would work.

No sooner thought than done. We tried to modify and cut away what we could – barely – do without, as long as the essence

remained. It was hard. After having reduced the memories of my mum, and thus heavily maiming the piece of paper, what remained still was too heavy. I could not entrust everything to heaven. Certain thing I had to learn to let go of whilst still on earth.