

QUESTION: Leon, I've been reading the Book of Matthew in the last few days. I noticed something I hadn't seen before and that is how many times Jesus said to the people "Fear not." Why do you think he spoke so much about fear? Is it that much of a problem for people?

ANSWER: First, you are so right that Jesus spoke lots about fear and many times was very specific about what not to fear, such as don't fear man who can kill the body but after that can do nothing, but fear God who can destroy both body and soul in hell. But many times, it is very general, simply telling the disciples not to be afraid or correcting them for their fear such as in the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Second, as to why we are challenged so much not to be afraid or to live in fear all the time, it is because it is one of the major problems we all deal with in life. When a child enters this world, they have two main fears: the fear of falling and the fear of loud noises. But as we grow it is amazing how many things we learn to fear. We fear what others will think of us and whether we can measure up. Parents teach us to fear things they are afraid of and then we learn even more fears from school, from friends, from media, from songs, from work relationships and on and on it goes. But what is the problem with being afraid of all kinds of things in life? Doesn't that protect us from illnesses and dangers? Think about it from another point of view. How many good things in life have we missed because we were crippled by our fears? If we are afraid to even try, the result is we never live up to the potential God has placed in us.

Third, notice there are legitimate fears to have. “Fear God and keep his commandments” is clear. But what does it really mean? Is it the idea that I am constantly afraid of disappointing God or afraid that he will attack me in some way? I don’t think so. Instead, it is the concept of fear as reverence and awe. We so respect God that we long to walk with him and have his arms around us. Look at Hebrews 12:28-29: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” Most translations use the word “fear” instead of “awe” in this text. Compare this with Revelation 2:10 “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you; the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.”

Finally, look at I John 4:18. “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.” Imagine going through your life without fear haunting you every day. The ultimate cure for fear is love, love for God and for other people. Think of the huge difference between being driven in life by fear or by love. If it’s by fear we live in constant worry, thinking something awful is about to happen, so joy is out of the question. But if love is the driving force in life it changes everything. Look at Paul’s description of love in I Corinthians 13:4-8 “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record

of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” Let’s live our lives with love as the driving force for everything and see the massive changes it makes in us.