

## Our Greatest Fears

Fear is a terrifying thing. Words like cancer, job layoff, divorce, affair, automobile accident, failure, evaluations, and many other words and experiences can affect us at the very core of our lives. Fear robs us of our health, drives us to whatever numbs us, keeps us awake at night, and causes us to make poor decisions. Panic attacks, depression, weight gain or loss, insomnia, irritability, low self-esteem, and many physical symptoms can be traced back to the three most profound and common fears we face. They are:

- ◆ **Fear of Abandonment**
- ◆ **Fear of Not Being Loved**
- ◆ **Fear of Failure**

The **fear of abandonment** is one of our deepest and earliest fears. There is a stanza in the Neil Diamond song, “*If You Go Away*,” that speaks to the commonality of this fear.

If you go away, as I know you must,  
There'll be nothing left in the world to trust,  
Just an empty room, full of empty space...  
And I tell you now as you turn to go,  
I'll be dying slowly 'til your next hello...

Researchers who observe children who have been separated from their mothers describe a three-phase reaction process: anger, despair, and then detachment. Being or feeling abandoned, for whatever reason, leaves us feeling alone, that relationships are not to be trusted, and that we are not worthy of being in relationship.

This fear of abandonment is often manifested in children who have been orphaned, upended through divorce, left homeless by disaster or tragedy, or whose parents emotionally left them. This fear is often carried into adulthood. The most profound words we want to hear from someone we love is that “I will never leave you, no matter what.” “Till death do us part,” is built into the fabric of marital commitment, but is often broken for a host of reasons. Our faith encourages us to know that we are never left alone no matter what our circumstances.

The **fear of not being loved** is another early and powerful fear. E. C. McKenzie said, “The loneliest place in the world is the human heart where love is absent.” To not feel loveable or loved is a wretched feeling, and we numb ourselves with a host of disorders and addictions to avoid the pain. Like in abandonment, a person may leave their partner before the other leaves so as not to be the one considered unlovable.

Jackson Browne, in “*Fountain of Sorrow*,” pens these words:

When you see through love's illusions,  
there lies the danger  
And your perfect lover just looks like a perfect fool  
So you go running off in search of a perfect stranger  
While the loneliness seems to spring from your heart  
Like a fountain from a pool  
Fountain of sorrow, fountain of light  
You've known the hollow sound  
Of your own steps in flight

The fear of not being loved is so closely tied to the fear of abandonment, that it is often difficult to separate the two. However, the fear of abandonment leaves the message that I am not worthy of living in a close relationship; the fear of not being loved leaves the message that I am not worthy of respect and nurture. We feel ashamed because there must be something inherently flawed in us.

The **fear of failure** is the third great fear. This fear says that I am not worthy of being valued in society. I have nothing valuable to offer; therefore, I am nothing.

This fear leads the race in our 24-hour, 7-day-a-week quest for material security and meaning in life. Who we are is so intertwined with what we do that no wonder we panic when we fail or fear that we will. And, if we are not enough, who will love us and stay with us? Consequently, anxiety and frustration develops when we are caught between security and dependence on one hand; and, self-expression and independence on the other.

I was talking with a young man who has a wife and small child. He worked very long hours and had a look of fright in his eyes. As we talked, I asked him what he feared most. He told me that it is always in the back of his mind the fear of losing his job. He said there is always someone smarter, younger, and who will work for less money. He feels like he has to maintain that pace or risk losing the financial security for his family.

It is one thing to work hard; it quite another to lose our health, marriage, and life in the process. Success, from a perspective of faith, is not how much we do - it is what we do with how much we have. Our faith tells us that God will not abandon us or lose His love for us. He will always provide a way for us.

If any of the three great fears is getting the better of your life and relationships, it is time to seek those who can help you with them.