I. **FEAR**

FEAR is: an anticipation of danger, an unpleasant feeling of anxiety or apprehension caused by the presence or anticipation of danger, a concern about something that threatens to bring bad news or results.

A. **Fear puts us under the authority of that which we fear**

1. We experience fear when we feel powerless to protect ourselves.

2. There are legitimate reasons to be fearful. Yet, there are other fears such as fears from our childhood, that we can overcome and eliminate the power they have over us.

3. The fear a child experiences can easily cross over into adulthood and keep one locked in fear. Adult victims need to understand they have power, truth, knowledge and a tongue that can protect them. They are no longer a powerless child but an adult who needs to take authority over their fears.

B. **Shame and fear are very real.**

1. Until we examine the truth or validity of our shame and fear, we will remain a victim and suffer the many consequences brought on by them.

   “For the Holy Spirit, God’s gift, does not want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, and to love them and enjoy being with them.” - 2 Timothy 1:7 (LB)

   When Adam and Eve sinned and God came looking for Adam, Adam said, “I was afraid … and I hid.” (Genesis 3:10 ESV) This fear is as old as mankind. We hide our true selves. We don’t let people know what we’re really like. Why? Because we think, “What if I tell you who I am and you don’t like me?”

C. **Fear does three terrible things to relationships:**

1. **Our fears make us DEFENSIVE.**
   
   We’re afraid to reveal ourselves. When people point out weaknesses, we RETALIATE and DEFEND ourselves.

2. **Our fears keep us DISTANT.**
   
   We don’t let people get close to us. We want to WITHDRAW and HIDE our emotions. We don’t want to be open and honest.

3. **Our fears make us DEMANDING.**
   
   The more INSECURE we are, the more we try to CONTROL or DOMINATE things. We try to have the last word in a relationship. This is always a symptom of FEAR and INSECURITY.

   “The Lord is my light and my salvation; I will FEAR NO ONE. The Lord protects me from all danger; I will never be afraid.” (Psalm 27:1 TEV)
FOUR MAJOR FEARS that affect RELATIONSHIPS

There are four major relational fears:
1. Fear of Failure
2. Fear of Rejection
3. Fear of Abandonment
4. Fear unto Death (physically or emotionally)

I. The FEAR of FAILURE

The Fear of FAILURE says, “I am only as good as my last performance. I need to keep pushing hard to ensure success because if I don’t I will fail.”

A. Trying to Meet Expectations

1. As adults we have expectations from friends, spouses, family, coworkers, church, and bosses dictating the way we act or behave.
   a. Our culture measures us based on our actions

2. When we experience Fear of FAILURE, it is as if we “perceive” we are under a magnifying glass.
   a. We feel every move is dissected and judged.
   b. May feel as though our entire competency as a person is on the line.

3. We define ourselves by our capabilities rather than our WORTH and VALUE.

4. The Fear of FAILURE can become so emotionally absorbing that it depletes us from having any energy to connect with those we love.
   a. Can become so overwhelmed by this fear we do not even try anything new in our lives
   b. Have a sense of panic when we are not meeting our expectations or what we “perceive” are the expectations of others.

B. Looking at Success as “Good Luck”

1. When we have a deep fear of failure, and we do take risks and succeed, we interpret our victory as a stroke of good luck rather than as a measure of our capabilities.
   a. When we’re commended, we minimize and discount the sincerity of the compliments we receive.
   b. When success occurs, we are unwilling to take ownership for it.

2. Deep within us, when we struggle with this fear, we feel somehow defective.
   a. To compensate, we counterbalance our fear of failure by setting high and unrealistic expectations.
   b. These expectations are often expressed through perfectionistic tendencies.

3. And when we don’t succeed?
   a. We become disappointed and self-critical
   b. We COMPARE ourselves to others
   c. We minimize and/or ignore our own achievements and feel like a failure
   d. Then we PROJECT this self-hate onto others and ASSUME that they also despise us for being so defective.
4. When we feel the Fear of FAILURE we block ourselves from moving forward and celebrating our abilities, achievements, and blessings.

C. **Signs of the FEAR of FAILURE**

1. VIEWING our worth by our abilities

2. AVOIDING situations that involve learning new skills and abilities

3. BECOMING paralyzed when thinking of taking a risk or striving beyond what is necessary to ensure success.

4. DEGRADING our achievements and ourselves.

5. VALUING others’ measure of us more than our own.

6. PLAYING negative messages in our head such as:
   - “*I will never be good enough.*”
   - “*I have failed at everything I have tried.*”
   - “*I’m not talented enough.*”
   - “*I’ll never make it so why even bother?*”

7. COMPARING ourselves to others and perceiving them as MORE successful, competent, talented, etc.

8. HAVING THE NEED for things in which we are involved to be perfect, such as being the perfect decorator, perfect friend, perfect parent, or perfect coworker.

9. CONFUSING our performance with love.

10. NEVER really being at peace.

II. **FEAR of REJECTION**

People who suffer from a FEAR of REJECTION cannot say “NO.”

They FEAR SAYING “NO” because they don’t want others to think less of them.

A. **Hearts That SINK**

1. The experiences of rejection in our lives can cause our hearts to sink, our heads to drop, and an inner voice to say, “*I am not OK.*”

2. When we sense personal rejection, it often feels like an earthquake that measures 7.9 on the Richter scale.
   - The rejection rocks our soul and causes the bricks of our self-worth to fall.

3. **To be REJECTED means that WHO WE ARE is NOT of VALUE to others.**

4. Most of us first experienced some form of rejection in childhood. In families where there were high expectations of achievement or there was a personality conflict between a parent and child, there was a heightened sensitivity to rejection.

5. Psychologist, Sheldon Kopp, explains how the seeds of rejection are sown in our souls.
“If our parents treated us as WORTHY OF RESPECT in our own right, then by the time we grew up, we felt at ease in revealing ourselves and expected that some people would be pleased to know who we were. But if we had parents who were UNACCEPTING of our INDEPENDENT IDENTITIES, we learned to hide who we really were for fear that we were not allowed to be ourselves.

We created the illusion that all we wanted was to fulfill our parents’ needs. In the safety of isolation from parental intrusions, we sustained a secret self. We coped with childhood fears by hiding what we really felt, and grew up afraid that unless we met other people’s expectations, they would reject us.”

B. **Masks that Cover Our Hearts**

1. When we experience rejection over time, we develop “masks” that cover our TRUE SELVES and protect our hearts from hurt and shame.
   a. When we put on the masks, like actors, we perform in ways we perceive others want from us.
   b. We are hoping, by pleasing them, we can minimize painful criticism and judgments.
   c. Our need is to somehow secure LOVE and ACCEPTANCE through “right” behavior.
   d. **The IRONY of it is that EVEN WHEN we are affirmed we are NOT WILLING to BELIEVE it, because behind our mask of performance we feel we are unworthy.**

2. We can wear a variety of masks.
   a. **Mask of the “GOOD PERSON” or PLEASER**  
      (1) Always making sure that others like us, even if that means we compromise our own values and opinions
   b. **Mask of a CLOWN**  
      (2) Spend our lives entertaining others and making sure they are happy even when we are not being true to our real emotions and needs
   c. **Mask of the PHILOSOPHER**  
      (3) Remain detached from the real world of feelings, presenting the image that nothing really affects us  
      (4) Always above the world, making judgments and never really letting others in

3. How much good is left undone because of our fear of the opinion of others.
   a. **The irony is that the opinions we fear most are not those of people we really respect, yet these same persons’ opinions carry more weight than we are willing to admit.**

C. **Keeping Our Distance**

1. Another aspect of the Fear of REJECTION is avoiding deep relationships, remaining distant and aloof, and concluding that it is better not to be involved than to be hurt.

D. **Signs of the FEAR of REJECTION**

1. TRYING to read people’s minds and assuming they will not like us.
2. BEING DISTRUSTFUL of others and anticipating that we will be harmed.
3. DEVELOPING a self-perception that if someone got to know the real us, that person wouldn't really like us.

4. ALLOWING others to dictate how we feel about our lives and ourselves.

5. CONSTANTLY trying to please others.

6. SECOND-GUESSING our reactions and decisions.

E. The FEAR of REJECTION is based on two things:

1. *We all need to be loved — that's a fact.* We all desperately need massive doses of love in our life to be healthy individuals. God says, "I want to love you." *God IS love,* and he knows you need to be loved.

2. *We develop the false idea that our need to be loved is solely dependent upon ONE person or a certain group of people.*
   a. When you expect someone else to meet 100% of your need for love, you're asking for trouble. You're setting yourself up for hurt and opening the door for the fear of rejection.
   b. When you look to any other person besides God to meet all your love needs, he or she can't.
   c. There is no human being alive that can love you as completely and as fully as you need to be loved, and there never will be. *Only God can do that.*

3. So the first step in overcoming the fear of rejection is to put God in 1st place because He's the only one who can ultimately meet all your needs.

   Does God ever love us through other people? *Of course.*
   Does God want us to love others? *Yes.*
   Does he want to use us as channels of love? *Absolutely.*
   a. But, you will never have ALL your needs met by any person or group of people.
   b. God never meant it to be that way. They just don't have enough love. Human love is limited; God's love is *unlimited* and *unconditional.* No matter how deep your need is, He can fill it!

The FEAR of REJECTION ties us up from being free to be who we were created to be.

III. The FEAR of ABANDONMENT

The Fear of ABANDONMENT affects its sufferers *more profoundly* than the Fear of REJECTION. If REJECTION is like an earthquake registering 7.9 on the Richter scale, then the Fear of ABANDONMENT is like a 20-megaton bomb going off in our souls.

To be ABANDONED is the demoralizing experience of being GIVEN UP ON, left ALONE and DESERTED. One feels FORSAKEN.

A. Feeling Empty... Suspicious
1. The experiences of abandonment leave us cracked, chipped, and broken relationally.
   a. We feel empty inside and long to have this void filled
   b. We are forever looking to find someone who might fill up the barrenness we feel inside.

2. Abandonment, whether it is physical or emotional, leaves us suspicious that others in our life will leave too

B. Emotional Hibernation

1. When we have been abandoned, we go into a form of emotional hibernation
   a. We keep ourselves emotionally removed in order to deaden the painful experiences of our earlier losses in an attempt to reduce the pain of ever being abandoned again.

2. In the Fear of ABANDONMENT, we give up our sense of ourselves to guarantee a relationship.

3. Many children experience abandonment in several ways:
   a. By their parents physically leaving
   b. By their parents not modeling their own emotions for the children
   c. By their parents not providing for the children’s developmental dependency needs
   d. By their parents physically, sexually, emotionally, and spiritually abusing them
   e. By their parents using them to take care of the parents’ own unmet dependency needs
   f. By their parents using them in order to take care of the parents’ marriages
   g. By their parents not giving them time, attention, and direction
   h. By their parents acting shameless

Counselor, John Bradshaw explains,

“In abandonment, the order of nature is reversed. Children have to take care of their parents. There is no one to take care of them. The preciousness and uniqueness, which every human child possesses, is destroyed through abandonment. The child is alone and alienated.”

C. Signs of the FEAR of ABANDONMENT

1. Developing a sense of INSECURITY where we want to attach ourselves to other people for strength and support yet remain emotionally aloof.

2. Having difficulty in trusting others.

3. Questioning what healthy love is because the love we first experienced was conditional.

4. Denying our own needs and feelings in order to secure love from others.

5. Developing a RESCUE personality where we seek out needy people who are unwilling to take responsibility for their own pain.

6. Seeking out relationships with people who are unreliable and will ultimately abandon us.
IV. **FEAR of DEATH**

Physical death is a major fear, yet there is another fear we encounter in life: the FEAR of EMOTIONAL DEATH.

A. **Fear of Dying Emotionally**

1. Due to the ongoing strain of stress and life’s circumstances, a person may feel they are losing their mind, fear for their very survival and wonder if they can go on.

B. **An Overload that Overwhelms**

1. All of us become temporarily overloaded at times by circumstances, but we find a way to manage. It is when there is a convergence of life circumstances extended over time that can begin a downward spiral of becoming emotionally disconnected.
   a. This chronic state of being overwhelmed feels like we are dying emotionally inside.

2. **To DIE EMOTIONALLY** means that we experience the FEARS of FAILURE, REJECTION, and ABANDONMENT at the same time and with the same intensity.
   a. We become emotionally OVERLOADED to the point that we become like a walking, LIFELESS zombie.

3. When we are NOT DEALING with our Fears of FAILURE, REJECTION, and ABANDONMENT, we automatically become EMOTIONALLY HANDICAPPED.
   a. To become emotionally handicapped means that the degree and amount of UNRESOLVED PAIN in our lives significantly OUTWEIGHS the pain we have resolved.
   b. Like a scuba diver with weights walking along the ocean floor who must release the weights in order to come to the surface, so we need to release the weights of failure, rejection, and abandonment. Otherwise, we will find our life source of oxygen running out, causing us to feel like we are dying emotionally.
   c. IF this happens, we either WITHDRAW or WAIT for others to take responsibility for our unwillingness to deal with our pain.
   d. Sometimes the quality and intensity of verbal or physical abuse over an extended period of time will cause a spouse, child, or single adult to feel like life has been drained from his or her soul.
   e. To be constantly told you are a failure, to have your thoughts rejected combined with consistent threats of abandonment creates an emotionally overload.
      (1) Individuals will respond by either becoming entrapped or by courageously escaping and finding healing for the pain.

C. **Fear of Dying Physically**

1. Some people live their lives preoccupied with losing their health.
   a. Their anxiety drives them to gather information
   b. The fear often originates from losing someone close to them while they are growing up

2. Unlike the fear of dying emotionally, the fear of dying physically is an inevitable reality we must all face. We will die.
   a. Death’s stark reality hits hardest when either a loved one or a friend dies or has a life-threatening illness.
b. Human beings are naturally anxious because we are ultimately helpless and abandoned in a world where we are fated to die.

3. Our lives consist of a multitude of beginnings and endings, ebbs and flows.
   a. When one stage of life ends a new one begins, except in the case of dying.
   b. Death is ultimate finality and haunts us of our own finiteness.

4. It is what we cannot see with our human eyes that makes the terror of death so overwhelming.
   a. We become afraid of how long we will live, how we will die, and what will happen after we die.
   b. We try to alleviate this fear by fooling ourselves into thinking that if we take the right vitamins, eat the right foods, and live a balanced lifestyle we will be able to postpone the inevitable.
   c. Since death is so overpowering we create schemes to keep it out of our conscious thinking.
   d. We defend against this fear by participating in something of lasting worth.

D. **Signs of the Fear of Death**

Those who struggle with this fear of death – either emotional or physical death – several of the following signs may appear:

1. Becoming **PREOCCUPIED** with our **health** and the possibility of **illness**.
2. Becoming **OBSESSED** with the thought that a loved one might die.
3. Never being at peace.
4. Trying to live good lives to “please” God and thereby lengthen the days of our lives.
5. Unwilling to take trips for **fear** of an accident.
6. Becoming **PREOCCUPIED** with thoughts of heaven and hell.
7. Being unable to celebrate the good things in our lives.
8. Feeling often **DISCOURAGED** and at times **DESPAIRING**.
9. Becoming emotionally **NUMB**.
10. Remaining **emotionally distant** in relationships.

E. **MISC.**

1. It takes strength to confront our fear of death. It is only when we truly look this fear in the face that we begin to start living.
2. We cannot celebrate our life until we have come to peace with our death.
3. Each day of our lives we may be confronted with any of these fears.

The issue isn’t how we will keep ourselves from feeling these emotions, but whether we will
Learn to MANAGE OUR FEARS or Let our FEARS MANAGE US.

Until we face our fears we remain a prisoner to them. Those who face their fears become fearless!

Where do you get the courage for taking the first step in resolving fears?

*It comes from God’s LOVE and Spirit in your life:* “For the Holy Spirit, God’s gift, does not want you to be afraid of people but to be *wise* and *strong* [courageous] and to love them and enjoy being with them” (2 Timothy 1:7 LB).

The starting point in connecting with anyone is to pause and pray,

“God, help me to take the first step toward resolving these fears and becoming *honest* and *authentic* in this relationship by *getting my value and worth from You*, rather than from people alone.”

“*God has not given us a spirit of fear,*
*but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*”

-2 Timothy 1:7