

HELP, I HAVE A DOMINANT

FEAR

—by Karen Els



Fearful and hiding from the Midianites, Gideon threshed wheat while cowering away in a winepress. Midian's power over Israel at that time was so oppressive that in an effort to survive, the Israelites were forced to shelter in hillside caves (Judges 6:1-6). Gideon felt intimidated by this seemingly insurmountable enemy, further compounding his feelings of helplessness and his sense of abandonment by God (Judges 6:13). The Angel of the Lord then appeared to Gideon saying, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior" Judges 6:12, commissioning him, contrary to how he felt and how hopeless the situation seemed, to rescue Israel (Judges 6: 14).

Although Gideon was a 'worrier' filled with doubt and fear, God instead saw

you are consumed by fears and a sense of powerlessness over what you experience to be an insurmountable trouble, enemy or situation? If so, has this fear been so dominant and intense that it has made you want to retreat from life and from that which is important to you? Possibly, like Gideon, this fear has made you feel alone, wanting to isolate yourself and even made you feel abandoned by God.

WHAT ARE NORMAL VERSUS OVERWHELMING FEARS?

Fear itself is a normal human emotion and basic survival mechanism. Fear is felt when there is a possibility of being hurt or endangered by an actual external source. The emotion of fear typically triggers survival behaviours such as withdrawal, a desire to fight back or avoidance to minimise the risk

Though we are to walk by faith, overwhelming and persistent anxiety should also not be ignored, particularly if this could impact negatively on one's daily life.

Gideon as a mighty 'warrior'. The rest of the story of Gideon (Judges 6-8) demonstrates how God utilised Gideon's weaknesses for His glory and to achieve His purposes for Israel. Despite fear and uncertainty, Gideon overcomes through his obedience to God and God's constant faithfulness, steadfast promises and patient handling of Gideon and his apprehensions as the rescue plan God had for Israel become reality.

OVERWHELMING FEAR?

Have you ever felt, as Gideon did hiding out in the winepress, that

of actual harm. Anxiety too is considered to be a normal response, the purpose of which is to assist and prepare us to cope with stress and pressure.

It is an emotional state which occurs in response to perceived threats which are experienced to be unavoidable and uncontrollable. Fear and anxiety which are intense, which persist for extended periods of time or which are not dealt with using effective coping strategies can lead to a person feeling overwhelmed and, as with Gideon prior to his encounter with God, distort our experience of the world, ourselves and possibly even God.

Phobias, for example, are unreasonable

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intense fears which develop in response to specific external threats e.g. snakes, lightning, injections etc. Phobias have the potential of causing a person to retreat from life and avoid doing things that they would do typically so as to not encounter their specific trigger.

Overwhelming and persistent anxiety should also not be ignored, particularly if this could impact negatively on one's outlook towards life, God and relationships. This could be generalised and chronic or in response to specific situations, for example, anxiety that is felt in response to social situations or confined spaces. Intense anxiety could also result in panic attacks, which are intense attacks of terror associated with difficulty breathing and increased heart rate.

A MIGHTY WARRIOR, NOT A MIGHTY WORRIER!

Jesus does not want His children to be consumed by intense fear and distressing anxiety. We are encouraged in 1 Peter 5: 7 to trust Him with our concerns and to "Cast all your anxiety on Him, for He cares for you".

So, what strategies can we follow to manage our fear and anxiety healthily and to progress from being mighty worriers to a being the mighty warriors that God sees us as?

- Acknowledge and accept what you are feeling - be honest with yourself, identify and accept your emotion and aim to identify and understand your emotional triggers
- Pray – Spend quality time with God, trust Him and bring your concerns to Him
- Immerse yourself in the Word of God and seek His direction
- Remain future-focused and action-oriented, taking one step forward at a time
- Be accountable and take responsibility for your behaviour
- Seek and maintain healthy interpersonal support from family, friends, church etc.
- Challenge doubts and worries constantly
- Be grateful and say thank you
- Seek help – Overwhelming anxiety and fear may be difficult to cope with alone. Consulting with a pastor or Christian psychologist may be useful to try to obtain a different perspective and find strategies to deal with the anxiety and fear you experience. ■



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