

# Fear of Man—Humiliation & Failure

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[0:00] Well, that's good. It's good that we have some context of what fear of man is. And I want to begin by telling you two stories from my past. Whenever families get together, families love to tell stories.

And so when my Aunt Cindy comes over, she loves to tell stories of what she remembers of me and of us when we were younger. And she brings up my extreme shyness when I was four or five years old.

And that I was obsessed with Superman. So I would dress up in this Superman like pajamas from head to toe. I loved Christopher Reeve. He had this little curl in his hair.

I made my mom do this little curl. I looked the part. And as far as I was concerned, I was Superman. And Cindy recounts how incredibly shy I was.

And her and my uncle would come over and they couldn't look me in the eye right away. They have to play it cool, right? It's like looking at a cat or something. I just, I was so scared of people, of her, of them.

[1:05] And I'd have to warm up. I did not want the attention. But I was also angry. I remember being an angry kid. This is what my family remembers about me. It's terrible. I hated people, but I didn't have the courage to face them either.

I feared what others thought of me. And in high school, second story, I loved working in theater. I loved doing behind-the-scenes works in theater, prop work and things like that.

In my senior year, I was stage manager. I loved solving problems and managing a team. And during one of my high school performances, I was tasked with giving the announcements before the show. I was behind the curtain, you know, where the exit signs are and things like that. And I was actually kind of excited because I felt important. And I remember just before I began to read, I was so terrified, so nervous.

And I have this memory of me holding the sheet of paper, literally shaking, reading, reading these announcements. And the actors backstage with me were looking at me like, are you okay?

[2:11] Just, you know, it was an odd scene. And I thought that I was so scared of messing up that I was physically shaking. I thought of all the ways that I would mess up and how dreadful it would be if I fumbled over my words.

Everyone would laugh. And I thought that even though this curtain was hiding me, I'd be a laughing stock. I wanted to feel important, and yet I feared the attention. And so I practiced so much that I was not going to get it wrong.

So I was preoccupied. It was not a preoccupation of just doing the job well and serving others. It was a preoccupation with myself. I feared whether it was thought.

It was fear of man. So fear of man motivated me to hide from my family. Fear of man caused me to practice incessantly to make sure this job was done well.

So I think, you know, fear of man can be a confusing term to some people. It seems, you know, we have some pretty good categories for what we're talking about. I put on your notes there some other motivations that may have their roots in fear of man.

[3:21] We mentioned a few of those, like perfectionist or people pleaser. Shyness was it for me. Sometimes overcommitted. You know, somebody who's unable to say no.

So indecisive self-esteem and being embarrassed or needy or even quiet could be fear of man. Codependent. Health nut.

Fear what people think of you. A loner. Isolation, introspection, escapism. All these things may have their root in fear of man and not necessarily just a personality trait. So, I mean, I wonder, too, just thinking if some of the problems we face and the things that we face are not just mental hiccups in our personality, but sins to be repented of.

We don't necessarily just need solutions to figure out how to operate. We need to see our sin rightly. And so, I realize that not every problem that we face has a sin attached to it. Not every one. But I do think that fear of man is especially easy to overlook. It's very easy to overlook. Marshall Siegel, I think I have it for you there. He said, If we knew how dangerous the fear of man really is, we might fear men less and fear our fears more.

[4:42] That's a good word. Other sins, he says, have beset me in my walk with Christ over the years, but few have so consistently eluded my radar like this one.

And Ed Welch observes that the Bible gives three reasons why we fear others. And these are really the topics of our classes, three of the four classes.

First one today, that we fear people because they can expose and humiliate us. Two, we fear people because they can reject, ridicule, and despise us. And three, we fear people because they can attack, oppress, threaten us.

It's more the physical. And we're going to go through each of those over three weeks. And the last week will be what it means to fear the Lord. So, that's kind of where we're going with that.

And the problems, the problem with each of these is that in some ways it's a misplaced fear. It's a misplaced fear or a misplaced trust.

[5:44] Or a misplaced worship. We're worshipping something other than the Lord. There's something else that's taken the place of the Lord on God's throne where he desires to be worshiped.

And the thing that we desire becomes the things we crave or the things we must have that we'll fight for and ultimately worship. And we develop a fear of losing it or not getting that thing.

And so, when you're looking into fear of man, it's also good to ask, what do I want? What do I crave? What do I desire here? David Pallison said, sinful fears are inverted cravings.

So, in many ways they go hand in hand. What do I want? When I'm fearing something, what do I fear of losing? What do I want? So, those are just some broad stroke definitions and a road map of where we're going.

Who in scripture do you remember had fear of man? Can you guys call out? Look back. Elijah? Elijah. Okay. Fear of Peter. Fear of Jezebel.

[6:49] Jezebel, right. Good. Good one. What were you saying? Peter. Peter. Yes, Peter. Right. After his arrest, for sure. Abraham. Abraham.

Yeah. When was it in Abraham? He lied about. He was afraid. Right. When he went to Egypt. Exactly. Abraham. Good. Who else? Martha. Martha.

Oh, okay. Yeah, that's good. Moses. Moses. Absolutely. Jonah. Jonah. That's an interesting one. Yeah. Could be fear of man.

It's hard to tell exactly, but he could be filled with hatred, too, for these people. But it could be fear of man. Yeah. Anybody else come to mind in scripture?

Saul. Yes. I'm at Saul. Yeah. I was going to talk briefly about Saul. I'm going to save that for another class. But, yeah, Moses.

[7:45] The Israelites, they feared when they went to scout out the land. They had fear. Fear of people. Physical harm. Maybe Jonah. I said Herod with John the Baptist.

He feared what his guests thought. So, he didn't want to behead John, but feared what people thought. And, of course, Peter denying Jesus. Pharisees. The Pharisees.

Oh, yeah. For sure. Yeah. Feared the Romans. Feared what the people thought. Pilate. Pilate. Oh, yes. Absolutely. Very good.

Some of these scriptures here, just a spattering of a few others. Matthew 10, 28, where we get some of these fear of man. Do not fear those who kill the body and cannot kill the soul.

Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Psalm 56. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust, I shall not be afraid.

[8:42] What can flesh do to me? Galatians 1, 10. For am I now seeking the approval of man or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

And most clearly, we get that term from Proverbs, most explicitly. Proverbs 29, 25. The fear of man lays a snare. But whoever trusts the Lord is safe.

So we see that fear of man is in many ways a misplaced fear. Fear of man, it lays a snare. But who trusts the Lord is safe.

So what's at stake when we operate in the fear of man? What is at stake? That's a good question to ask. And I did think of Saul.

And just to briefly mention Saul, all of his life, it seems, he struggled with fear of man. From when he was first told by Samuel that he was going to be king.

[9:43] And he was chosen by tribe, by family, by individual. And he was hiding among the baggage. And then when Samuel confronts him about his disobedience, he said he feared the people.

And then David comes along, and he's jealous, and he's envious. And he fears David. Over and over again, it says that Saul fears. And the kingdom was torn from him because of it.

And so what's at stake with the fear of man? And so we see just in this one man's example, jealousy, conflict, animosity, murder. He's using his own daughter, Michael, to accomplish his purposes.

Manipulation. These are things that stem from the fear of man. The fear of man lays a snare. And in some ways, I'm just trying to build a case.

You know, because I think it's, not only is it something that we can overlook, but it's something that we can also say, that's not that big a deal. And that's just not the case. It has its tentacles in a lot of areas in our life, I'm afraid.

[10:50] And may the Lord do his work in uprooting the fear of man in each of us. Some would say that the fear of man is loving.

Because isn't it unloving to do whatever you want without any consideration to what others think?

Yeah. I love what 1 Corinthians has to say about that.

1 Corinthians 10 says, and we'll get there in this series. If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you're disposed to go, well, eat whatever's set before you without raising any questions on the ground of conscience.

But if someone says to you, well, this has been offered in sacrifice, then don't eat it. For the sake of the one who informed you and for the sake of conscience. I don't mean your conscience, but his.

For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake in thankfulness, why am I denounced? Because of that for which I give thanks.

[11:52] So, whatever you eat, whatever you do, do all for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many that they may be saved.

I think we fail to identify the fear of man in ourselves because it looks so much like love at times.

And as one author said, we love to look loving.

I yield to you. It's not always a bad thing, don't get me wrong, but it could be fear of man. And so Paul asks that question, why should my freedom be limited by someone else's conscience?

Why should Christians care about someone else thinks? But Paul's motivation is not fear of people or that he craves approval. Who cares what people think of him?

He cares what God thinks. And he doesn't want to be a stumbling block for them in their faith, does he? He says he wants to please God and do all for the glory of God.

[13:00] So even though Paul says, I try to please everyone in everything I do, Paul is no people pleaser. Just as we said at the beginning, people pleasing is fear of man. People pleasers are trying to please themselves.

When we do that, isn't that the truth? We're trying to please ourselves. And I'm guilty of it as well. A people pleaser hates to displease people because they hate having others mad at them.

Self is at the center. The displeasure of others is more of a reflection of how it makes the people pleaser feel. If I make a decision that's unpopular, it might be a reflection of who I am.

My identity becomes in what others perceive of me. That desire to have the approval of others displaces the desire to please God. And look again at that last verse.

I do not seek my own advantage, but that of many that they may be saved. Not seeking my own advantage, Paul says.

[14:08] And that's a different way of thinking. I want that for each of us. This is a God-centered attitude, not a self-centered attitude. More could be said there, but let's move on.

As we think about fear of humiliation and fear of failure, I think we need to look at least for a moment at the first example in Scripture of fear of man.

That's in the garden, the Garden of Eden. This isn't until I started digging in. This is not something I thought of as being fear of man with Adam and Eve. They ate the forbidden fruit.

They sinned against God. And Genesis 3, 7 says the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

These two were exposed. They had sinned. They knew their own sin and they knew each other's sin. They saw it. And they were naked and both of them wanted to hide their nakedness from each other.

[15:12] I mean, who else was around? But the two of them, but they were ashamed. Adam and Eve hid and we still hide today because of our own failure.

I believe one of the reasons they hid because of failure. They disobeyed and they felt shame. They failed God. And because of sin, we all have in some ways a self-imposed nakedness, if I could put it that way.

By our very nature, we are enemies of God. And so there's a sense in which to fear to fail in that way, to fear to fail God is a good thing because sin does bring shame.

We're rebels against God. We should be concerned about the things God cares about. But that's more in line with the fear of the Lord, not the fear of failure. But why do we fear failure?

Why do we fear failure? I think, again, it mostly has to do with perceived failures, not biblical failure.

Maria, as an example, describes her relationship with food as a love-hate affair.

[16:29] Food is her BFF. She loves to plan special times with her favorite food. However, she hates that her eating is out of control. She hates that she's 10 pounds heavier and she's failed another diet.

She knows she has to change in her disorderly eating, but she fears failing again. Tom is a self-described workaholic. He's a husband who neglects his wife and kids and regularly misses his son's baseball games because he's working.

Projects overlap and cutbacks are looming in his work. He's online for promotion, but he fears that it won't come if he slacks off. After the death of his first church plant, Pastor Frank now doubts this new opportunity to plant another church.

He's suddenly aware of the things he's never been aware of before, and he finds himself overly cautious. And now he wonders if a life of pastoral ministry is the life for him after all.

These three examples, I think, have a common fear of failure. Ultimately, God's not in the picture.

Maria craves to lose weight, and Tom craves this promotion, and Frank's doubting his calling, but all have to do, in this example, with how they're perceived by others.

[17:46] They don't want to look like failures. And so in some ways, I think we need to... I think too often we say we failed something.

Even in our minds, I failed in this way. And it's not real biblical failure. It's not really what God sees as failure. I think we need a redefinition of what real failure is.

Failure, in God's eyes, I believe, is sin. Romans 3.23, all have sinned and fall short, failed. The glory of God. And this is...

Failure is something we need to be redeemed from, from which we need forgiveness. And what's debilitating to most people is a fear of messing up, which is not necessarily sinful, like a sinful way of failing.

Missing a deadline. The assignment is less than average. We fear mistakes, not necessarily disobeying God. We're exposed as a fraud, and we attach a false identity to that.

[18:48] And we look at ourselves from the eyes of the others, and we don't like what we see. And because this narrative is usually loud, it

affects what we do and why we do it.

So we can project a false identity upon ourselves. So what do we do with this fear of failure that can be crippling?

I put two things on your sheet that I think are very helpful. One, realize you're going to fail. That can be helpful.

You will fail. You and I are going to fail God. Others are going to be disappointed in us. And as much as I want to be Superman, I'm not.

And neither are you. We want to look it in the face. We're going to make mistakes. Erring.

Forgetting. Misplacing. Not walking in the Spirit.

[19:56] I know I'm kind of combining this sinful way of failing, and then just what we perceive as failure. I'm kind of combining those. But we're going to do both. We're going to send the Lord, and we're just going to make mistakes.

We want to look it in the face. We want to see our own weakness. And failure can help us to see our own weakness and our need for grace. And it should put God in his rightful place on the throne, the only one who will never fail.

Our failure is certain, but the Lord will uphold us. Two is repent where needed. When true failure happens, when we sin against our holy, loving God, we must repent.

1 John 1.9 is still true. If we confess, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Feeling bad about something is not repentance.

Guilt is actually not repentance. Shame is not repentance. But turning to God, confessing, asking for forgiveness, turning away from sin and turning to God in faith, faith that knowing he's forgiven you of these sins, committing your ways to the Lord, this is repentance.

[21:20] And so an application question may be, are there specific fears that keep you from moving forward in a life of faith? What are they? What would they be?

Name them in your own mind. What fears might there be that keep you moving forward in a life of faith? And going back to Adam and Eve, before the fall, Scripture says Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed, but after sin, those two things seem like a paradox.

When we are naked and exposed, we experience shame. Ed Welch said, Humiliation and shame is the deep sense that you are unacceptable because of something you did, something done to you, or something associated with you.

You feel exposed. So humiliation and shame, which I think can be used interchangeably, is about being exposed. Adam and Eve felt shame from the eyes of the other and from the eyes of God.

And as Genesis 3 reminds us, they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. But the Lord God called to the man and said, Where are you?

[22:33] And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden. I was afraid because I was naked. I hid myself. They were unacceptable. They felt unacceptable, exposed, humiliated.

And humiliation is tricky because we feel it in a few different reasons. There's a myriad of ways that humiliation can show up. Sometimes it appears in shame because of abuses done to you.

And that's a painful thing. That's a horrible thing. And it's not something you can just repent and move on from. When you've been shamed by somebody else's sin, if you've failed, sinfully failed, you can repent and move on.

But shame done to you is tricky. It's hard. And if you do struggle with that, myself, one of the pastors, would love to talk with you about that. There is help.

Or we're like Adam and Eve and it involves sin. The humiliation is justified. We're wrong. But I suspect most of the everyday, run-of-the-mill, fear of being humiliated is the sinful desire to be exalted in the eyes of others.

[23:50] Humiliation is about exaltation. And failure is about success. Those two things. Those are the two cravings. So here again, fear can be deceitful.

It doesn't seem to be wrong for people to think highly of you, to have a good reputation, to generally feel good about yourself. But far too often, those things control our thoughts and motives.

The desire to be exalted becomes our functioning God. We think about it. We cherish it. When it does happen, we cherish it when it does happen, and we mourn when it doesn't, and we worship that desire.

And so, what is the psychological, the pop psychology, modern psychology answer to humiliation? When you feel bad about yourself, if you're worrying about what people are going to think of you, or think you're a phony, or say something to which people are going to make fun of you, what do people usually say?

I think it's, you just need more self-esteem. You just feel good about yourself. Culture says that we actually have a low self-esteem epidemic. Afraid of what people think of you?

[25:02] Well, you just boost your self-confidence. One author I read said that they attended a PTA meeting at their kids' school, and they were informed that the chief objective of this elementary school was to bolster self-esteem.

While there was a roaring ovation from the crowd, the couple thought, are we going to keep our kids in this school? They had some difficult decisions. Why? Why is that a difficult decision?

It's because self-esteem is no answer for the fear of man. It actually feeds fear of man. It still has self at the center of all of our motivation.

Jared Mellinger, a pastor, said this wonderfully. I thought it was so helpful. Once self is made an idol, I will either view myself as awesome or a failure.

If my standards for myself are low, I live life surpassing my expectations, and I feel awesome. It's the Michael Scott syndrome in many ways. If I'm confident, self-assured, boastful, I am confident, I'm self-assured, boastful, and I'll look down on those who fail.

[26:14] On the other hand, my standards, if, on the other hand, my standards are high, and I don't meet them, I feel like a failure. I'm insecure. I feel worthless, unpresentable, and self-destructive.

Apart from Christ, and with self as our God, the only options are self-esteem, I'm awesome, or self-hatred, I'm worthless.

The idol of self has failed us and cannot be the answer to our problems. That is so helpful. We got to dethrone ourselves and put God back on the throne.

Romans 12, 3a says, For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but with sober judgment. What the world calls self-esteem, I think the apostle Paul, would just say is another way of thinking too highly of ourselves.

We're not to think too highly, nor think too often of ourselves. That could be the problem. But there are gospel answers to the fear of man and self-focus.

[27:28] Oh, may we let self-absorption be displaced by Christ absorption. The only man that was ever deserving of worship is the same one who stepped down out of heaven, giving up his divine prerogatives and lived among us.

He suffered shame and humiliation at the hands of others. He's even able to sympathize with our weaknesses because he himself was beset with weakness.

He was tempted to indulge in self-pity, self-glorification, self-esteem, but he never once sinned. And more than that, this was the Jesus who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising its shame.

The cross of Christ shows us our greatest need. But it also shows us where our greatest help comes from.

In one act, our greatest need and our greatest help presented before us. Psalm 121. I lift up my eyes to the hills from where does my help come?

[28:42] My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. Marshall Siegel, said this, what a great line, woe to us if we tremble before criticism and yawn before the cross.

There is great blessing in the self-emptied, God-centered life. So, may we all seek to confront our need to be liked or appreciated or respected or thought well of.

And may we replace it with the need for mercy, the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. May the Lord help us.