

f e a r s w e f a c e

The Fear of Losing Freedom

One of the strongest myths is the illusion of control. Our egos need this lie to survive—we don't want to admit that we are actually totally dependent on Someone greater, and that we really don't own any kingdom. So we use the power of money, relationships with important people, or a string of sexual conquests, or a prestigious job, or our ability to learn to make us feel that we are *somebody*—that we have control.

Dr. Seuss' story, *Yertle the Turtle*, describes the frailty of the kingdoms we create. Yertle believes he rules over a little pond of turtles, but he can't see his kingdom. He decided the kingdom he ruled was too small. "I'm ruler", said Yertle, "of all that I see.

But I don't see enough. That's the trouble with me.
With this stone for a throne, I look down on my pond
But I cannot look down on the places beyond.
This throne that I sit on is too, too low down.
It ought to be higher!" he said with a frown.
"If I could sit high, how much greater I'd be!
What a king! I'd be ruler of all that I see!"



So to lift his throne up—to extend his vision and rule over the field of cows and everything around—he commands all of the other turtles to be stacked up, making a high throne for him. He thought he was powerful and secure. He could see for miles! Then at the bottom of the turtle stack, an obscure, powerless turtle named Mac, burped—and Yertle's whole kingdom collapsed.

Usually for us it's the unexpected, sometimes little things, sometimes big things that intrude and shake our kingdom to remind us we are not in control. Max De Pree (CEO of a Fortune 500 company) wrote this when the life of his infant granddaughter was threatened: "I'm seeing again—how often we need to learn this—that we can control only what counts for little. Eyesight, lungs, love, health, eternal life are gifts beyond my power to convey. How easy it is not to understand when we take something for granted."

Instead of letting the problems of life send you into a panic, let them shake some sense into your head—I am not in control. Only God can satisfy me.

For Discussion

Besides the fear of losing control/freedom, what are some of the other fears people share.

Encounter

Read God's Word so that He can speak to you.

1 John 4:15-21

If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Explore

**God's Word by asking questions of what you saw.
The notes that follow may help you think through these questions.**

1)

What are some examples of the fear of losing the power to control our own lives? Why does this create fear?

2)

Is absolute freedom the best thing for us? Why or why not?

- To what degree is freedom good?

3)

Adam and Eve chose to be independent and in control of their own lives. What happened as a result of their choice in Genesis 3? Did they gain freedom and control?

- What are some passages of Scripture that make it abundantly clear that we are not in control? (E.g., see Isaiah 40)

Explore (con't)

4)

1 John associates fear with judgment. Think about the reasons for fear—how are those fears often associated with the possibility of consequences, losing something, being judged?

5)

What is "complete love" and how does it cast out fear?

- How is that love related to God's ability and plans, to my hope and to the grace/strength He gives to me?

6)

Scripture says when we are free from sin we are slaves to God (Rom 6:22). How is that freedom? Explain John 8:36.

- How does God's sovereign control and my surrender to His control provide a freedom from the problems and consequences of today and tomorrow?

Notes on the Passage

15 - Confessing that "Jesus" is God's "Son" is not the only *condition* for abiding in God. It is one evidence that someone might be abiding. One not abiding may or may not make this confession. Confession is the last step, the step of bearing witness (cf. 1:9; 2:23; 4:3; Rom. 10:9-10). "The notion of God 'abiding' in someone has rich associations with John's Gospel, where *meno* occurs more than three dozen times. The word can mean simply to dwell somewhere; one's domicile is where one 'abides' (John 1:38, 39a; 2:12; 4:40 [2x]; 7:9; 8:35 [2x]; 10:40; 11:6, 54). But there is a fuller sense. God's Spirit descended and 'remained' on Jesus, according to John the Baptist (1:32, 33). The Spirit was Jesus's constant companion. To 'remain' or 'abide' in Jesus's teaching is to be his true disciple (8:31). A disciple will be informed and steered by all that Jesus commanded and taught. God the Father 'remained' or 'abode' with Jesus during his earthly days (14:10). The Father was the source of the very words he spoke, and Jesus 'remained' continually in the Father's love (15:10b). 'Abiding' describes a reality involving Father, Son, and Spirit." [Yarbrough, p. 252]

16 - This verse summarizes this section (3:24—4:16; cf. John 6:69). John was speaking of intimate knowledge ("come to

Notes on the Passage (con't)

know") and intimate fellowship ("abides"). "We" includes the readers with the apostles. John's point was that his readers had personally "seen" God in a sense similar to how the apostles had seen Him. The apostles had seen God in that they had seen Him in His Son, Jesus Christ. God had revealed His love to the apostles through Jesus Christ. The readers had seen God in that they had seen Him in His Spirit-indwelt abiding believers who loved one another. Consequently, John's readers could bear witness to the truth as the apostles did, and they could enjoy the same intimate fellowship with God that the apostles did.

17 - Our "love" becomes complete ("is perfected"), in the sense that we can now have "confidence" as we anticipate our "day of judgment" (i.e., the evaluation of our works at Christ's judgment seat; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10-12). The characteristic of God and Christians in view here is our love. We do not need to fear the judgment seat of Christ if we have demonstrated love to others. By loving God and others, we become like Jesus Christ our Judge ("as He is, so also are we"). Therefore to give love is to gain boldness (confidence). Here John said that God's love reaches perfection "with us" (Gr. *meth hamon*), whereas in 4:12 he wrote that His love reaches perfection "in us" (Gr. *en hamin*). When it reaches perfection *in* us, a proper relationship to other people exists, namely, no hate. When it reaches perfection *with* us, a proper relationship to God exists, namely, no fear. As Jesus abode in His Father, and consequently had confidence in the face of trials and death, so we can abide in Christ, and have confidence in spite of the world's hostility. Abiding in God gave Jesus confidence, and it gives us confidence too.

18 - When we love others, we have "no" basis for "fear" as we anticipate the judgment seat of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:15; Heb. 2:15). The person who loves is, of course, the person over whom God is exercising His controlling influence (i.e., an abiding Christian). A believer who does not love others feels guilty, and fears (dreads) meeting his Judge, perhaps subconsciously if not consciously. This fear is a punishment. His guilty conscience punishes him. On the human level, only total acceptance of another person will remove the "fear in love." For example, in marriage a love relationship that is *free of fear*, is one in which there is a commitment to demonstrate total acceptance of the mate. *Total forgiveness* is also necessary for a transparent relationship (Eph. 4:31-32).

19 - Our ability to "love," and our practice of "love," come from God's love for us ("He first loved us"). We need not fear standing before our Judge, because we love Him and He loves us.

20-21 - A claim to "love God" is a poor substitute for genuine love of the brethren. Verse 19 left open the possibility of such a claim. John therefore clarified that a claim to love God is not a *true demonstration* of love. In John's hyperbolic parlance, failing to love is *to hate*. Love for the *unseen* God will find expression in love for our brethren—whom we *can see*. Furthermore, God commanded us to love *both* Himself *and* our "brother[s]," not *just* Himself (2:3; 3:23-24; 5:3). Here is another false claim (cf. 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9, 22; 5:10).

Going Further

One thing we can do to train ourselves to remember, is to memorize a part of what our Father has said to us. The Holy Spirit can use this to change our thinking so that our "heads" are more like Jesus.

This week, memorize 1 John 4:18.