How Bible Teachers Can Overcome Fear

About the author

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How Bible Teachers Can Overcome Fear

If you teach from the Bible to individuals or groups, you will have moments where you experience fear.

Occasionally someone will say to me, “Glenn, I’m not like you. You’re never afraid to speak or teach.” I always tell them that I experience fears about half the time I’m teaching. They are usually shocked to hear this from me, but it’s true. The real difference is that I have learned to overcome fear when it comes.

Fear is not the most frequent problem that troubles Bible teachers, but its effects are brutal. I’ve seen experienced, competent teachers seize up in fear and fall apart in front of a class. And I’ve personally felt the grip of fear squeeze my heart so hard I wondered if the blood was going to burst out my head.

More often, there are moments of fear that come up right before you teach, or during a lesson. These may not be apparent to anyone else, but you know it. And they can rattle you. A number of teachers have pointed out that when those “small fears” grab your thoughts, you can go for several minutes without actually listening to anyone else. You won’t even remember what you said!

No Bible teacher is completely immune from fear. I’m confident, however, that every Bible teacher can learn how to overcome fear.
The primary way to overcome fear is to restore a Biblical perspective about the situation.

Most of the fear that plagues Bible teachers is from a human perspective. We get all caught up in what might happen –

- We could look foolish in front of others
- We don’t know how to answer questions
- People will think less of our intelligence or knowledge or skill
- We get into conflict with someone

Let’s look at what’s going on in the spiritual perspective. What does the Word of God tell us about this situation that may be causing you to freeze up in fear?

- These people (whom Jesus died for) are not the enemy – Satan is (Ephesians 6:2).
- Your teaching role, for these students at this time, is not an accident of fate. The Sovereign Lord of the Universe has arranged this time, and is able to work all things together for good. (Romans 8:28)
- If someone rejects you, they are actually rejecting Jesus and the Father rather than you. (Luke 10:16) So this isn’t about you at all.
- Who among us is perfectly wise or intelligent or competent? Apart from Jesus we can do nothing (John 15:5) but with him all things are possible (Matthew 19:26)
- You have been given supernatural gifts to serve the Lord (Ephesians 4:11-13)
- Your obedience and faith, operating in the love of Christ, are tremendously powerful.
- It is God who causes spiritual growth in others, not you. (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- You have been given a spiritual promise that the perfect love of Jesus Christ in you drives out fear. (1 John 4:18)
- You are never alone. (Matthew 28:20)

Commit yourself to Truth from the Source! Listen to the revealed truth of the Bible, dear teacher, and not your pounding heart.
Fear of man paralyzes you. A heartfelt fear of the Lord makes you bold and gives you energy.

Love the Lord with all your heart and mind and soul and strength (Mark 12:30), and you will see every person in the right perspective. “The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread.” (Isaiah 8:13)

A heartfelt fear of the Lord – the Creator of all things seen and unseen, the Holy One above all, the One who is sovereign over time and space and knows every word before you speak it, the One holding all things together, the Awesome Righteous Judge, the One with power over death, the God who loves every numbered hair on your head – is your obligation and duty and joy.

Noah feared God, though he was the only righteous man on the whole Earth.

The Israelite midwives feared God more than their Egyptian masters and did not kill the boy babies. And Moses – one of those boy babies – later stood unafraid before Pharaoh, the most powerful man on Earth at the time.

Joshua feared the One who could shatter the walls of Jericho.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were all rescued from certain death.

Isaiah fell on his face before the temple-filling power of God.

Peter and John had seen the Risen Lord Jesus, and did not fear the Sanhedrin.

Luther challenged the Catholic hierarchy, fearing God more than the troubles caused by disrupting conventional (but ungodly) church practices.

And thousands of Christian martyrs have gone fearlessly to their glorious deaths because they feared God more than men.

If you are afraid about a Bible study lesson or presentation, remind yourself of the company you keep. Let go your fear, dear teacher, for you are called to high and holy things!
Physiological Fact: Fear is not just in your head. Learn to deal with the physical responses of fear.

Ok, some of you are asking why I have this. “It’s not spiritual, Glenn.” We are both flesh and spirit! Our bodies operate by principles. There are flesh realities just as there are spiritual realities.

Fear creates a physical response, a stress response. Your body will tense up. You will take rapid breaths, and shallower breaths. Adrenalin pours into your bloodstream, so your heart beats more rapidly. Your blood pressure will rise (which you can feel in your neck and head). Your intestinal tract will contract and the acid

For many people, dealing with the physical responses to fear is what allows them to starting thinking clearly again. It’s ok if this is your first response to fear, rather than a mental one. Most people can’t think about all the theological truths I outlined above when their brains are on stress-response mode.

Here are two practical suggestions that work:

1. Take slow, deep breaths, one after another. Inhale as deeply as you can, and then quietly exhale. Repeat.

   Increasing the oxygen flow into your bloodstream will counter many of the stress response symptoms. Doing this slowly counters many of the others.

2. Consciously tense all the muscles in your hands, arms, and legs, and then consciously relax them.

   Most people don’t have enough physical training to just tell their muscles to relax. It’s much easier to first consciously tense muscles, and then relax.

Pray as you do both of these. Ask the Lord to help you, calling upon His many promises to you. This is not Eastern mysticism or martial arts, reaching for the Void, but Christian men and women calling out to the Lord our Rock and our Redeemer for strength!
You can do both of these before or even during a lesson, if necessary. I recommend you try practicing them when you aren’t fearful – even in that situation you’ll experience how much better you can feel.

**Psychological Fact:**
Your students want to like you.

Psychologists have studied teaching situations for many years now, trying to understand what makes for effective learning. One thing they’ve discovered is that **students genuinely want to like the person who is teaching or speaking.** (The cynics say this is because it makes it easier to rationalize why they’re spending time listening, but who cares?)

Use this fact to calm your fears. The people God has called you to teach are pre-wired to like you!

**The simple rule about fear:**
Either fear controls you, or you control it.

Fear controls you as long as you allow it to grip you. But when you embrace it, get your arms around it, then you’re in control. This is one important strategy to take charge of your fear.

Let’s say you’re afraid to fail with a lesson, or afraid people won’t like the questions or application you came up for them. Ask yourself this question: “Ok, if I fail, then what do I have left? Do I still have my family, my health, my relationship with Jesus? Will I still have friends in the church? Will I still have all the promises of God and assurances that He will use me?” It’s a lot easier to get past the fear of failing when you recognize that you’re still going to be ok even if you do fail.

Maybe you’re afraid of conflict with someone in the class. Or rejection by someone whose opinion you really, really value. Accept that this might happen, and then think about what your next steps would be. “What can restart with? How would I talk with that person again? What’s the next thing I could do?” Bruce Johnson has written “Sometimes the wisest thing you can do is to accept the worst…and then move on.”
Jesus is patient with you, so be patient with yourself, dear teacher.

Some teachers experience fear more often than others. Don’t compare yourself to others. “Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfector of your faith.” (Hebrews 12:2) Put your confidence in Him and His calling on you. He is able!

Teach to change lives!

Glenn Brooke
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