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Photo by Isranet

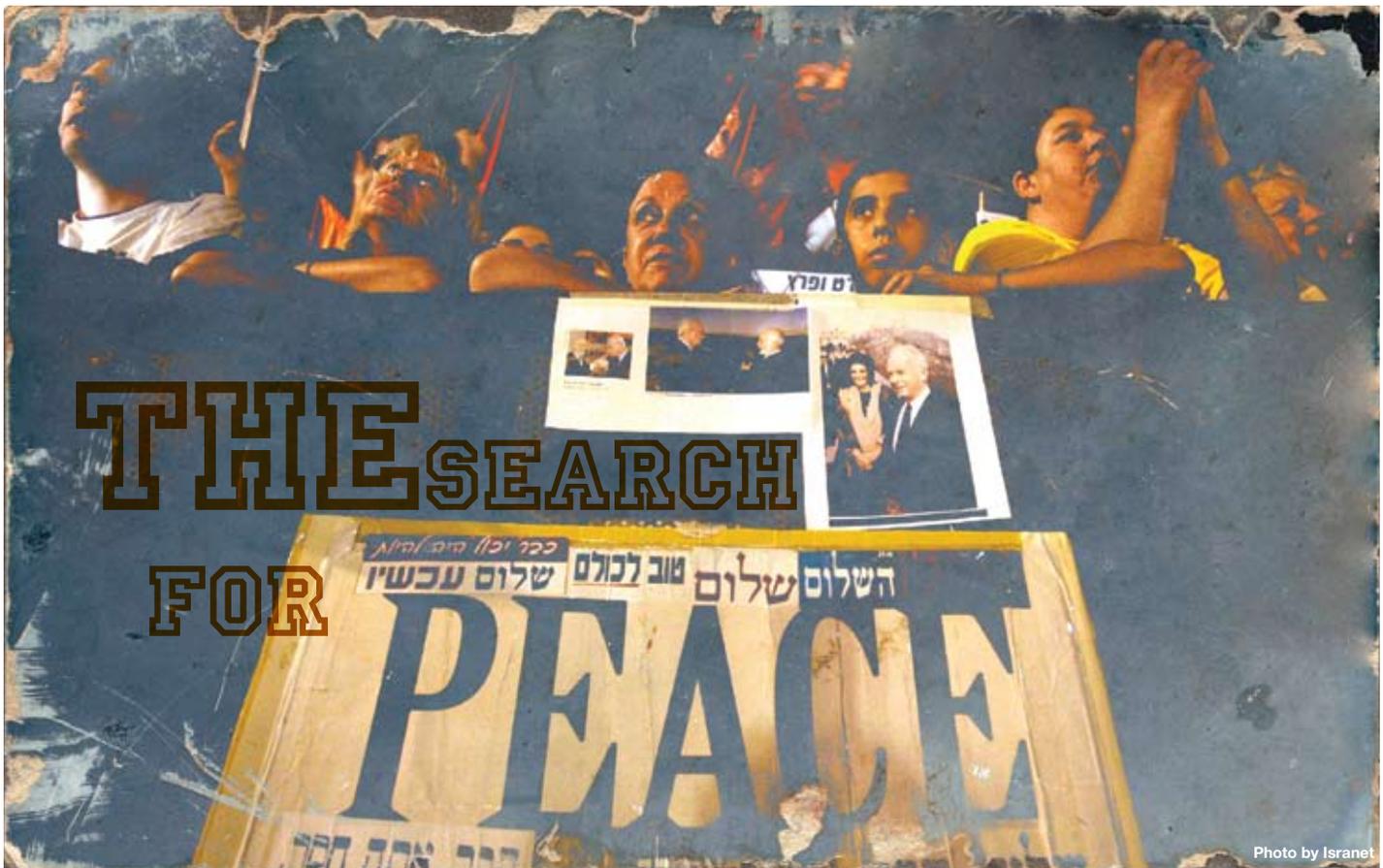


Photo by Isranet

I have never met an Israeli who didn't desire peace. Whether on the right or the left (politically), all have a deep desire for peace. While they may not agree on how to get there, I am convinced that a vast majority of Israelis would willingly lay down arms, if they felt that genuine peace was a reality. I have lived in Israel for nearly 20 years and have never experienced real peace here. There have been times of relative quiet, but never a cessation of violence.

I have learned to be deeply appreciative of the security forces that provide a measure of safety for the inhabitants of Israel. The security fence separating Israelis from Arab communities in the territories (along the border of the West Bank, or biblical Judea and Samaria) has dramatically lessened terrorist actions in the past few years. The recent activities in Gaza have struck a blow to terror, and the 2006 Second Lebanon War had a deterring factor. But, none of these efforts have brought peace; they are simply efforts to deal with the reality, which is anything but peaceful. World leaders try to solve the problems with cease-fires and peace process proposals. Since 1993, Israel has repeatedly tried to achieve peace through the Oslo Accords. However, peace remains elusive.

The problem with most of these efforts is that they don't deal with the root problem. Any peace applied that is not accompanied by a true heart for peace is doomed to failure. As believers, we can inexplicably have peace in our hearts that enables us to walk through the often frightening events of modern life, with the assurance that God is with us. In this *Teaching Letter*, I want to explore the topic of peace, and one of the greatest enemies of peaceful hearts—fear.

WHEN FEAR REIGNS

In the world today, fear is reigning in the hearts of men and women everywhere. Financial insecurity, threat of wars, and terror fill hearts with dread, uncertainty, and fear. Fear is not a stranger to most of us. When I was a child, I was often overwhelmed with fear. I was afraid of big dogs, bridges that you could see through, horses, and goats (especially after one particularly big billy goat tried to bite me). My father was an evangelist and Bible teacher who specialized in Bible prophecy. Some of the biblical predications of the end times are frightening. So, I was afraid of the future and, as a child, had many nightmares. My parents gave me great counsel to overcome fear, and the Lord has ministered to me in this area. Not only children have fear; many adults also struggle with fear. Fear of failure, people, public speaking, financial ruin, physical danger, growing old, and being alone are just a few.

During the recent Gaza conflict, Bridges for Peace was there to minister to the people of Israel who have been under missile fire for the past eight years. On the first visit after the start of the battles, I went to meet the mayors and express Christian support for them. The night before we went, I had to overcome a sudden fear that came upon me. I was asking myself, “Why do you want to go to a war zone?” I went in spite of this natural fear, and it was the right thing to do. Then a couple of weeks into the conflict, the emergency air raid sirens went off in Jerusalem. There had been no warning of a test. So when we heard the undulating sirens, we assumed that Jerusalem was under imminent attack. Grabbing my coat, phone, and purse, I joined the other BFP staff in the basement safe room. While I was not overwhelmed by fear, my body responded with increased heartbeat and adrenalin. The last time we heard the sirens in Jerusalem (except for tests) was during the 1991 Gulf War when we huddled in sealed rooms, wearing gas masks as Saddam Hussein sent Scud missiles into Israel.



WHAT IS FEAR?

First, it is important to understand that in the Bible, there is more than one kind of fear. There is positive fear, as in the fear of the Lord. In a future *Israel Teaching Letter*, we will talk about the fear of the Lord. In this *Teaching Letter*, we will talk about the fear that destroys the peace in which God wants us to walk.

Fear is an uneasiness of the mind upon the thought of future evil likely to befall us. It is an emotion experienced in anticipation of some specific pain or danger. Consider these two key words in the above definition of fear—mind and thought. Fear has everything to do with the mind, our thought pattern, and belief system—primarily our belief system. Another definition says it is a natural human response to stimuli that are interpreted on the basis of our

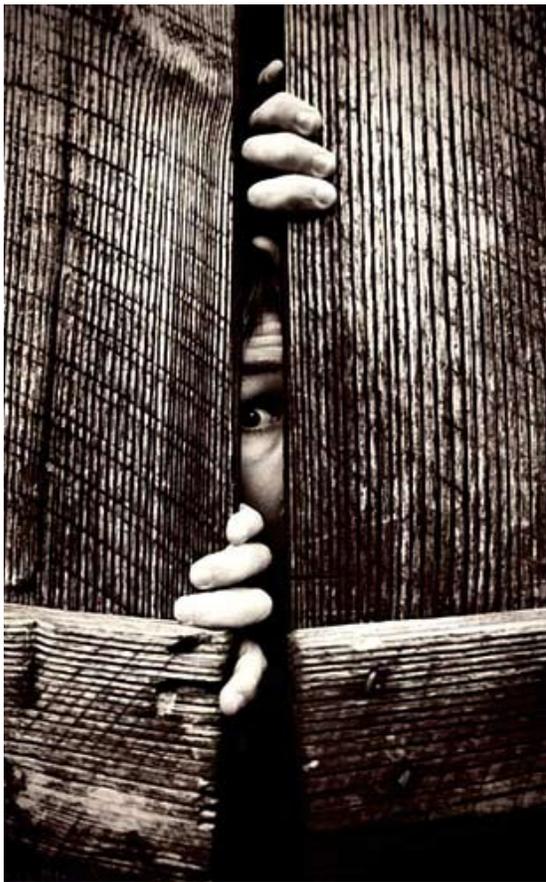


“...for
whatever
is not from
faith is
sin.”
ROMANS 14:23

individual backgrounds and past experiences. A dictionary definition depicts fear as “a strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger; reason for alarm; anxious concern.” Various nuances of fear include dismay, anxiety, worry, shyness, fright, alarm, horror, terror, or panic, which are all forms of fear to one degree or another. As I was reflecting, I realized that we accept fear as a normal part of living. Yet, for the Christian, it shouldn’t be normal. Yes, it is natural, but it is not God’s plan for us.

After my childhood problems with fear, I thought I had overcome fear in my life. When I turned 40, fear came upon me again. My husband had been diagnosed with diabetes, and a good friend told me that meant he would have a shortened lifespan. Realizing that women statistically live longer than men, I came to the conclusion that I would outlive my husband. We had been ministering for the Lord in Israel already for a number of years and were living on support. We never had more than enough to meet the basic needs of life. There was no retirement fund. I also faced the reality that we did not have children, and at age 40, it was highly unlikely that God would work a miracle and give us children. So, in my fear, I expressed repeatedly the fear that I would grow old, be alone, with no savings or retirement, without children to care for me, and I would be reduced to eating cat food. This went on for months until one evening, while in church, the Lord got through to me and impressed on my heart that I was defaming His name by not trusting Him with my future well-being. Immediately convicted of this sin of unbelief, I repented and had a real change of heart.

Through this experience, I came to understand that fear and unbelief are linked. We say we believe in God. We know that He is the all-powerful, all-knowing Creator of the universe, but as long as we allow fear a place in our lives, we are, in effect, saying that we don’t believe He will take care of us. Paul says, “...for whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). Doubting the protective care of God is not of faith. Boldly, I say to you that abiding fear is sin.



THE RESULTS OF FEAR

Fear has a devastating effect on our lives. It can cause emotional paralysis that keeps us from moving forward because we are so terrified of imagined results. Doctors know that fear, worry, and anxiety are often the cause of sickness and death. Dr. Charles Mayo said, “I have never known anyone who died of overwork, but I have known many who died from fear, anxiety, and worry.” A sudden fright can cause heart attacks. Ongoing worry and fear cause a myriad of serious health problems including cancer, ulcers, and heart disease. The fearful Christian is not walking in the fullness that God has for His children. Such a person is stunted in faith. Fear steals one’s joy and saps one’s strength. Under the influence of fear, we make flawed decisions, and we miss opportunities God has for us.

Today, world events are daunting, and fear is prevalent. It is time that believers walk in faith. When Yeshua (Jesus) spoke about the end times, He noted that fear would overtake men. “*And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; **men’s hearts failing them from fear** and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near*” (Luke 21:25–28, emphasis added). Even when Yeshua is noting that fear would overwhelm people, He gives believers instruction to look up. He wants us to not dwell on the fearsome circumstances but rather in the midst of these times to look up and trust Him that our redemption is near.

FEAR IS NOT GOD'S PLAN FOR US

Repeatedly in Scripture, the Lord tells us to “fear not.” Let’s meditate on a few of these Scriptures.

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you...And the LORD, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed” (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8). At this time, Joshua and the children of Israel were facing exactly what Israel is facing today—war with all its terrors.

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

One of the last things Yeshua said to His disciples was *“...lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen”* (Matthew 28:20b). Since we are still not at the end, we can confidently abide in the fact that Yeshua is with us. Does that mean we will not face difficulty? No. He also said that *“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33b). God never said we wouldn’t face troubles, but He did promise that we wouldn’t have to go through them alone. *“...Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you”* (Isaiah 43:1b–2).

“...Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine.”
ISAIAH 43:1B

HOW DO WE OVERCOME FEAR?

I want to share four practical ways to overcome fear in our lives.

1. We must know the truth found in God’s Word. When we are oblivious to the promises in God’s words, then we will have every reason to fear. Studying His words is the first remedy for fear. Not knowing the Scriptures allows us to be in error. *“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God’”* (Matthew 22:29). Search the Scriptures for God’s promises and meditate on them. Ask the Lord to make them real to you. His Words are life to those who receive them. Read Psalm 91 and Psalm 23 for starters.

2. We must know and trust God.

The way to knowing God and developing trust is through relationship. We must spend time with Him. The Scripture proclaims that He is a God of love, mercy, and compassion, but until we understand those words in our hearts, not just our heads, we will continue to be victimized by fear, unbelief, and an inability to trust Him. *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But He who fears has not been made perfect in love”* (1 John 4:18).

There is no more perfect love than the love of God. A revelation of His love will transform our lives. In staff devotions the other day, we were singing wonderful songs about the awesome Creator, the God who can do anything, who is bigger than everything, who is unstoppable, knows everything and still loves me. Imagine, He knows how many hairs are on your head (an ever changing number)! He loves you, and as love personified, He wants to cast fear out of your life. He wants to make us perfect in love. Remember that God is not the author of fear. *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind”* (2 Timothy 1:7).



“Many
are the
afflictions
of the
righteous,
but the
LORD
delivers
him out of
them all.”
PSALM 34:19

As a frightened child, my mother frequently quoted Proverbs 3:5-6 to me, telling me to memorize it and repeat it every time I was frightened. “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.*” When we know and love God and understand His love for us, we learn we can trust in His protective care.

3. We must surrender our cares and fears to God.

Repeatedly in Scripture, God calls His people to surrender. As human beings created in God’s image with the ability to reason, to problem solve, and to think creatively, we often fall into the trap of thinking we can run our lives. Frank Sinatra sang, “I did it my way,” but God is calling to us to “do it His way.” In recent months, this idea of surrender has been frequently in my heart and prayers. His way is so much better than anything we can manage. We resist surrender because we don’t want to lose control. How shortsighted! The greatest blessings come when God is in control of our lives. The psalmist says:

“Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass...I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread...For the LORD loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off” (Psalm 37:5, 25, 28).

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19).

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

4. We must keep our mind (our thoughts) under control.

Have you ever sat and listened to children pretending? Their imaginations are so active. It is great fun to listen to their ideas. Imagination has this positive side, but also a negative side. Fear is often negative imagination. We imagine every evil thing that could happen, and it becomes real to us. Consider the proverb which says, “*The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion*” (Proverbs 28:1). Sometimes our imaginations cause us to run away from something that doesn’t even exist. God has given us the solution. We must choose to look to God, not to the feared situation. “*You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You...*” (Isaiah 26:3).

We also can choose to take control of our thoughts. The Scripture says, “*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, **bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ***” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5, emphasis added).

This requires constant vigilant effort. You may not be able to control what thought enters your mind, but you can make a conscious decision about whether you meditate on it or not. We need to be careful to fill our minds with edifying and godly thoughts. I find it helpful to remind myself of all the things God has done in the past, both biblical accounts and personal experiences. I surround myself with praise and worship music. We need to spend time in the Scripture. We also need to be careful not to fill our minds with junk. What we read and watch becomes a part of who we will become. How important it is to carefully consider what we are putting into our minds.



IT'S TIME TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT FEAR

Recently, I read in Revelation a passage about the new heavens and new earth. What wonderful promises are available for those who overcome, but I was shocked at those included in the list of those who aren't over-comers. *"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away...He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death"* (Revelation 21:4, 7-8).

Earlier I made the bold statement that fear is sin. Please take note that cowardly (fearful) and unbelieving people are right there with murderers and the rest. It is time we as Christians take this issue seriously and allow God to give His peace to us. He told us to *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **And the peace of God** which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things"* (Philippians 4:6-8, NASB, emphasis added).



PEACE CAN BE OURS

In Hebrew, the word for "peace" is *shalom*. In Israel, this word is frequently heard. Every time it is used as a greeting, the person is expressing a desire for peace. Hebrew is a language in which every word is formed by a combination of consonants, which is called the *shoresh* (or root). The root for *shalom* is (שלום) and the words formed from it have the meanings of peace, wholeness, complete, finished, and safety. That is what God wants for His people. This true peace, which brings us to a place of wholeness, is the result of a heart that knows, loves, and trusts God. We can walk in this peace that God provides.

We do not deny that the days in which we live are full of trouble. In fact, many believe we are in the end times. There is great uncertainty about the future. In these times, it is more important than ever that we surrender our lives to the Almighty and trust Him with our lives. He has told us that He has good plans for His people. *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of **peace** and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will*

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil..."
JEREMIAH 29:11

PEACE



call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:11–13, emphasis added). Let’s make the decision to call upon the Lord in prayer, seeking Him with all our hearts. Our response to the crisis time we live in should be that we hope in the Almighty God who loves His children.

Yeshua encouraged His disciples by saying, *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”* (John 14:27). Throughout Scripture, the message is clear: God wants us to focus our hearts on Him so that He can grant us the gift of peace, but the choice is ours. Let me close with the words the Apostle Paul used to encourage the believers in Rome: *“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 15:13).

By Rebecca J. Brimmer
International President and CEO

All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

Many pastors, Bible teachers, and lay people have written and asked if they can use these notes for preaching and teaching. The answer is a resounding “yes”! It is our hope that the information contained herein will be disseminated over and over again, whether through the spoken word or by photocopying and redistributing these teachings. *“For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem”* (Isaiah 2:3).

