

Changing Motivation From Fear to Love

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Our direction and goals come from our thoughts. Our motivation comes from our emotions. While we work very hard to educate our thoughts and correct our beliefs, few people train or perfect their motivation with equal discipline. As far as our nervous systems are concerned, our minds run well when motivated by love and desire and poorly when motivated by fear. From a moral point of view, love is also superior. Perfect, that is to say, mature *teleios* love casts out fear. (1 John 4:18)

It should not come as a surprise that fear motives creep into our lives as we fail to mature properly. We learn our motivation during infancy through bonded relationships. Whatever emotions our parents use to motivate us become our internal source of motivation during life. If these early bonds form from love and closeness they serve us well but if they form from fear and the avoidance of pain our motivational system stays immature.

Fear bonds form as the result of failed attempts at self-preservation. While self-preservation is the great value of fear, early experiences in fearful relationships we cannot escape, produce very negative and upsetting internal emotions. When these unpleasant emotions exceed our capacity to return to joy and quiet on our own, we begin to avoid pain as a form of self-preservation. After a while, avoiding pain becomes the central focus of fear bonds even when there is no real risk of overwhelming our capacity.

Once avoiding pain becomes the goal we hear phrases like, “What if he gets mad?” “Are you going to be upset?” “I’m afraid that—fill in the blank” “I’d be too embarrassed!” “You are really pissing me off!” “I have to make him/it stop.” “I can’t stand it when...” “What difference will it make?”

We must then ask a serious question about avoiding pain and overwhelming feelings. Is it self-preservation if I stop being and acting like myself? When I no longer do or say or act like what I really feel inside isn’t my “self” lost? When I can no longer even figure out what I want, feel or even think, haven’t I lost my “self” already?

What we discover in many people who are fear-bonded and motivated is a loss and obscuring of personal feelings, thoughts, values and desires. They are afraid to make an impact on others. Often the fear is that they will not have an impact or make a difference. Fear bonded people are also quite confused about what fears are theirs and which ones belong to others. Just being around anxious people makes them edgy or distressed. They often withdraw, placate, entertain or please others to make the fear stop. Often the result is that they take on responsibilities that are not theirs because they are afraid of what will happen if they don’t. Other times they shrink back from their duties because they feel inadequate.

Another group of fear-bonded individuals are afraid to let others have an impact because they fear losing their own impact. These controllers frequently control people around them with anger, contempt, rejection, ridicule, the “silent treatment,” and other ways of creating pain including, physical violence.

Naturally we recognize these behaviors as representing brains that have lost their synchronization at level 2. They are operating out of fear and a desire to make things stop instead of synchronizing with others (level 3) or expressing their own values, goals, desires and preferences (level 4.) They have lost their flavor. They have ceased to be lights. Thinking they are preserving themselves they have lost themselves and disappeared.

Before we can understand how to change a fear-bond back to a desire/love-bond, let us review how a healthy identity would deal with fears at each level of development. From this review we can see where we need to start correcting the fear-bond.

Avoiding Fear-Bonds at Each Level of Maturity

1. Infant maturity

- a. Recognize the fear (what am I really afraid of?)
- b. Know who I want with me when I am afraid
- c. Discover what I want (desire)
- d. Talk about my fear

2. Child Maturity

- a. Recognize my part in the fearful situation
- b. Recognize the other person’s part in the fearful situation
- c. Use a third person to check my reality
- d. Separate my responsibility from yours (a+b)
- e. Learn to be myself rather than control others

3. Adult

- a. Stay in relationship while letting others have fears
- b. Do nothing about what others fear-let them handle it
- c. Take care of our own business with personal style
- d. Remind self and others about our mutual goals and desires

There is a big separation between adult and higher levels of maturity when it comes to handling fears. Up to this point every person is responsible for their own fears and no one else’s. Without many years of practice distinguishing *this fear is mine* from *that fear is yours*, then moving to higher levels of dealing with fear will only bring confusion about responsibility. The shift of responsibility from dealing with my own fears to helping others with their fears is a major sign of dysfunction when it is attempted by anyone of adult maturity or lower. Even for parents, taking on the fears of others is dysfunctional outside the parent/child relationship.

Parents must be very careful not to develop fear-bonds in their children. Since parents want to build capacity in their children, they help children back to joy from fear and teach them to act like themselves during manageable levels of the emotion.

4. Parent

- a. Help one's personal people (natural and spiritual family)
- b. Take some shared responsibility for the fears of younger minds
- c. Identify fears in younger mind
- d. Help younger mind return to joy and peace

5. Elder

- a. Help "at risk," isolated, marginalized people
- b. Identify community fears
- c. Help community remember what is like us to do
- d. Remain a non-anxious presence

Elders, as we know, act like parents-at-large for their communities. Elders will provide just barely enough security for people to recognize and face their own fears knowing that they are not alone and remembering what is really important to "our people" under these scary conditions.

Converting Fear to Desire Based On Our Maturity Level

Now, the reason for our discussion was to change fear-bonds to love-bonds where our desires and identity can shine. To make a change from fear to love we start first with the adult level. If we can correct the problem at this level it will be easiest. The adult will simply think and decide differently and the problem is solved.

Solutions:

1. Confidently be yourself. Take care of your business. Stay in relationship with others around you who are anxious but do nothing about their part of the problem. Speak of mutual goals that are important during this time of threat and fear.

If this adult solution worked, then you have corrected the fear bond. This does not mean that others will not react by trying to put pressure on you to become frightened again, so you may have to make this correction several times under even more pressure and anxiety from others.

If you still feel fear or cannot imagine how to use an adult solution we must go deeper and correct some earlier problems that lead to fear bonds. First we look at the child level skills. Resolving fear-bonds at the child level is not just a matter of understanding and choosing differently. These solutions take longer and involve study and consultation with others. They require a good deal of problem solving to figure out "mine" from "yours." We generally do not solve these problems without consultation and encouragement.

2. Define your responsibilities carefully. Go through the demands you feel you must meet and see which ones are logically yours and which are unreasonable. Find someone qualified to double-check your judgment. Now, be equally clear when you are trying to solve someone else's problem or fear. You should now be able to speak clearly about what is yours and what is someone else's part of the problem and solution.
3. Check to see if someone else is controlling you by being upset or threatening to become upset. If you are being controlled return to step 2 until you can speak calmly and clearly to them about your responsibilities and boundaries.
4. Check and see if you are attempting to control others through your threats or upset. If so return to step 2 until you can speak calmly and clearly to them about your responsibilities and boundaries.

If you still fear and cannot imagine or manage to speak clearly to others about your responsibilities and limits, then we must go deeper and correct problems and develop skills needed for the infant level. We get here when we can't figure things out on our own or even if we do, the fear is strong enough that we can't talk freely and openly about who we are so our "self" continues to be hidden and lost when we are afraid.

5. Find out what I am really afraid of with help from experienced minds. Often what I am afraid of is not a current day reality or what it seems to me. I may think I am afraid I am not doing my job but I am really afraid someone will be angry or ridicule me. I am afraid I will not survive being ridiculed because of my early life experiences.
6. I must discover who I want with me when I am afraid and what I want them to do with or for me. I need someone who can handle the fear without being overwhelmed and help me focus on myself instead of the threat I perceive.
7. I must discover what I really want and what really matters most to me in the current situation so that I can express my goals and values.
8. I must learn to speak about what matters to me even while I feel afraid by having someone patiently help me find words I can mean and practice saying them in a low threat situation until I am ready to speak of my values, goals and preferences to others who are afraid or of whom I am afraid.

This process of defining and expressing our identities gets much easier as our identities mature and become solid. The farther we have grown, the easier it is to change fear-bonds to love-bonds.