

fear
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What is Fear?

One emotion that we typically like to shut down is fear, but the reality is that fear is actually really important. We hear about "facing your fears" or being "fearless," but rarely does anyone talk about how fear can be good. That rush of fear you feel? That is your brain doing what it needs to do to warn you of danger and keep you safe. You've probably heard of fight, flight, freeze, or fawn responses. Those are the ways your brain reacts when it senses a threat, and fear is a big part of that. It's like an internal alarm system, making sure you're ready to handle whatever comes your way.

The real struggle with fear comes when it starts to control you.

Instead of just giving you a heads-up and letting you decide how to handle this, it takes over and confuses your brain on what decision may be best. When fear takes over and starts dictating what you can or can't do, you lose control of your actions—maybe even your thoughts. When fear gets so overwhelming that it stops you from doing what you need or want to do, that becomes a real problem.

When fear starts to control your mind, you lose control of your actions—and maybe even your thoughts. If fear gets so strong that it keeps you from doing what you need or want to do, it becomes a real issue.



What Does It Look Like to Experience Fear?

You can be afraid of pretty much anything. Whatever you can think of, there's someone out there who's scared of it. Your best friend may be terrified of flying on a plane for vacation, but maybe you want to be an airline pilot. Maybe your friend loves reptiles, but just the thought of a lizard sends shivers down your spine. Fear hits everyone differently, and that's okay and valid.

The physical effects of fear can show up in all kinds of ways. In the heat of the moment—like when someone suddenly yells at you, or you narrowly avoid an accident—your reflexes kick in to help you back off or protect yourself. But fear isn't just about those intense, immediate moments. Suppose you are fearful about what could happen in any particular situation. In that case, you may experience a higher heart rate, sweaty hands, muscle tension, or stomach issues.

There are many other physical reactions to fear, but those are just a few. Sometimes, the discomfort of fear can drive people to unhealthy coping mechanisms, like substance use or habits that can lead to addiction, to escape the feeling. Your body feels fear as much as your mind does, and it's essential to recognize the impact it can have when you don't address it headfirst.



Physical



Fear can be intense and overwhelming. It can take over your mind, pushing aside all other thoughts and emotions until you're isolating yourself and hiding away in a place that feels safe. Sometimes, fear shows up in disguise as other feelings like anger, sadness, or anxiety.

For example, you might be angry at a sibling for making you late to school, but that anger could be masking a more profound fear of missing out on a social interaction you were planning to have with your friends at the start of your day. Or you might feel sad about your best friend getting into her dream college when what you're terrified of is losing her friendship and feeling left behind.

It's important to remember that feeling fear is completely normal. Allow yourself to experience it, but also understand that something can be scary without being harmful.

Fear can mess with you spiritually and challenge your beliefs and practices. Maybe you grew up fearful about various topics, but instead of getting help with those topics, you were told fear is bad and you need to trust. If you have doubts or questions about religion, fear might make you want to keep those questions to yourself so nobody thinks you're wrong.

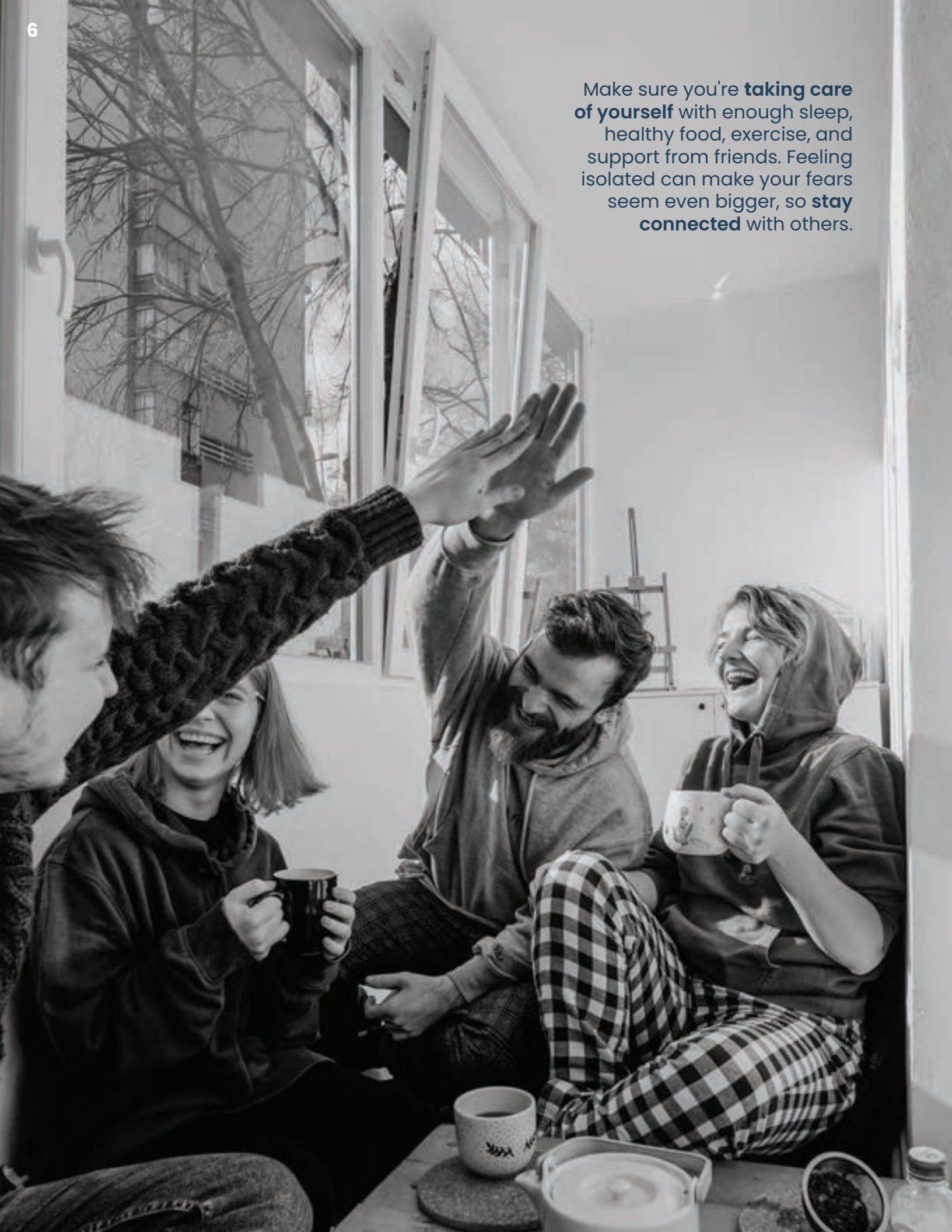
You might also have fears like wondering if there's really a God if God could ever love you, if praying is pointless if you're going to hell, if you have no purpose, or if people would judge and reject you if they knew the real you. Any of these fears can shake your faith, and it might seem like fear and faith can't coexist.

But remember, fear is just a feeling. You can still have faith even when you're feeling afraid. In fact, faith can be a great antidote for the feeling of fear!

Spiritual



Make sure you're **taking care of yourself** with enough sleep, healthy food, exercise, and support from friends. Feeling isolated can make your fears seem even bigger, so **stay connected** with others.



How To Overcome Fear

Facing your fears sounds simple, but it's not always easy. You may have some smaller fears that are easier to deal with while others feel deeper and far more intense. Maybe you are somewhat fearful about swimming, but you are able to talk yourself into at least going into the shallow end to build up some courage. On the other hand, maybe you have a deep-rooted fear of thinking others do not like you, so you get stuck in negative thought patterns and cannot enjoy yourself with friends.

Overcoming fear is not always easy, but it is possible! Be patient with yourself, and don't be afraid to ask for help. There's always hope; you don't have to go through it alone.

Professional Guidance

If you've noticed that fear is taking up a lot more of your time and energy than you want it to, then it is probably time to talk to someone who can help you. A licensed therapist can help you sort through what your fears are, where they come from, and how you can navigate overcoming your fears.

Constant fear is often linked to something that is much deeper than it appears to be, and processing the root can help you heal. Some fears may be related to past traumas, anxiety, or depression, and getting help with those can, in turn, help with your fear. Some fears may even reach the level of being a phobia, in which case your brain will need help and support to adjust. A mental health professional can help you connect all these dots and figure out the best way forward for you.

Caring for Yourself

You don't have to be brave all the time! Cut yourself some slack. If you're working on facing one fear, don't stress about tackling all your fears at once. It's okay to handle them one at a time. Make sure you're taking care of yourself with enough sleep, healthy food, exercise, and support from friends. Feeling isolated can make your fears seem even bigger, so stay connected with others.

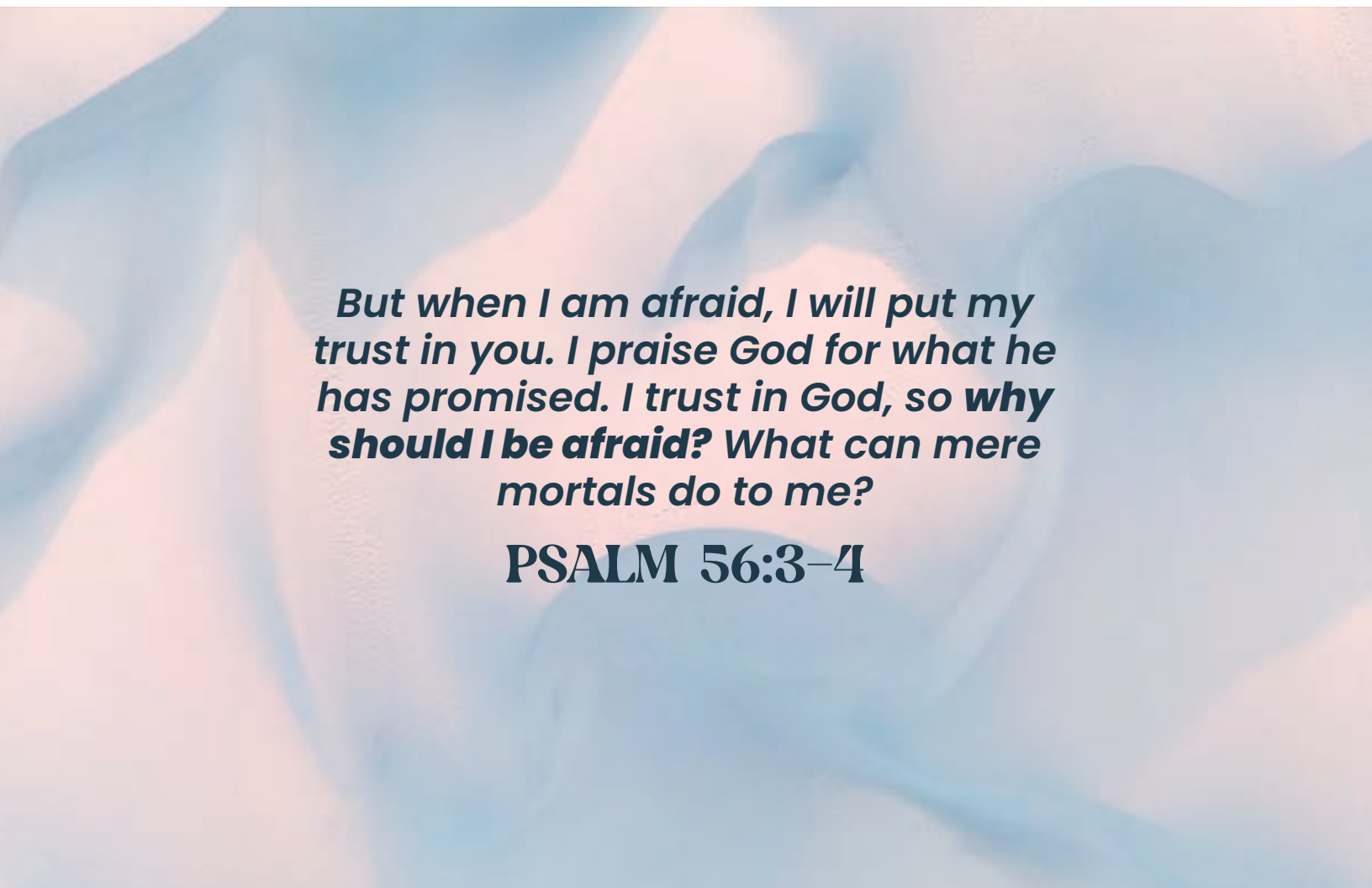
Remember, you can be scared and still be brave. Not everything that feels terrifying is actually dangerous. Be patient with yourself as you figure out the difference between fear and what you truly believe. Give yourself breaks when you need them, and celebrate the small wins along the way.

Spiritual Practice

Even Jesus experienced fear. Before He was arrested, He asked God to take away the suffering of the cross and was so anxious that He sweat blood. Despite His fear, He held onto His faith. When He says things like "fear not" and "I am with you," He's speaking from a place of understanding exactly what it's like to be afraid and doesn't want you to face your fears alone.

You can feel scared and still chase your goals. You can turn to prayer, find comfort in scripture, lean on your friends, or even reach out to someone who can support you through it.

Faith and trust can help you battle fear and find freedom from the things that scare you. You've got this!



But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so **why should I be afraid?** What can mere mortals do to me?

PSALM 56:3–4

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