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The Power of Divine Love to Cast Out Fear

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. - (**1 Corinthians 13:4-8**)

When considering this description of divine love, I remember being told every time the word love appears in this passage, you should insert your own name in its place. It wouldn't surprise me if this caused you as much frustration as it did me if you attempted to do so. This little exercise puts the cart before the horse. Paul is not primarily giving instructions on how Christians should live, but describing what God is like, a love that is the fruit of God's absolute self-sufficiency. The key to loving like this is to be "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). God can love like this because of who he is, and if we are to love like this we need to be fully immersed in who he is.

Most people would agree that if everyone loved like Paul described, nearly all the problems we face in human society would disappear, along with many others that we don't usually connect with human misbehavior. At the center of so many of our difficulties is fear—fear of rejection, fear of failure, fear of death, fear of sickness, fear of not being able to take care of ourselves in old age, fear of what may happen to our loved ones.

There are so very many things to frighten us. What is the answer to all our fears? Love. The love that comes out of abundance - out of the fullness of God's sufficiency. We read in 1 John 4:18 that "there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear." As the King James Version puts it, "Fear hath torment." To fear is to be tormented, but to be loved perfectly—and to know it—is to be free of fear's torment..

Practice: *Dallas Willard shares a story about an older brother in Christ whom he and his wife knew. When this person found himself burdened by difficult circumstances, the way he would entrust this situation to God was by going out onto his back porch, raising his arms high, and crying out, "Let 'er rip! Let 'er rip!" The only way any of us could say that and mean it is by knowing that we are not in control, but that we are grounded in the sufficiency of God the Shepherd.*

One recommendation for those caught in fear is to imagine that the worst thing they feared had taken place, and to ask, "Where would I be if this actually happened?" and "What would happen to God?" If we were to do this, we would realize that in reality, it would not make much difference, since most of our fears are quite trivial. Even severe fears can be faced when we are confident in the strength and generosity of God—and in the fact that his kingdom isn't shaken, and he is not undone by these things. For his ability to bless us is not contingent upon the situations we encounter, but remains available through an interactive relationship with the living God.