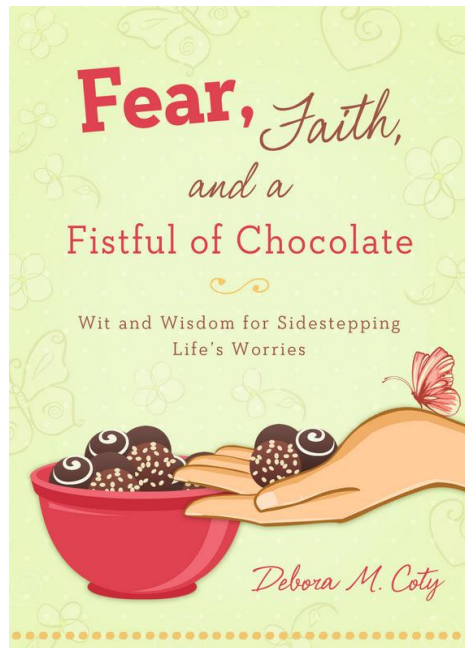


Fear, Faith, and a Fistful of Chocolate

Wit and Wisdom for Sidestepping Life's Worries



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Introduction

Do you find yourself hocking up anxiety over and over like a Guernsey regurgitating her cud? Does insecurity nail your feet to the floor? Are you secretly scared that if you stop worrying, your world will fall apart? Do the *what ifs* suck joy out of your very soul? Does thinking of the future make your blood run cold?

If you answered yes to any of these, you're in good company. Welcome to the sisterhood of weary worrywarts. But hey, who wants to be a wart?

In my travels as a speaker, I've encountered countless women like me who have spent years running from their own personal fear monsters. Some fears have names and specific countenances; others are faceless, frightening creatures that lurk in the shadows just out of sight. But we know they're there. We *feel* them. And we yearn to boldly step up to those fear monsters and yank off their masks.

That's why I wrote *Fear, Faith, and a Fistful of Chocolate*. It's time we treat fear like the unwanted gift it is and exchange it at Heaven's Customer Service desk for something we can really use: power, love, and self-discipline.

In preparation for writing this book, I conducted a survey of 500 random women between the ages of 18 and 80 in order to pinpoint real fears women struggle with on a daily basis. Here are the top ten fears in descending order:

1. Loss of loved one (spouse/children/parents)
2. Debilitating disease/illness/cancer
3. Failure
4. Old age/senility
5. The unknown/the *what ifs*
6. Loneliness
7. Dependency on others
8. Rejection

9. Specific Critters (e.g. snakes, roaches, rats)
10. Being judged unfairly

Within these pages, we'll address these fears (along with others) and explore the reasons they can keep us stretched tighter than size 8 jeans over a size 12 tushie.

I've got to tell you, fear is a scary topic for a humorist. Ain't nothing funny about fear. But there was no mistaking my divine directive from The Boss to tackle it, so you'll find this book a smidge different than my first two books in this "Take On Life" series, *Too Blessed to be Stressed*, and *More Beauty, Less Beast*.

Oh, there will be plenty of the great personal stories bringing scripture to life that you've told me you love, snippets of my quirky humor, and lots of light-hearted but heavy-hitting practical tips. But at the request of Bible Study groups who enjoy studying these books, I've added a few additional reflection questions at the end of each chapter (More Pluck, Less Chicken), and the chapters will be a smidge longer and perhaps more serious in tone.

Because fear is serious. And in no way do I wish to trivialize or downplay the destructive force fear often has in our lives. It's real. It's powerful.

But the hope-filled news is there's something even more powerful. *Someone*, actually, who can break the hold fear has over us. Someone who offers us freedom from fear-a-phobia. "I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:4, NASB).

Our fears spotlight what matters to us most ... those hidden corners of our life in which we trust Papa God the least. Those are the hot spots we need to work on, girlfriend. Because if we relinquish control to the only One who can truly defeat fear, the thing that scares us to death can be the very thing that propels us to life.

Section 1: Internal Fears

Refusing to Water the Wallflower

“I give you peace, the kind of peace that only I can give. It isn’t like the peace that this world can give. So don’t be worried or afraid.”

John 14:27, CEV

Chapter 1

I'm a Lean, Mean, Frightened Machine (Exposing Fear)

We will not fear, even if earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea.
PSALM 46:2 NLT

Remember the hilarious scene in the movie, *Patch Adams*, when Robin Williams' Patch character began to empathize with his roommate's bizarre squirrel phobia? At first Patch couldn't grasp such a nonsensical fear. "They're *squirrels*," he deadpanned when his bladder-bursting roommate was pinned, terror-stricken, to his bed believing that invisible rodents had invaded his room.

Patch simply could not connect with this anxiety-riddled guy. Pointing out the absurd didn't work. Logic didn't work. Common sense didn't work. Raw, unexplainable fear trumped them all.

In a flash of enlightenment, Patch finally understood that the only way to help his friend was to enter into his fear with him. To penetrate his personal war zone— as crazy as it seemed (who better than Robin Williams to do crazy?) — and battle fear on its own terms. So during a frenzy of overturned furniture, squirrel nukes, and air bazookas, Patch was able to secure the road to the latrine and provide real, tangible help to someone who was unable to conquer the enemy by himself.

That's exactly why we're here, girlfriend ... to fall in alongside each other, grab an Uzi and blow the nuts out of the invisible squirrels that plague each of us.

Those squirrels, of course, come in all shapes and sizes. Some are flesh and blood — people, or specific critters that give us heebie jeebies, like snakes, rats, or cockroaches

(shudder). Others are without actual bodies but just as real, such as fear of losing our spouse or children, dread of debilitating illness or cancer, and terror of heights or closed spaces. And then there are those ominous, formless fears that swirl around in the dark closets of our minds, filling us with insecurity about the unknown, the future, or things we don't understand.

Five Categories of Everyday Fears

Now I realize that fear is a deep well and I'm not a professional well-driller. But I *am* a deft (some might say daft) bucket-dipper, and I've worked closely with the side-effects of fear during my three decades as a health-care professional. I've learned a few things through study and observation. There are as many different fears as there are belly buttons in this world, but for the sake of simplicity, I've grouped common fears women face into five basic categories, all beginning with the letter "S" (we'll be referring back to these later):

- **Spurting fear:** An impulsive reaction to a provoking stimulus. Not unlike blood spurting from a fresh puncture wound. This is naked emotion, sister. The unpremeditated, gut level, internal reaction incited by something that makes us break out in a cold sweat, quiver like a tower of Jello, and maybe even toss our cookies. Usually based on previous experience, this type of fear causes us to dutifully avoid things like high ledges, speaking in front of crowds, and confrontation with that sassy-mouthed co-worker.
- **Savory fear:** The delicious thrill elicited by being scared by a specific controlled thing or event. This is an intentional, emotion-driven, temporary fear that we

subject ourselves to because we know there's no real danger (or damage) involved. It's fear within the parameters of our safety zones, like riding roller coasters, driving fast, or entering a House of Horrors. Savory means "to give flavor to; to season," and most of us sprinkle little savory fears throughout our lives just because we enjoy the flavor. Hey, we need a cold chill thrill now and then to remember we're alive!

- **Saturating fear:** The invasive kind of fear that often originates in childhood and permeates our lives in ways we don't always see. I don't consider saturating fear a conscious emotive response, but equate it with the "spirit of fear" that the apostle Paul spoke of in his very personal letter from prison to his spiritual son, Timothy, shortly before Paul was beheaded (2 Timothy 1:7). Saturating fears are probably the hardest to eradicate because they soak into our personalities and become so enmeshed in the fiber of our being, we have difficulty recognizing their individual threads. We don't like them, but we learn to live with them. Sort of like those muffin tops spilling over the waistband of our jeans. We cover them up or excuse them as "that's just the way I am," rather than something that could potentially be changed.
- **Simmering fear:** The fear of the unknown, of things we've never experienced but have developed an underlying dread for based on other people's experience and our own speculation. Included in this category would be fear of the future, the infernal "what ifs", dependency on others, loss of employment or possessions, debilitating illness, and the great unknown, death.

- **Sovereign fear:** Born of respect, this is the subjection we willingly place ourselves under to those in authority, such as our parents, teachers, spouse, pastor, bosses, and above all, our creator. Did you know there are over one hundred scriptures advising us to “Fear God”? Oh, not in the tremble-from-head-to-toe, wet-your-pants sense, but through awe and respect due to the sovereign, powerful, almighty commander of our universe.

More about each of these later, but the point I want to make for now is that all fears are not created equal. And they’re not all bad.

Sphincter-Pucker Moments

Not long ago, while my fam was chilling at our remote mountain cabin, I took my 4-wheeler, Sir Lancelot, out for a spin. Lance is a loud fellow, let me tell you, especially with his propensity for tooting/backfiring/flatulence – whatever term your delicate sensibilities prefer (hence his name, because he has flatu-*lance a lot*).

Anyway, as I approached the paved road I had to cross to get to the creek-hugging dirt trail on the neighboring mountain, I braked Lance to a rolling stop. A rolling stop – not exactly a full stop. Now, mind you, there was no stop sign (so I wasn’t breaking the law), and this particular road had relatively little traffic. But it was on the crest of a steep hill, so that cars nosing up the hill from the right suddenly appeared about ten yards away, and traffic coming from the left could startle you spit-less as they careened around the curve.

The saving grace was that in the sound-carrying mountains, you could hear them coming and not do anything stupid.

Unless you were straddling an ear-splitting, flatulent-tooting ATV.

I glanced right. Nothing coming. So I craned my neck left to peer around the curve as Lance rolled slowly into the highway. Suddenly, a deep rumble rattled my teeth and I jerked around to find the metallic grill of a huge truck bearing down on me from my right.

Fear actually saved my life. In the three seconds between the time that truck appeared and almost immediately rolled its mammoth wheels across the spot I had just inhabited, panic shot incredible strength to my right thumb. I jammed the accelerator lever so hard that Lance leapt straight up in the air like a crazed rodeo bull and bucked us both into a heap on the far shoulder of the road.

And there I sat in a horrified stupor as the truck, horn blasting an almost-too-late rebuke, disappeared around the curve.

Papa God gave us the emotion of fear for good reason. It serves a useful purpose – to motivate us, move us forward, and keep us from making mistakes. Sometimes fear saves us from ourselves. I mean, how often would we have skipped school growing up, just because we didn't feel like going, without the disciplining fear of failure? Or how rotund might we become without fear of regaining that twenty pounds we worked so hard to lose? Why else would we faithfully squash our bosom buddies flat with mammograms without the possibility of that frightening C word invading our bodies? We could be out pounding the pavement if fear of losing our jobs didn't motivate us to get our reports in on time.

It's when fear becomes controlling that it debilitates. When it evolves from an emotion to a paradigm (fifty cent word that means world view). When it alters our course from the splendid women Papa God intended us to be and makes us settle for a wimpy, whiney imitation. When it begins to dictate our thoughts and behavior.

First fear worms its way into our thinking processes, then it affects our actions. Fear is passion in a negative direction. If we allow fear to continue to wreak havoc in our lives unimpeded, it can eventually erode our self-esteem, relationships, and even our faith.

Okay – are we ready to recognize our enemy for what it really is? Let's dump over a table for cover, get down on our bellies and do our best G.I. Jane crawl Patch-imitation. Time to join forces, clean our weapons of warfare, and blast us some invisible squirrels, girlfriend.

“Fear is an acronym in the English language for ‘False Evidence Appearing Real.’”
~Neale Donald Walsch

More Pluck, Less Chicken

1. What would you say are your biggest fears in the spurting (impulsive reaction) category?
2. The savory (fun, thrilling) category?
3. How about saturating (invasive, underlying) fears?
4. Would you say you have a healthy sovereign (respectful) fear of Papa God? How do you show it?
5. Which controlling fears are you currently struggling with? Would you like to loosen their grip you?