

How can I tell if My Faith is “Fear Based” or “Love Based?”

Written for Set Apart Ministries by
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The idea that one could have a faith based on fear at first glance may seem impossible. Yet, we are complex people and often contradictory. The concept of love bonds vs fear bonds comes from attachment theory, recently reinforced by the ability to study our brain mind connection in action, through the use of various types of imagery. It is intimately connected with the concept of our joyful identity and strength. For the first time, we have been able to do more than dissect a brain after death when there is no longer the presence of the active mind. We can confirm which portions of the brain are active during different emotions or activities of the individual. In this way, it has become possible to more accurately understand what goes on in our brains and minds during the development of relationships. Allan Shore, MD and Daniel Siegel, MD, are among the most noted researchers in this area. James Wilder, PhD and colleagues at Shepherds House in California have applied this knowledge in a way that is consistent with Biblical understanding and have developed very helpful concepts for those of us interested in the development of relationships and maturity. The type of attachments one has is very much dependent on the quality of care received as an infant and young child though their hereditary patterns do play a part. To our collective surprise perhaps, it seems that it *is* possible to develop a relationship that is based more fully on fear rather than on the love and concern that is the optimum design. If the relationship between parent and child was characterized by sensitivity and responsiveness to the infant’s needs, a secure attachment, grounded in love and the joy of being together is formed. If the relationship there is fraught with unpredictability or predictably negligent, an entirely different base for relationship is established; this type of relationship being more vulnerable to having fear/anxiety as it’s base rather than the intended bonds of joy. Thankfully, in His wisdom, our Creator Father designed our brains in such a way that the portion of the brain that relates to this needed joy strength is the only portion that can still be developed even long past the infant stage.

What exactly is the faith bond that is being addressed here? How would I know what it looks like or plays out? In their book [The Life Model: Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You](#) Wilder et al have developed a useful chart for comparisons of love bonds vs fear bonds. These concepts also have to do with maturation in the areas of emotions, morals and developmental stages as delineated by various researchers, among them, Kohlberg, Erik Erikson in [Eight Ages of Man](#) and Jim Wilder’s [Stages of a Man’s Life](#).

**LOVE BONDS versus FEAR BONDS
IN RELATIONSHIPS**

Love Bonds	Fear Bonds
1. Based on love and characterized by Truth, closeness, intimacy, joy, peace, Perseverance and authentic giving.	1. Based on fear and characterized by pain, humiliation, desperation, shame, guilt, and /or fear of rejection, abandonment or other Detrimental consequences.
2. Bond is desire driven . (I bond Because I want to be with you.)	2. Bond is avoidance driven . (I bond because I want to avoid negative feelings or pain.)
3. Love Bonds grow stronger both when we move closer and when we move farther away . (When we move closer, I get to know you better. When we move farther away, I am still blessed by the memory of you.)	3. Fear Bonds only grow stronger by moving closer or by moving farther away . (The closer we get, the scarier it gets, so I have to avoid the closeness or the farther away we get, the scarier it gets, so I have to manipulate closeness.)
4. We can share both positive and negative feelings. The bond is strengthened by this truthful sharing.	4. We cannot share both positive and negative feelings. The bond is strengthened by (1) avoiding negative or positive feelings OR (2) by seeking only negative feelings.
5. Participants on both ends of the bond benefit; the bond encourages all to act like themselves.	5. Participants on only one end of the bond gain advantage: the bond actually inhibits people from acting like themselves.
6. Truth pervades the relationship.	6. Deceit and pretending are required.
7. Love bonds continually grow and mature people , equipping them to find their hearts.	7. Fear bonds increasingly restrict and stunt growth , keeping people from finding their hearts.
8. Love bonds operate from the front of the brain, the “joy center”, and govern “How do I act like myself?”	8. Fear bonds operate from the back of the brain and govern, “How do I get what I want?”

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Consider each of these aspects, presented in a comparative format here, to decide what types of bonds are more prevalent in your life. It is probably easiest to think of one relationship at a time; then go through the chart thinking about which description seems more applicable to that relationship. It is entirely possible and probable to have a mix of love and fear bonds with some people, while others are more clearly in one camp or the other. Take a moment of prayerful celebration for those relationships that are more fully founded in love bonds. They are the relationships in which you will be able to test and grow.

How might this pattern of love vs fear bonds play itself out in our faith relationship with our Elohim? In human relationships, there will always be two individuals, at least, to consider, because each one's security and capacity to relate will impact the quality of the relationship. For our Creator however, there is only one option: He is Good, He is Love itself, He does not change or lie. The Father and the Son are One! He is a God of emotions, yes, and He will respond or direct us through them but whether we comprehend what is happening or not, whether it is a time of blessings for obedience or stressings due to disobedience, we can know and maintain our assurance that He is always loving and good.

A Brief Study as to these Characteristics of a Love Bond on YHWH's Part

Love: His love surpasses all knowledge. **Ephesians 3: 17-19**

Intimacy, closeness: Yahshua prayed that "they may be One with the Father as I am One with Him." **John 17: 20-23**

Perseverance: He is long suffering, not willing that any should perish. **Matthew 18: 14**

Truth: His Word is Truth and He will sanctify us in His Truth.
He is not a man that He would lie. **John 17: 17**
Numbers 23: 19

Giving: The Shepherd would lay down His life for His sheep.
Ask and you shall receive. **John 10: 11**
Matthew 7: 11

Desire: I have loved you with an everlasting love.
Come away my Beloved! **Jeremiah 31: 3**
Song of Solomon 2

Growing in closeness: Nothing can separate us from the Love of *Elohim*/God which is in *Yahshua ha Maschiach*. **Romans 8: 39**

Both positive and negative can be shared:
In all things, pray without ceasing. **Ephesians 6: 18**

Both benefit: He rejoices over us with singing. He is anticipating the Restoration of all things with joy. **Zephaniah 3: 17-20**

Covenant Love: He has sworn it by Himself. He cut the covenant with Abraham, and by faith, with us, His heirs. In the knowledge of His love and the exhortation of His Torah and Ruach/Spirit, we can rest securely confident that He will work all things together for our good and that He is able to accomplish His plans in us. **Romans 8: 28**

Absence of Fear: Fear is not in Him, because He is love. **1 John 4: 16-18**
(In a sense, we come back around to the beginning, which is His love)

Just as someone lacking in maturity or joy may be unable to perceive the joy or love coming from another person, so is it true that we are not always capable of fully perceiving, let alone fully receiving His love for us. It has been common wisdom for many years that the quality of the child's relationship with their parent, generally with the father, has a great bearing on the individual's ability to enter into relationship with YHWH, our Elohim, the Creator Father. In these concepts and the research behind them we can see the "backstage" view of how it all actually works together.

If I am predominantly walking in a love bonded relationship with YHWH through my Messiah, Yahshua, I will generally be able to hold on to the knowledge of these attributes as listed above. I will be able to act like myself, no matter what the stressors might be, because I will know that I am loved. I will also know that I cannot fully comprehend the depth of His love while I am yet in this finite body but I am nevertheless confident. I will find myself hungering and thirsting for His Word because His Word is Truth and I want to please my Beloved. I won't find Bible study to be a burden but a delight. I will find myself praying about all things, large and small, but praying out of that confidence and assurance of my relationship with Him. I am very aware of the price He paid for me, but rather than dwell on the tragedy of it, I will exult in the victory of it. I will be joyful or grieve and mourn in due season as circumstances may toss and turn but underneath it I will have the sense of peace and confidence that can only come from Him.

On the other hand, if I am walking predominantly in a fear-bonded relationship with our Messiah, the things described above may sound like far-fetched, fantasy experiences. I may believe that such goodness is a pipedream, maybe something someone else might know but never for me. These things would be true, even though I had declared with all sincerity and honor that I believe and accept Messiah's atoning work on my behalf. I would be focused on the disobedience issues, aware of the elements of discipline, or punishment, that I see in the Word. Rather than being confident that I have dignity and worth because I am created in His image and I am seeking His will, even though imperfectly, my familiar stance would be more that of dread. I would be anticipating how I might fail the next time and what kind of trouble I would need to endure when I displease Him. If I am lacking in self worth, I would focus on how I need to perform in order to avoid being in trouble with God. My concern would be less for the spirit of His commandments and more for the letter of the law. I would not really in my heart believe

that personal relationship could be personal and intimate and joyful, believing instead that I must toe the line in order to have any relationship with Messiah at all. “Just tell me what to do so I know how to behave right,” is a statement made by one who appeared to have just this sort of bond with our Messiah. I would be trying to make points by doing things correctly in order to avoid punishment, rather than out of love and a desire to please my Beloved.

One aspect of a fear-based relationship is a reliance on emotions for decision-making. A person reliant on emotion would generally decide one way or another on the basis of whether they would receive reward or punishment. Without a growing relationship and knowledge of the Word, one can easily be swayed by emotions. Emotions are part of who we are created to be, and to be desired, rather than to be emotionless or flat and cold. Yet, they must always be balanced with knowledge and awareness in order to prevent us from being swayed by any teaching or impression that comes along. A tendency to focus on guilt, shame or fear of rejection can be easily manipulated and mistaken for faith. A fairly recent example has been the movie “The Passion of the Christ.” The producer, Mel Gibson, intended to focus on the details of our Messiah’s sufferings in order to produce deep emotional responses. From all reports, his effort was successful. Yet, to base one’s faith on an emotional response is a mistake made all too often. If emotion can be swayed one way so easily, it can also be swayed in another direction without much effort. Compare this to the seeds dropped on poor soil. The seeds of such an emotion driven “faith” may well spring up quickly, but they will also easily wilt or be scorched in times of trouble. A loyalty based only in emotion will not stand the heat of persecution.

The issue of intimacy with God is a strong concern for one who is walking in more fear bonds than love bonds. It is too scary to get close to Him, because He might see something in me I’d rather He didn’t (forgetting that He does see all) but neither would I want to fall away enough that I might feel too lost. (Another aspect of emotional decision-making.) I might then find myself in a sort of bargaining position, trying to find just the right balance in which I can feel safe enough but not too close for comfort. Because I don’t have the confidence to just be myself in this relationship, I might seek out situations in which I can feel intense emotions, such as a worship time or corporate, intercessory prayer. I could find myself praying, not TO my Father, but for the benefit of those hearing me. In the company of other Believers, I might try to look and sound good in what I do, wondering all the time which ones of the others are looking down on me for some reason unknown to me, but probably devastating to my reputation. This would be part of my effort to receive positive emotions in this relationship with God, but even here, I would be wondering what would happen if I make a mistake. On the opposite end of this balancing act, might be one who looks for experiences that reinforce any potential guilt or shame they already have, thus giving them permission to stand back and not pursue a deeper intimacy for too long.

Being in a fear bond with one's God can lead to all manner of misinterpretations and concerns because there is not the bottom line of confidence to fall back on: no conviction that He is "for" me! As a result, I find myself involved in pretense and deceit, trying to perform as I think I am expected to perform, and likely beginning to resent it, too. There is no joy or room for stretching to grow and try new behaviors because growth or change is perceived as too dangerous. I believe it was Oswald Chambers who noted that we may think that the high places of intimacy with God are to be found among the mountain peaks, that we would have to be very careful not to slip off the narrow paths. In fact, if a love bond exists, we will instead find that the high places open up to something more like a broad pasture in which we have freedom within His Righteous Teachings to flex, grow, move, be transformed, all without condemnation!

In this paper, the question of exactly what has led to one type of faith bond or the other has not been deeply addressed. Nor has the question of what to do, if one finds one's self in a fear bond been explored. These subjects will need more attention to fully develop. To begin, examine the paths of your life and the quality of the relationship you have with our Messiah. Where do you fall between the two patterns represented here? A wonderful, and necessary first step toward increasing and strengthening the love bonds we have is to acknowledge where we have fallen into fear, unbelief, self-sufficiency or rebellion. So often, we find that we have fallen into these snares not by our own choice, but because we have accepted other's behavior toward us that has spoken messages that do not confirm our true identity and worth in Messiah. Humbly ask Him to reveal any aspect of your faith that has roots in fear and bring it before Him with thanksgiving. If it is too unnerving to pursue this alone, find a trustworthy Believer who will stand with you in the process. Our birthright is for the joy of Messiah. May it be so in your life today!

BLK

Resources

The Life Model: Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You

By The Shepherds House staff

E. James Wilder, PhD, James G. Friesen, PhD, Anne M. Bierling, MA, Rick Koepcke, MA, Maribeth Poole, MA Shepherd's House Inc. Revised, 2004

The Bible, NASB, NRSV

The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are
By Daniel J. Siegel, MD, The Guilford Press, 1999