

When a  
Woman  
Lets Go of  
Her Fears

Cheryl Brodersen



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

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## **WHEN A WOMAN LETS GO OF HER FEARS**

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

[www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brodersen, Cheryl.

When a woman lets go of her fears / Cheryl Brodersen.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7369-2792-5 (pbk.)

1. Christian women—Religious life. 2. Fear—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Brodersen, Cheryl. I. Title.

BV4527.B74 2010

248.8'6—dc22

2009049481

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**Printed in the United States of America**

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 / VP-SK/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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## The Beginning of Fear

Quietly I made my way through the bustling throng of women to the back row of the church that had recently hired my husband as a pastor. I sat down as far as I could from anyone else and hoped no one would notice me. I felt too awkward to socialize. I didn't know the women around me, and I was scared. I simply wanted to listen in on the women's Bible study.

An elegant woman stood behind the podium. She made announcements as I sat uncomfortably in my seat. The third announcement brought me to tears. She said that every woman who attended the study needed to be assigned to a group.

*This is it*, I thought. The idea of having to be in a group of women terrified me. It would require small talk and deep talk. It would mean having to open up, and that could mean rejection and hurt. Quickly I rose from my seat, tears blinding my eyes, and made my way to my husband's office.

He was concerned over my obvious trauma. I could barely speak but I tried to explain why I was so upset. "They want me to sit in a group with women and talk! I just can't do it." Brian tried desperately to be sympathetic, but he couldn't understand how such a small thing could devastate me. I didn't completely understand it myself.

### When Did Fear Take Over?

Years ago I was a young woman held in bondage by numerous

fears. I was almost incapacitated by my fears, and the longer I entertained them, the greater their hold on every arena of my life became. How did I come by my fears? I simply picked them up along the path of life until I had an overflowing basket. One day I realized I was afraid of nearly everything that makes a full life. Not all my fears were justified or substantial. In fact, I think their extensive influence came by way of *quantity* rather than quality.

For instance, I had a fear of the dark. This is a common childhood fear, but I never shared it with anyone because it sounded silly even to me. One night when I was a child, the portable television set was left in my room. I was supposed to be sleeping but couldn't, so I quietly turned on the television, remembering to keep the volume low. On the screen was a story about a doll that was stealing the life of a little girl every night while she slept. The little girl would awake anemic, white, and with scratch marks on her neck. The doll on the dresser, which no one seemed to take note of except the cameraman, had glowing red lips and blood-red fingernails. I turned off the television and glared at the dolls on my dresser. The next day I tore a beautiful doll I had to pieces. Her crime? She had ruby red lips and red fingernails! From then on I hated being alone in the dark.

Other fears came from the playground at school. I remember watching some girls surround another little girl on the playground and taunt her mercilessly because she was wearing bobby socks rather than the fashionable knee socks they were attired in. I didn't want to experience the embarrassment she endured, and that day a fear arose within me of the public humiliation I might face if I didn't fit in. Years later, as an adult, I was still afraid of doing something that would prove I didn't really belong.

Other fears came from hearing the daily news. At any given moment something terrible is going on in the world. Knowing that awful things were happening constantly to unsuspecting souls, I logically concluded I could be the next unsuspecting soul. The cruelty of some men depicted on television and played out at the high school and college I attended gave rise to even more fears.

Many of my fears, no doubt, came about because of the attention I endured as the daughter of a nationally known pastor and his wonderful wife. Anyone who wanted to find something to use against them usually took a close look at my siblings and me for ammunition. I felt constant, critical eyes on me. And this fear of scrutiny was not without justification. Well-intended people were always asking me if some story they'd heard about me was true. More often than not the story was either embellished or made up altogether. Hearing these negative stories about me made me want to be invisible. I so wanted to be like everyone else.

On a few occasions young women approached me and felt compelled to confess that they'd disliked me when we first met. They explained their reason for dislike had been rooted in the fact that I was the daughter of Pastor Chuck and Kay Smith. Their jealousy made them dislike me. Now who can stand under that kind of scrutiny?

Like every girl and young woman, I had also gone through periods of rejection by peers. Friends that liked me one day found a better friend the next day. I remember hating to go on vacations when I was a child because while I was gone my friends usually found new friends. You've heard the term "Two's company, three's a crowd." Somebody who knew rejection obviously coined it.

In my later teen years two men decided they were going to marry Chuck Smith's daughter...and they didn't consult me! These men stalked me. One man went so far as to show up outside one of my university classes and try to coerce me into leaving with him. Earlier that week he'd even spent the night on my parents' front porch. Eek!

Though some of my fears had merit and others were based on some truth, the main issue was not the amount, the validity, or the origins of the fear. The problem was that the fears had control of me. Because I was afraid, I changed where I went, who I interacted with, and what I did.

## **My Fears and My Relationships**

While still a young woman I realized fear had begun to taint my

relationships. I remember being terrified when I realized I was falling in love with Brian. Here was one of the noblest men I had ever met. He was dynamic. He was fun to be with. He was deep and insightful. He was sensitive and kind. The realization that I cared about him was accompanied by the fact that he had the power to really hurt me if he tired of me or rejected me. I wanted to insulate myself from hurt because I was afraid of emotional pain. I broke up with him numerous times, not because he had done anything wrong but because I was scared of rejection. I really put that poor guy through it. He persevered though and seemed to understand it was fear that motivated my chaotic behavior.

One day when we were dating, Brian called to tell me he had a surprise for me: He'd gotten glasses. Throughout our courtship he'd never worn glasses even though he'd needed them. My first thought was, *Oh no. Perhaps he's never really seen me. When he sees what I really look like or how fat I really am, he won't want to marry me.*

I wore my most flattering dress that night and even put on extra makeup. In the meantime, he was grappling with his own insecurity. His concern was that I might not like him in glasses. And that wasn't even an issue for me. When we talked openly about our fears later, we both laughed.

Unfortunately, the relational fears didn't dissipate when I said "I do" at our wedding. Instead they continued to multiply.

Fear gradually paralyzed me. I stopped wanting any social interaction. I built protective walls around my heart and self. Since Brian and I attended my home church, I would hide in my dad's office after church services and wait until the crowd died down before I went out to the car. I even stopped answering my phone at home unless Brian or a family member gave the "special ring." I stopped reaching out to people. If I ran into someone I knew or who knew me when I was shopping, I feigned some excuse to make a quick exit. Soon I was spending the majority of life in our little apartment waiting for Brian to come home.

There were other manifestations too. I would erupt in anger at

Brian when he tried to get me to venture out. He didn't understand the power fear had on me. When he wouldn't relent, I would become terrified. In my panic I would strike out, desperate to force some protection from all I was afraid of.

Brian and I fought over money. I was afraid he would use it all up. (He never did.) We would fight over his driving. I was afraid he would miss a turn or crash the car. (He never did.) We would fight over where to go. I was afraid he would make me interact with people. This was the drift my ocean of fears was taking.

I thought I was alone in my fears, but I've come to realize through talking openly about them that I was not. Fear is something many women struggle with. Perhaps you can relate to some of the troubling fears I held:

- I feared rejection.
- I feared people.
- I feared confrontation.
- I feared driving.
- I feared the devil.
- I feared the world.
- I feared the future.
- I feared failure.
- I feared illness.
- I feared trials.
- I feared death.
- I feared airplanes.
- I feared cars.
- I feared.

### **God Intervenes**

While sitting in a church service one night as Brian, my husband, preached, I heard the Lord speak gently to me: "I am going to deliver you from your fears."



*No!* I almost cried aloud. The thought of being delivered from my fears scared me. What would the process encompass? To tell you the truth, I wasn't quite ready to trust God to *gently* deliver me. At that point I was used to living with fear, and because my fears were familiar, I trusted them more than I trusted God.

Again God spoke: "I am going to deliver you from your fears."

An argument began within my heart and mind at this prospect. My fears screamed against this promise of God. I had begun to regard my fears as my protectors. My fears were my security. After all, we were on a first name basis. We traveled everywhere together. When others might forsake me, my fears were right there, comforting me with the infamous phrase "I told you not to trust anyone." "Deliver" was a very scary word. After all "deliverance" involves action. What action(s) did God intend to take?

I knew my fears were smothering me. I knew they were creating tension in my marriage. I knew they were keeping me from the life of adventure God had planned. I knew I was living in the shallows of the Christian experience because of fear. Nevertheless, I held my fears tightly.

As ironic as it sounds, the thought of being delivered from my fears terrified me. I didn't want to face them or live through them. I was afraid that I would have to confront each fear and then walk through the related emotions. It had taken me years to build comfortable walls of insulation around my life. I believed that deliverance would make every fear I had attack me as it sought to survive, and I didn't think I could endure that experience.

I told the Lord I didn't want to be delivered from my fears. In vain I explained to Him that the word "deliverance" was a little too strong for my fears and me. To this flimsy excuse, I felt the Lord respond, "Then how can you walk with Me? I am going places that your fears will never let you go. And I want you to come with Me."

It was true that my fears hated traveling. They didn't like heights or adventures. My fears loved schedules, maps, and neatly arranged

itineraries, which they could amend at their will. Now I was confronted with the greatest struggle of my Christian experience. In my mind, God was asking too much of me. In His occupation of my heart, He had found that closet of fears, and He was insisting on dealing with it so I could be free to travel with Him.

Finally my fear of losing closeness with God outweighed my fear of fear. Slowly and reluctantly I capitulated. I was scared, but willing. I confessed and acknowledged my fears to God. I surrendered my fears to God. Then I waited. And nothing happened. There was no great revelation. No sudden surge of courage took possession of my heart and mind. No great fear struck. No voice from heaven boomed. Actually it was unusually quiet—too quiet.

### **The Skunk Dream**

A week later I had a strange dream. I was in a bus sitting next to Brian. We were occupying seats in the front of the bus, across the aisle from where my parents were seated. The rest of the bus was filled with all the acquaintances I had ever known.

The bus parked in a large parking lot, and everyone disembarked and headed toward a large building that resembled a shopping plaza. As I stepped off the bus to fall in line with everyone else, I spied a baby skunk in my path. I was terrified the skunk would spray me, so I hid behind a car in the parking lot. Suddenly behind me I saw another skunk. I ran to hide behind another car. Meanwhile, everyone else walked gleefully toward the gleaming plaza. They chatted. They sang. They continued on, unaware of my plight and unmoved by the skunks that romped in the parking lot. I watched from afar as the people entered the large building. Soon I was all alone in the parking lot ditching skunk after skunk. There seemed to be no end to the baby skunks.

After what seemed quite a long time, everyone came out of the building. I could hear their happy conversations. They'd had a wonderful time together. They walked happily across the parking lot loaded down with exciting packages and talking about the fun

they'd had. They were returning to the bus. My thought, at this time, was just to get safely back to the bus. I soon noticed that even Brian had gotten on, meaning the bus was ready to leave.

Unscathed, I finally made it to the bus door, only to be met by the great mommy skunk. She had to be six feet tall. I stared at her, fearing the worst. In my dream she turned, raised her tail, and a great shower of rank skunk juice saturated me. I stood outside the bus, unwilling to inflict my stinky self on those inside.

From inside the bus, Brian urged me to climb in.

"No," I begged. "I just got sprayed by a giant skunk. I'll stink up the bus. Everyone will hate me and order me off."

"Cheryl," he said with a tone that meant I was being unreasonable, "just get on the bus."

I complied with my head down and took the seat next to him.

"You don't smell," he announced.

I quickly shushed him, not wanting the rest of the bus to hear.

The bus wasn't full after all because other people soon climbed aboard, including my parents. As each person climbed the steps I profusely apologized for the acrid odor, confessing that I was the one stinking up the bus. To this admission, every person replied, "You don't smell at all."

Then I awoke. The dream was vivid in my mind, and I didn't like it. It wasn't the nightmare aspect that bothered me. It was the ring of reality. In my spirit, I sensed that God wanted to give me a message I didn't want to hear.

A strange thing happened later that day. I attended a morning prayer meeting. After an extended time of prayer, one woman gave me a questioning look and asked, "Did you have a strange dream last night?"

"Yes, I did," I answered matter-of-factly. Suddenly I was certain that God was in the dream, and I was mad. I wasn't ready to deal with my fears. I felt put on the spot. (I probably would have continued to put this off indefinitely if I'd had a choice.)

"There's an interpretation to that dream," she offered.

I didn't need her offer. In my heart I already knew what it was all about. The Lord had been ministering to me all along; I was hiding from the interpretation, refusing to acknowledge the significance of the dream until the woman forced it into the open.

"I already know," I answered curtly. "The dream was about skunks," I volunteered, hoping that would put her off from any more inquiries. But then I found myself recounting the dream and offering its interpretation. I explained that I was struggling with overwhelming fears. I was spending my life hiding in the parking lot of life and never entering into the true Christian experience. I needed to understand that the thing I was so afraid of, even if it were realized, would not sever my relationship with Brian or those I loved.

What a strange beginning to a great deliverance! After that time, slowly but surely God showed me the places of fear in my life and the hold they had on me. He never left me alone during the entire deliverance process. The One who promised to be my Comforter was truly there comforting me as He began to untangle the knots fear had used to tie me firmly down. At one point in my life I thought I would never again share that skunk dream. Though it sounds comical now, at the time of the dream it was terrifying. I remember being humiliated by the knowledge that my fears were running my life. I had no idea how I would ever escape them.

Since then I've told that dream quite a few times, and it tends to bring audiences to laughter *and* tears. Why? Because many women live in the same realm of fear I did. Like I was, they are on a first-name basis with their fears. They are comfortable with them even though those same fears are keeping them from the full Christian adventure.

Some women are unaware that fear is the culprit behind many of the irregular things they do or say. When they hear me share my crazy dream, they are suddenly aware that fear could be the motivator behind some of their own actions.

## Driven by Fear

In the Bible is a great example of the dangerous consequence of

fear's control. Who is so afraid? King Saul. When I consider this first king of Israel, I see a man whose fears caused him to act in disobedience to God and lash out at David. I am not saying that fear alone is to blame for Saul's actions, but fear had an accomplice in Saul. Saul had the choice to act on fear or refuse to give in to fear.

Saul was a man with a glorious beginning. Not only did God designate him to be the first king of Israel, but he was anointed by God's prophet Samuel. God blessed Saul's very first military assault with unanimous success. Saul quickly gained the respect and admiration of all of Israel.

However, I believe it wasn't long before Saul began to feel responsible for God's nation. God had chosen Saul to be His servant who would be king, but Saul began to see himself first as king. He began to question the directives of God and rely on his own judgments instead of the instructions of God.

Saul's son Jonathan led an attack on the garrison of the Philistines in Geba while Saul was close by. Then "Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear!" And the Israelites believed he had won the fight.

When the Philistines were mounting a second battle against Israel, Saul was told to wait for Samuel to come and offer sacrifices to God before setting out. But Saul got worried and offered the sacrifice himself in direct violation of God's command. Saul excused his bad behavior by telling the prophet, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together...I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering" (1 Samuel 13:11-12). Saul acted rashly against God's directives because he panicked. The time was getting late, and the people were getting scared as they saw the forces of the Philistines amassing. Rather than waiting on God, Saul took matters into his own hands—which is what fear often encourages.

While Saul sat under a pomegranate tree on the outskirts of Gibeah, his son Jonathan crept out of camp with his armor bearer to attack the Philistines. As they attacked, the garrison and raiders

trembled and the earth quaked. The guards at Saul's camp saw the multitude of Philistines melting away and reported to Saul. Saul ordered a roll call to see who was missing, and they discovered it was Jonathan and his armor bearer. When the noise of the battle increased, Saul and his army and all the Israelite warriors in the surrounding areas joined in and the Philistines were routed.

At some point Saul made a rash declaration that the warriors should not eat until he had been avenged. Perhaps this was to inspire the troops to fight harder. But Jonathan had not heard the declaration, and while walking in the forest he came across some honey and, being hungry, he ate. When told about the charge Saul had made, Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?" (1 Samuel 14:29-30).

When Saul learned Jonathan had eaten honey, he was ready to follow through on his threat and have Jonathan put to death (1 Samuel 14:39). Saul was ready to kill his son, the hero of Israel, to protect his image among the army of Israel.

Later, when a Philistine giant challenged the armies of Israel, Saul refused to face the giant. When he heard about a shepherd boy who was willing to fight the giant, he sent for him. After trying to talk him out of it, the mighty King Saul let the boy, David, go out and face the massive enemy.

When David killed Goliath he was praised throughout Israel. Eventually Saul appointed him leader over the army, and David became a mighty warrior and exalted hero. But even as David was growing in faith and following God, Saul became so jealous and afraid of him that twice he tried to murder David with his spear. He told his servants to kill David and plotted for David to be killed while in his bed at home. But David's wife and Saul's daughter, Michal, learned of the murderous plan and aided David in escaping.

Saul became obsessed with David's destruction. Not only did Saul demote David, but he pursued him across the land of Israel. Saul had every advantage, but his surrender to fear became his downfall.

Though Saul dogged David's steps and forced him into a life of exile, David refused to give in to his fears. Rather, he surrendered his fears to God and chose to live by faith. When David was afraid he prayed and sought the Lord. Many of his heartfelt prayers are captured in the book of Psalms, including, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27).

### The Choice

The choice between fear and faith was offered to me that night as I sat in church. God was inviting me to join Him in a life of adventure or I could continue to be terrorized, motivated, and immobilized by fear. If I chose fear, my future was as bleak as King Saul's. If I chose faith, then my life had all the promise of David's life.

God offers that choice to *every* man and woman who calls upon His name. He doesn't force anyone to choose His way. He asks for permission to remove those hindering fears so faith can take residency where fear has been. God is offering you that choice right now. Have you been hindered by fear like I was? Are you tired of the hold they have on you emotionally and spiritually? I pray that as you go through this book God will help you recognize your fears so you can choose to be liberated from them and ushered into the fuller, more exciting life of faith He desires for you.

As I review the lives of David and Saul, I prefer the work of faith in David's life to the motivation of fear in Saul's. I am inspired by the faith and trust for God I see in David. In the same way, I hate the effects fear had when I allowed it to grasp my heart, and I love to see the effects of faith as I allow it to take greater possession of my heart and mind.

What Does God's Word Say?

1. Read 1 Samuel 18. Where do you see Saul's fears beginning?
2. How do you see Saul's fears gaining greater control on his life?
3. What fears do you recognize in your life?
4. Where do you think these fears had their beginnings?
5. Where do you think your fears are leading you?



6. Look again at 1 Samuel 18. What stands out to you about David?
7. In contrasting David's behavior with King Saul's, what differences do you see?
8. How will you step away from fear and toward faith today?