

## —Chapter 7—

### THE WORLD IS FROZEN IN FEAR

*Fear can hurt and even kill when the object of the presumed fear is not even in the vicinity? Fear makes people fall at false alarm.*

*“The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.”*

—Proverbs 28:1.

### Stampede Caused By a Moth

**W**e had sneaked out of a boarding high school to watch an open air film in an adjacent township. Film was a rare thing in the countryside. This meant that any time a film came to town, it would attract a big crowd. Even students for whom it was against the rules to leave school compound at night could not overcome the temptation.

A big crowd had gathered. The film was showing. A moth, apparently attracted by the light rays from the projector, fell on someone's neck. The hairy insect caused him to convulse and shriek. His jumping and screaming caused commotion around him.

Not knowing what had happened, people who stood near him started running. The shockwave quickly spread into the whole crowd resulting in a stampede. One person died.

Why did people spontaneously start running? There were some armed forces folk camping hardly three kilometres away from the

township. The general impression people had about army men was that they were bully and cruel. Because they were camping in the vicinity, there was fear hanging in the air. When the moth caused the person to scream, another person next to him shouted, “The army men have attacked us!”

Think about it! Because fear was looming in the air, a moth was all it took to start off a stampede that cost a person his life and severe injuries to others. Because of fear, it only needed a moth to accomplish a feat that would otherwise require the force of an army.

On another occasion, we were reading during preps. It was a warm evening causing us to open the windows. It was again a moth’s story. Attracted by the light, the moth had flown into our reading room. Moths are notorious of falling abruptly on people. Like in the film’s case, the person on whom it fell screamed. He jumped and fell with his desk.

A commotion ensued. This was heard in the adjacent classes and reading rooms. In no time, the whole school was in pandemonium. Those who were sitting next to the windows rushed to close those windows. Because of the hurry, they pulled the windows with such force that a number of the windowpanes were shattered. Many students sustained injuries caused by the flying broken glasses.

Again, why was the response spontaneously pandemic? There were rumours that a leopard had been seen in the school compound. When the adjacent classes and reading rooms heard the commotion in our reading room, they thought that the rumoured leopard had finally attacked and was mauling people. The students in other classes and reading rooms were hurrying to close their windows to stop the leopard from jumping into their rooms as well. Now think of it! A mere, ‘harmless’ moth had caused a phobic frenzy resulting into untold injuries.

When fear looms in the air, a moth qualifies to fill-in for a leopard.

## Looking Suspicious

After the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorism in the US, there were widespread fear resulting in severe economic repercussions. Many renowned Airlines closed down after having gone bankrupt. Many people working in the Airline industry lost their jobs. Some airports were as good as vacated. Travelling by air became a life and death gamble. Since many are unwilling to gamble with their life, people only travelled by air if they had to. The fear that gripped the world was understandable. But the problem is that, when fear is justified, the devilish activities will be intensified and the devil will be gratified because he shall have created market for one of his favourite products—fear.

There have been many delays caused by “suspicious-passenger” phobia. Some of the suspicions have been well-founded as others have been mere “security precautions”.

When people live in constant fear, it doesn't take much to cause mayhem. Nobody knows where the next bomb will explode. It is like people are fleeing even when they are not running. The reality of terrorism and the zeal that fuels it have turned ardent optimists into latent pessimists. Security is no longer a certainty—people travail before they travel. To say that travelling has become a gamble is not an exaggeration.

Fear is one of the best weapons of the devil. He only needs to set the wave of fear in motion and the shockwaves thereof will do the rest. With fear, he will keep those in the South in panic while he is in the North causing havoc; he will keep those in the West terrified while he is terrorising those in the East.

In December 2004, an African-looking man caused panic at Askim, a town near the boarder between Norway and Sweden. He had boarded a Norway Bus Express plying Oslo—Stockholm. According to the bus driver, the man was behaving suspiciously—could he have been a suicide bomber? The suspicion was caused by the fact that the man “overdressed” himself, creating the impression that he might have been hiding bomb under the clothes. He also had a stop-watch that he was pressing against his chest, mumbling words and fumbling a book they perceived to have been a Bible. Nobody wants to take chances, otherwise the occupants of the bus

could have “relaxed” that Bible-carriers are not known for suicidal bombing.

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The man was later arrested and no bomb was found on him. I wouldn't be surprised if this man had just arrived from Africa and it was his first winter. Mid December was already cold enough to make him “overdress”. I personally know some Africans who, being new in a cold country, were already “overdressing” by September.

February 28<sup>th</sup> 2002, Associated Press sourced news about a “Jet with ‘suspicious’ passenger shadowed by fighter jets to New York.” In this case, an Air India jetliner, Flight 101 from London with nearly 400 passengers aboard was shadowed by fighter jets to New York after authorities were told that there was a suspicious passenger aboard.

When the jet landed at Kennedy International Airport, two passengers were questioned and released. It turned out to have been a false alarm. An FBI spokesman reportedly said that they were of “no investigative interest.” The explanation for the security alert was that the authorities were told that one of the passengers ‘resembled’ one of the 22 people on the FBI’s “Most Wanted Terrorists” list.

What we are seeing here is that fear has made it risky to resemble somebody, especially if that person is a wanted terrorist. Resemblance can be as subjective as it can mean anything.

If you follow in the news, you will notice that some of the security alerts are based on embarrassingly false alarms so much so that the people concerned would only accept to talk to the media in anonymity.

One of the passengers in the above case said that when he looked at the two suspects, they didn't seem violent or anything like that. He was reportedly shocked when reporters told him the flight had

been tracked by fighter jets. Looks can deceive. They may not have looked violent but that may not necessarily mean they were not violent. Equally, people who may look violent may not necessarily be terrorists.

Monday, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2003, in what it called “Suspicious passenger delays D.C. flight”, WorldNetDaily reported a case where the Washington Police confronted a Middle Eastern man after a lavatory bomb scare. The US Airways passenger had been observed by one of the flight attendants to have behaved strangely moments before the plane landed at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. The flight attendant warned pilots that the man might have planted explosives in the lavatory.

The plane which was due to proceed to Hartford, Conn had to be swept and investigated. No explosives were found. The man was not charged with crime, but was turned over to the federal Transportation Security Administration for further questioning.

In April 2005 there was an incident where a KLM Royal Dutch Airlines flight from Amsterdam was forced to turn around over Canada after U.S. officials realized that there were two passengers on board whose names were on the no-fly list. Nevertheless, when the flight returned to Europe, local authorities questioned the men but did not arrest them. This could as well have been a case of “security precaution”.

On June 8<sup>th</sup> 2005, Fox news maintained that the Richmond, California’s suspicious passenger who sparked Amtrak scare must have been very lucky.

FBI agents and police evacuated an Amtrak train, seized a passenger and X-rayed his packages. It was alleged that the man had angrily warned that the train was going to “fall into the sea.” The packages were found to contain personal items and a laptop.

The man who had a Middle Eastern appearance was taken into custody for a 72-hour psychiatric examination. An X-ray that initially suggested that the computer might have been a bomb caused business and homes in the area to be evacuated. A police lieutenant confessed that they take such situations at their face value due to their potential danger to industries and other major infrastructure in the area.

The train had to remain at the Richmond station for more than four hours while investigators searched the cars. Not only were the about 240 passengers delayed but other eight trains were prevented from passing through. The man must have been agitated after having had a misunderstanding with the ticket taker.

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After the London bomb on 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2005, the insecurity wave around the world was revived. In what it called “‘No-Fly’ Passenger Found on French Jet”, Washington Post had the news of a Chicago bound Air France that was returned to Paris because of what the US officials described as a ‘No-Fly’ passenger. This happened twice. The first on 8<sup>th</sup> and the second on 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2005.

No one would be willing to take chances when there are many lives at stake. Because of this, some of the safety precautions may mean that one only needs to “look suspicious” in order to cause panic, disarray and delays. Meanwhile, the precautionary instruments are costing governments, private corporations and individuals dearly in terms of money, time, energy and emotions.

In some extreme cases, innocent people lose their life. A case at hand is that of Jean Charles de Menezes, the 27-year-old Brazilian citizen who had been living in London. He was shot dead by the police, being mistaken to be a terrorist. The Metropolitan Police later admitted that he was not connected to the 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2005 attempted suicide bombing attacks in the city.

Another tragic case is that of the mentally ill Rigoberto Alpizar, a 44-year-old US citizen whom the United States federal air marshals shot dead at Miami International Airport on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2005. He was alleged to have claimed that he had a bomb aboard an American Airlines plane in Miami.

Mr Alpizar had arrived in Miami, Florida, from Ecuador and was boarding a flight to Orlando. He had run frantically down the aisle of the Boeing 757 screaming while his wife pursued him explaining his bipolar disorder.

Fellow passengers witnessed how they heard the wife explaining that her husband was sick and that he had not had his medication. The air marshals didn't hear her pleas or if they did, the risk was too high—they couldn't afford to take any chances. Though the man was shot dead, no explosives were found on him.

Fear and panic are causing us to do cruel things. Think about it! A sick person who needs a tablet gets a bullet instead. The fear is hysterical, even well-trained security personnel can easily act out of impulse.

The position of the security personnel is that of a predicament; it is an almost 'no-winner case'. They can't trade a benefit of doubt; they take advantage—they don't give it. They can execute with minimum excuse. If they observe a 'suspicious act', and this can be anything, not responding immediately (read kill) can be a question of heavy loss. The options open to them only show that they stand to lose either way. If they kill a suspect who turns out to be innocent, they would be accused of being hysterical and impulsive. If they buy time hoping to find grounds to strengthen their suspicion, it might be too late if the person was actually a terrorist. Most of them would then reason like this: 'Better be blamed for the death of one person than a multitude and in the process lose one's own life' as well.

The predicament of these people is understandable but that doesn't lessen the pain of losing the life of a harmless person.

Look at it! You probably see that the wave of fear and the resulting panic sweeping the world today are as pandemic as the act of terrorism is tragic. Terrorism is killing people in two fronts: the deaths resulting directly from a terrorist act and those that result from the responses to and fear of terrorism.

### 'Is There an Arabic-looking in the Plane'?

Granted, many people would wish to ask, *Is there an Arab in the plane?* This is an expression that shows how people have generally

associated Arabs with terrorism. That not every Arab is a terrorist is not something to attract any debate. This, however, doesn't stop stigmatization and stereotyping that human beings are so addicted to. It is painful to be stigmatized yet innocent.

A friend of mine admitted that he is no longer excited by an imminence of travelling, especially by plane. He only travels if he has to. Any time he has to travel, he worries and panics. He would leave early for the airport in order to watch if there is an Arab-looking among those checking in. He is not alone. Though things may come back to normal with time, many people get very anxious when there is an Arab in the plane.

As I noted earlier, fear makes people run even when there is no-one chasing them. What does this mean? In a world sick with prejudiced generalisations, "appearance" is enough to make people "run" even when there is no reason except that people are nervous and agitated.

Generalisation seems to be instinct. The physical appearance of the people generally associated with terrorism is known. This makes a breeding ground for suspicion and stigmatization. Just wearing an "Arabic appearance", makes one a suspect.

I have in several occasions experienced how it feels to be scrutinised simply because of one's appearance. In one occasion, my colleagues and I were on a staff tour to the UK. I was the only African among them. When we landed and were checking out of the airport, it was not difficult noticing that I was with the group but I was isolated and thoroughly scrutinised.

My colleagues did not notice that I had been held back. They continued walking. The problem was that it was taking too much time. If I lost them, it would be difficult because there was only one person who knew where we were going to put up—and that person happened not to be me. After getting satisfied with her 'investigation' the security lady asked me, "Were you with those people who went some minutes ago?" When I answered yes, she responded, "Oh My! Sorry sir!" I could read two messages on her face: *Don't take it personally, I am just doing my work and, I hope you understand, please blame your skin colour.*

Having a complexion that is generally subject to stereotyping, being associated with poverty and mischief, I had to be scrutinised.

At one time I was denied visa to visit the US “because of economic reasons”. Studying in Europe in a country that is arguably one of the richest in the world, I thought that the guaranteeing letter from the faculty would earn me some credence to get visa so that I could accompany my classmates for a study tour. It never worked. They charged me heavily for the visa application. When they turned down my application, they advised me to reapply and pay application fee afresh. If I was that poor to go to USA, why were they so enthusiastic taking the “poor man’s money” and even after taking the first round, they didn’t look shy to advise me to reapply—meaning more money for them? I wish they could know that some people are “too proud” to be illegal immigrants.

If it was true that I accurately read the UK lady’s unspoken message, yes I did understand. Since nobody carries naturally-inscribed seal on the face reading, “I am a good man,” it is good to let people investigate to find out who one is.

I do understand very clearly the instincts of generalisation and stereotyping. Nevertheless, it would be dishonest to pretend that it doesn’t hurt to be ‘singled out’ even though one is just like everybody else. Again, I must add that some stereotypes are misinformed, baseless and prejudiced.

Given the kind of fear that terrorism has generated and the fact that acts of terrorism are endemic, that is, they are almost exclusively committed by particular group of people from a particular region, the “non-terrorist world” feels that it is justifiable to thoroughly scrutinise people from the region that sponsors terrorism. But this is not my appeal. My conviction is that the safety of the world does not rely on the scrutiny performed by the security personnel and man-made devices. If acts of terrorism are committed by man, man can bypass man. The security devices made by man can also be outdone by man. This is in no way being naïve enough to call the security personnel to lay down their tools and go home. They will continue doing what they are doing but that is not the ultimate source of security.

## Where Do Christians Stand in All This?

What I have shared above about fear, stigma and stereotype show the natural panic and the natural response by man. Nevertheless, our security, most literally, is in the hands of God. Man and technology can do wonders but it is God who has the ultimate security “personnel” and “devices” that sustain this world.

Governments will use their mandate to do what is politically expedient. This will include deploying human and technological resources in military campaigns in a bid to control terrorism and its threats.

It is not a desperate pessimism to say that there is little that conventional wars, politics and diplomacy will achieve to bring peace to this world. One of the problems is man’s double-standards. The terror we are experiencing, whether as victims or perpetrators, is a mirror of our error.

Military wars are basically triggered by selfishness and greed aimed at controlling others or deflecting their threat. There is no military campaign that will be used to establish the virtues of God in the lives of people. No-one can transform people from the heart by conquering them militarily. This is why the idea of “holy war” in a military gear is a curious paradox.

***Fear and panic are causing us to do cruel things... A sick person who needs a tablet gets a bullet instead.***

Everyone has been shaken, Christians alike. But let us seek our identity. It is natural to be impulsive with anger. This, however, should be a temporary status indeed. Living in anger opens our life for the other diabolic deposits. The enemy only needs a foothold in one’s life in order to bring his other stuffs. If we live in anger, we may not be in a position to rise above fear. As I have indicated above, fear can kill.

It is time for true Christians to stand up and stop the wave of terrorism and fear. This is the only secret as I will elaborate in detail in part 4 and part 6.

From the look of things, the devil has kept people on their heels, fleeing. The Bible makes it clear that it is the devil who is supposed to be fleeing from us. He, however, doesn't just flee—we have to resist him (Jam. 4:7-10). Resisting means standing our ground and refusing to retreat. And that is the assignment. Think of a roaring lion approaching and his intention is to devour someone (1 Pet. 5:8). The instinct will tell us to run. The Scripture, however, tells us to stand firm and resist him. Naturally, we are inclined to give wrong responses whenever we face a charging lion. We would either run away or faint as a result of being paralysed by fear. If we happen to “fight”, we would shoot haphazardly ending up killing people who were around there. A Christian, however, should be “sober” and resist in the right manner. When Christians go out to fight in a vengeance spirit, the innocent fall victim because we are chasing the enemy and shooting haywire.

If we resist the enemy, we shall have conquered the fear. One of the accomplishments of Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection was to quench the fear of death that kept mankind in bondage.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

—Hebrews 2:14-15.

It is ironical that people who do not fear death (the suicidal terrorists) are ending their lives on diabolic premises and mistaken promises. Because of religious deception, they gamble away their eternal heritage a result of which they will have eternity to grumble about their loss. For me, it is a mystery how religion can hypnotise people until they do things that God hates and still claim that they are doing it for Him.

## Things to Ponder

1. *When fear looms in the air, it is easy for people to overreact. Have you had an experience where people got hurt or paralysed because of fear when in the actual sense there was no danger at all?*
2. *Fear is instinct and can sometimes make us get out of the way of disaster; however, we need to manage it. In what ways can we manage fear so that we don't get hurt unnecessarily or stand in the way of danger—in other words, how can we manage an emerging danger so that we don't get hurt trying to avoid getting hurt?*
3. *Does the need for security precautions justify the impulsive responses that have claimed the lives of innocent people? Is there a way of preventing the loss of innocent lives falling victims of “security precautions”?*
4. *When God tells us not to fear, it means there is a reason to be fearful. How can God's Word help us not become overly fearful?*
5. *What really does it mean not to fear in the face of real danger?*