



## **COPING WITH FEAR**

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The seagull realized with terror that he had misjudged his landing place. He tottered lopsidedly in the busy intersection as he dragged one wing. He hadn't meant to land here, but it was all the farther he could go. As he stared into the shiny metallic grills and the black treaded tires directly in front of him, he saw his situation was hopeless. He seemed to perceptibly gather himself together and hunker down, making himself as small as he possibly could. The light turned green, and in a slow motion instant, all that was visible were feathers floating among the cars.

I think everyone has that hunkered down feeling at sometime in his or her life. Life can be overwhelming: Money problems, work problems, bad news from the doctor, or conflict with your husband or children.

The thought of the change involved to solve those problems can feel as if it threatens the life we know. At those moments, it can feel like we are in a struggle for our emotional survival.

This struggle goes by different names: depression, anxiety, stress, a sense of aloneness, or a hunkered down feeling—fear.

Fear makes it difficult to think. It can erode our resources. It can drive us to avoiding the issue altogether. It can escalate into panic where we grab at any solution.

The first step to manage fear is to learn from the seagull. To stay hunkered down increases a sense of helplessness. The challenge is to *act* in the face of fear. Unlike the seagull, we can take some kind of action.

That's where courage comes in. The action needn't be big. It can be as simple as picking up the phone. Or just opening our mouth and expressing our thoughts to the person next to us: "The wind's blowing pretty hard, don't you think?"

The harder it is to think about doing this, the more important it is to do. Fear can paralyze. But action works to calm the butterflies and restore your equilibrium. Taking action can also help you gain new perspectives, have different thought patterns, and make better decisions.

Put another way, an action step can clear away uncertainty, give a clearer sense of direction, and restore our sense of confidence. Our inner resources never really leave us. And the more we are aware of that inner place and can access those resources, the more we will conquer our fear.