

Overcoming Fear

From Chapter 1 (“Encouraging Words for Discouraging Times”) of Michael Youssef’s new book, *Never Give Up*

We know Timothy’s father was a Gentile (that is, a non-Jew, possibly a Greek). So Timothy’s father was not a Jewish believer like his mother. But here’s an encouraging word I want you to notice. Timothy’s mother is a living example of a principle Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 7:14: In a family with a believing spouse and a nonbelieving spouse, the believer sanctifies both the nonbelieving spouse and the children.

This doesn’t mean the nonbeliever and the children are saved by the believing spouse. Sanctify means “to set apart for a sacred purpose.” Every human being, in order to be saved, must make a personal decision to accept Jesus as Lord. But the faith of a believing parent does sanctify and set apart the children as holy and consecrated to the Lord.

And there’s more: Paul vividly remembers the day that he and other elders prayed for Timothy by the laying on of hands. At that time, Timothy received the Holy Spirit, was gifted by the Holy Spirit, and went on to exercise his gifts through the Holy Spirit. So Paul, the great encourager, tells Timothy, in effect, “I remember all of that, Timothy, and I thank God for you.” Timothy, who was prone to discouragement, must have been greatly encouraged and strengthened by those words. Paul’s encouragement empowered young Timothy to stand firm against the onslaught of Satan.

Friend in Christ, the same Satan who opposed Timothy and provoked feelings of discouragement in him is still active in the world today. Right now, Satan may be tempting you to throw in the towel, to give up, to surrender. And candidly, there is a lot in this world to be discouraged about. We face health fears, career worries, problems raising our kids, plus

mounting bills and debts. All around us, we see political squabbling, racial strife, soaring national debt, rising crime, threats of wars and terrorism, inflation and unemployment, and global instability.

It would be so easy to give in to discouragement and say, "Lord, don't ask me to be a witness for you. Don't ask me to share you with my neighbors and coworkers. I'm just going to lock my door, mind my own business, and let the world go by."

That's Satan talking. It's Satan who wants to instill in us a spirit of fear, timidity, and discouragement. Don't listen to the voice of Satan, the voice of discouragement.

Instead, listen to the Spirit of God. Take out your Bible and read words of encouragement. Remember how God has blessed you before. Remember how He has protected you and watched over you and rescued you.

Can you remember a time when you fell into a pit of circumstances from which there seemed no escape? How did God rescue you? Meditate on that experience, thank God for his protection in your life, and tell him you look forward to seeing how he will redeem you from your present situation.

The same God who rescued Joseph from an Egyptian prison—the same God who rescued Daniel from the lion's den—the same God who rescued you from your circumstances in the past—this same God wants to bless you and encourage you and use you again.

The Heart of Paul's Message

This brings us to the very heart of Paul's encouragement to Timothy in the opening verses of this letter. He tells Timothy, in effect, "Shake off your timidity, shake off your fear, shake off your discouragement!" Why? Paul explains in verse 7: "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." In some translations, the term "self-discipline" is translated "a

sound mind.”

I could write an entire book on this verse alone—and someday, perhaps, I will. But for now, I’ll do my best to summarize Paul’s profound insight.

Paul is saying, first, that God will never send us an evil spirit to make us afraid. I don’t know how many demons there are in the spiritual realm, carrying out the bidding of Satan. And it doesn’t matter. What does matter is that we recognize that feelings of fear, anxiety, and timidity are not from the Spirit of God. Such feelings may arise from our unstable human emotions or from Satan and his demons.

The Bible tells us, “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4, emphasis added). Who is “the one who is in you”? The Holy Spirit. Who is “he who is in the world”? Satan wants to crush your effectiveness, neutralize your impact, paralyze your spiritual life, and terrify you, trapping you in a prison of fear.

But the Spirit of God within you is greater than the spirit of fear. The Holy Spirit dwells within you to encourage and empower you to say “No!” to fear, to say “Go away!” to Satan.

We can’t help but notice the irony of Paul’s message of encouragement to Timothy. There is Paul, awaiting death in the most miserable dungeon in Rome—and his message to Timothy, and to us, is, Don’t lock yourself up in a prison of fear.

Paul is saying, in effect, “If you live in fear, your prison is much worse than mine. If you live in fear, you live in a cage colder and more unbreakable than steel. If you live in fear, you are trapped in a prison more escape-proof than Alcatraz or Devil’s Island.”

If you let fear rule your life, it will waste your God-given abilities, inhibit your desire to serve God, paralyze your

commitment to God, and impede your spiritual growth. Fear can damage and ruin your friendships, family relationships, and marriage relationship. Fear can undermine your health, disturb your sleep, raise your blood pressure, ruin your digestion, and shorten your life.

That's why Paul tells Timothy—and us—that God's Spirit is the Spirit of comfort, encouragement, and boldness. The devil is a liar. God's Spirit is the Spirit of truth.

We often don't like to admit that we are afraid, so we may excuse our fear and call it by different names. "I'm careful." "I'm cautious." "I'm shy." "I lack confidence." "God didn't give me an outgoing personality." "I'm just not an adventuresome person." "I can't share the gospel with my neighbors because God didn't give me the gift of evangelism." "Other people are so much better at serving others, I would just make a mess of things."

We can try to give our fearfulness another name, but we can't escape the truth. We don't have to live in fear. Paul has shown us the way to conquer our fear and timidity.

The Antidote to Fear

Please understand, there is nothing sinful about experiencing fear when you face real danger. If you see a truck rushing at you while you're in the crosswalk, a surge of fear and adrenaline will put power in your muscles as you leap out of harm's way. That instantaneous impulse of self-preservation we call fear is intended to keep us safe.

Believe me, I know that impulse well. I have experienced raw fear in dangerous situations, and that's a normal emotion in the face of an immediate threat. But in those moments, I have also experienced the Spirit of God breathing within me, saying, "Fear not!"

Again and again throughout the Gospels, in various ways and at

various times, Jesus tells his followers, "Fear not!"

- "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" (Matthew 8:26).
- "So do not be afraid of them" (Matthew 10:26).
- "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid" (Matthew 14:27).
- "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40).
- "Don't be afraid; just believe" (Mark 5:36).
- "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people" (Luke 5:10).
- "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed" (Luke 8:50).
- "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).
- "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

We don't have to be afraid of life. Why? Because Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He is the Author of life, and every detail and aspect of our lives is under His control.

We don't have to be afraid of death. Why? Because Jesus said, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades" (Rev. 1:18).

We don't have to fear the unknown. Why? Because Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (Rev. 22:13). He is the Creator of time and space, the future and the past, and there is nothing in

life unknown to him.

If there is one thing the apostle Paul learned in more than three decades of walking with the Lord, serving the Lord, and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is this—there is only one antidote to fear: faith in the Almighty God who alone can banish fear from our lives.

God is in control. He never makes a mistake. And His love never fails.

For more information on Never Give Up, check out [. {eo}](#)

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