

Treating Timidity

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God...

2 Timothy 1:6-8

*There once live a man who never risked, he never tried.
He never laughed, he never prayed, he never cried.
Then one day when he passed away, his insurance was denied.
They said since he never really lived, then he never really died!* **Anonymous**

*"If your vision doesn't scare you, then
neither your vision nor your God is very big!"* **Brother Andrew**

Not to be harsh, but it's my observation that a disproportionate percentage of American believers in Jesus are timid in the expression of their faith. There are "don't-dare-miss-it" people and then there are "don't-dare-try-it" ones. I think Christians should be more courageous, not only out in the big bad world, but even among themselves in their comfortable churches. Jesus has too many frail followers here – afraid to take any risks or do anything for the first time. There's something about our middle class suburban spirituality that lulls us toward a tentative, rather than a forward form of faith.

When there's plenty of *actual adventure* to be had in locating what God is doing and doing it with him, many Christians use up all their adrenaline in front of their computers and flat screens content with *virtual adventure*. They'd rather *watch* adventure on a screen than venture into God's daily quest to bring heaven here. Their feet, instead of flapping in the wind holding on for dear life to God's back bumper, have fallen asleep atop of their ottomans.

One of Satan's favorite strategies is to get Christians all jammed up with lesser fears, apt distractions to our bigger purposes, fears about money or romance or public speaking or the neighbor's disapproval. If he can, he'll get us stalled over fears unworthy of God's soldiers. The soldier who is afraid of bugs or germs or the dark doesn't ever have the chance to face the bigger fears of war. "Be careful," preached Jesus, "or your hearts will be weighted down with dissipation... and the anxieties of life and that day will close on you unexpectedly" Luke 21. The anxieties of life are often "pop-ups" generated by our adversary to get us off task of the grand adventure. Sometimes when I ask fellow followers how I can pray for them, I'm surprised by what's on their screens instead of eternal kingdom purposes.

Jesus put things in perspective when he said, "*Don't fear those who can only kill your body...*" What are you afraid of – the worst they can do to you is kill you! That's not worthy of being on the list of things to fear. With those smaller fears as our predominant preoccupation, we may never get around to the scary adventure of advancing the kingdom. Preoccupied with fears of stock market lulls or our sports team ... we won't have space in our hearts for the truly important challenges of life. Risking a friendship to share Christ with a co-worker, deciding to take our vacation money and use it for a missions trip to India, or volunteering in an AIDS clinic will be so far down the list of messages in our inbox that we'll probably never even see it.....

If we're not derailed by lesser fears the "spirit of fear" will knock us off track by spawning qualms about the bigger causes for which we were designed. If his tactic of distracting us with pathetic

phobias doesn't succeed, and we're considering taking on worthy eternal challenges, his stage two scheme will be to tempt us to balk with fear of the consequences of following Jesus in true cross-bearing. "What if I fail in that ministry or my career path is delayed by pursuing what it seems God is telling me to do? I might get hurt in such a dangerous neighborhood. I'm not sure I'm gifted enough for that ministry. Is it even wise to give that much money away to that ministry to orphans?" You see the difference between these fears and the former ones, right? But keep in mind, these are still fears, and most definitely not created by the adventurous Spirit of God. Small fears or large, we need power, love and self-discipline to overcome them.

I've heard that a sports team that "plays scared" doesn't tend to fare well by the end of the game. If they play to "avoid losing" instead of to win, they have probably lost before ever stepping foot on the playing field or court. So many of our brothers and sisters are using up all their courage and faith to just *stay saved*. To them, the church is a safe-deposit box to keep us sheltered from difficulties and the devil. They would consider it a victory just to sneak into heaven, let alone get anyone else there.

I think we need a shove toward spiritual bravery, but rather than use some spiritual hero – a Joshua, an Elijah, or a John the Baptist – to do the shoving, I'll use someone whose personality was, by nature, and maybe nurture, more *timid* than *intrepid*. He was called by God to lead a life of spiritual influence, but he tended more to *temerity* than to *bravery*. In my own battle to be a better servant of God I'm sometimes inspired more by people who aren't natural-born spiritual superstars, people who struggle like I do, and yet, for the Bridegroom's sake, have overcome their limitations and fears. Timid Timothy was such a man.

Slaying lions in snowy pits

"Dad," my son asked proudly, "do you want to see my new tattoo?"

"Umm," I'm not really into tattoos, especially the ones that cover whole limbs or trunks, but in order to be supportive – at least not combative – I feigned approval, "yeah, Luke, sure."

He pushed his sleeve over his shoulder and revealed a drawing, conspicuous with color that covered his entire upper right arm. It's actually a quite striking depiction of a remarkably muscled man engaged in mortal combat with a ferocious lion.

"I got this for *you*, Dad!"

"Yeah, right," I replied suspiciously.

"No, really," he claimed, "it's based on a message of yours."

"Oh?" Now he's got my attention. "Which one?" I asked.

"Can't you guess?"

Still pretty skeptical, my first attempt was, "Uh, Daniel in the lion's den?"

"Nope."

"Okay," my mind scanning the Bible stories with Lions in them, I took another stab at it, "David fighting the lion and the bear?"

"None," he said, "but you're getting warmer."

And then it came to me. On several occasions and in a variety of venues I have given a message on an obscure, but provocative passage, and Luke must have heard one of them and been impacted by it. Unless of course, it was just an excuse for filling up one of the last remaining regions of his body with skin art. “Oh yeah,” I exclaimed, “David’s mighty man, Benaiah. The guy who killed the lion in a pit on a snowy day!” For emphasis I articulated the quote from 2 Samuel with pauses between the phrases, like any self-respecting preacher would: “...*killed a lion – in a pit – on a snowy day!*”

“Ding, ding, ding!” he sounded out the game show correct-answer-sound. “I got it in honor of how you’ve been fighting your battles these days, Dad.”

I reached out, grabbed him by the neck, pulled him against me, kissed him on the cheek, and whispered in his ear, “I love you, Son.”

“I love you too, Dad,” he whispered back.

“Benaiah killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day.”

Like I said, I’ve spoken on this passage from 2 Samuel 23 many times over the years. This abridged version of a courageous man’s life, a member of David’s special forces, is not only good sermon material, but has encouraged me to persevere in difficult times. This man did **the hardest thing** (killed a lion) in **the most difficult place** (in a pit) in **the worst of circumstances** (on a snowy day).

Paul’s disciple, Timothy, had lions to kill (his spiritual leadership assignment) in a very difficult place (Ephesus) in really bad circumstances (the constant threat to his safety)! I can relate to this guy. A lot of times I’ve been more fearful than fearless. I’ve shirked scary circumstances, run from challenges, and missed many kingdom opportunities availed to me because I was afraid of something – reprisal, rejection, embarrassment, failure. Over the years I’ve failed to wrestle many lions in slippery pits.

“Timidity” is a much better translation than “fear” in this verse. Rather than being afraid of a certain thing, Paul was addressing a tendency toward fearfulness, a general cowardliness. It’s the same word that Jesus used while scolding his disciples in the boat when they failed the storm-test – “*Why were you so cowardly?*” And then again in the Upper Room lecture he said to them, “*Don’t let hearts be troubled, neither let them be timid.*” One last time it appears at the head of a list of people in the Bible’s second to the last chapter who will take their “*place in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.*” It’s the “*cowardly*” along with the “*vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, etc.*” which will be punished. It’s clear that he’s referring to those, when given the opportunity to escape persecution by defecting, don’t have the courage to stay with the team and its Captain.

Fear is a reality for everyone. None of us are immune to it. It’s a good thing in the right context. We should be afraid of lions and tigers and bears – “Oh my!” Courage, of course, is not having *no fear*, it’s proceeding in spite of it. My friend is a part of a cliff-climbing club whose mantra is – “*We will do something everyday that scares us.*”

Don’t some people tend toward timidity more than others?

Paul was no stranger to Roman jails, but this one from which he wrote to Timothy was by far the worst. He was cold, lonely, and in chains, and everyone had deserted him – he said so three times in the letter. This is it, these were his final days and he knew it. It was clear to him that soon he’d join all the elite class of martyrs. After thirty years of preaching he said, “I am now being poured out like a drink offering, I’ve finished the course, fought the good fight, and now there is laid up for me the

crown of righteousness.” His time was short, yet you don’t find him whining about it. Instead of being self-obsessed he was so selfless enough to take the time to try to boost his disciple’s bravery.

Everywhere he went Paul was pounded. As a new Christian, they tried to murder him in Jerusalem. They incited a mob against him and ran him out of Antioch. He was stoned to death (and was raised) in Lystra and in Philippi he and Silas, after being beaten with rods, their hands and feet bound in stocks, they were heaved into a dank jail. He was run out of Thessalonica, fled for his life from Berea, laughed out of Athens, threatened in Corinth, and beaten and jailed in Jerusalem. On his journey to Rome he was starved, shipwrecked, and bitten by a poisonous snake. This is a guy who simply refused to quit. Though Paul was naturally brave, it doesn’t that mean he was never scared. Of course he got scared, but he didn’t let his fear stop him.

Though Paul was the prototypical model of a courageous Christian, and the kind of person we would aspire to be like, we’re more likely to identify with his retiring protégé, Timothy.

Timothy was young, sickly, and shy. By “young,” since he’d travelled with Paul for 15 years or so, I mean he was probably in his early to mid-thirties.

His relative youth probably aggravated his timidity but was no problem to much older Paul who told him not to *“let anyone look down on you because (he was) young.”* Understandably, his physical frailty (“frequent illnesses”) added to his tendency to reticence. To top off his predisposition to faintheartedness, apparently his father was not a Christian and therefore his spiritual influence came primarily from his grandmother and mother (“Lois” and “Eunice”). I pose no rap on women or the blessing of maternal spiritual impact, but sometimes a boy needs a dad to show him how to be a spiritual man. Even though Timothy had been under the influence of the world’s most courageous Christian, he still fought his tendency to reticence.

The one was bold, resilient, hardy, and prone to risk-taking – the other – shy, weak, frail, young and timid by temperament. Paul was a *born leader* and Timothy a *born leaner*.

So, does God give “a pass” to the timid?

Because his ministry was hard for him, do you get the impression that his mentor let Timothy off the hook? Can you hear Paul say, *“You’re not a natural at this, so why don’t you find something easier to do for God? --- You’re sick and scared, so maybe you should rethink your ministry and sign up for something safer. Plus, I know it’s especially hard for you since you didn’t have a dad to show you how to be a spiritual man, so why don’t you take the next decade or two to work on your inner healing before you launch out into any sort of spiritual responsibility.”*

Alternatively, take a look at this cursory list of Paul’s exhortations to his mentee:

- *“Join with me in suffering for gospel by power of God...”*
- *“Don’t be ashamed to testify about Lord or me...”*
- *“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you’re young, be an example, be diligent...”*
- *“Fight the good fight of faith...”*
- *“Stand guard over what’s been put in your care...”*
- *“Be strong in grace...”*
- *“Endure hardship...”*
- *“Preach the Word...”*
- *“Reprove, rebuke, and exhort people...”*

Does that sound at all like being *let off the hook* to you? Timothy's predispositions to *lean* rather *lead* were, to Paul, no good reason to lower the bar. If anything, on the verge of his own death, the apostle *raised the bar*, and dared his disciple to suck it up and overcome his limitations for God's sake and the sake of the struggling baby church. This – Paul's final correspondence with his successor – was his "Win this one for the Gipper" speech.

You might've come by your tentativeness honestly and through no fault of your own. For all I know you were born with a skittish gene. I'm sure, if you're frail of frame or sickly like Timothy, it's not as though you chose your predilections. But still, my question to you is – what does *God* require of you? That's always my day-beginning query to God, "What do you want me to do today?" In spite of my incompetence, I really want what he wants to be my wants.

To me, his will is the determining factor. Moses stuttered, but God, even though Aaron took the bulk of his public speaking gigs, often made him speak in front of the nation (Deuteronomy is full of such Moses speeches). Though David was too young, too small, and too inexperienced, he took a deep breath and faced the giant. The boy's lunch was way too small to feed 5000 hungry picnickers, but because he gave it over to Jesus it swelled into a feast plus doggie bags for the disciples (twelve baskets for twelve disciples).

I like to think of it as "Dedicated Incompetence." I know I'm incompetent, yet it's when I dedicate to God what little I have, that he can do something with it. I try not to be held back by my fragilities, but offer them to God. If he feels he can do something with a person like me, he knows I'm at his beck and call. (It's as simple as **ABC** – **A**t his **B**eck and **C**all).

"He said to me, 'My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.' Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become." **2 Corinthians 12 (The Message Bible)**

Are fear and fearful the same?

Instead of being courageous lion-killers, many Christians are timid, and frankly, quite cowardly about the grand adventure into which God has invited us. Of course, the most extreme form of timidity, when the pressure's on, is to turn one's back on the Lord and deny him altogether. No doubt, that's the meaning of the apparently out-of-place reference to "cowardly" among other fatal lifestyle choices in the Bible's second-to-last chapter.

*But the **cowardly**, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."* **Revelation 21:8**

Some people are just more naturally – some supernaturally – bolder than others. I don't really know why that is, but I've been talking about how if you're not one of them, you're not necessarily let off the hook of a risk-taking approach to the way you live your life in Jesus. Paul's protégé, Timothy, was one such guy who was not given to living courageously. He grew up with a dad who couldn't mentor him spiritually, was given to sickness, fearfulness, and introversion; nevertheless, Paul wouldn't give him a pass on his responsibility to live for Jesus out loud. You might reason that your calling is not one of those that would require a particularly audacious outlook. I'd counter that while your calling may not demand an outgoing temperament, it most certainly will take courage on your part. Courageous faith seems to be the constant in all the callings

Spiritual bravery is not the same as being gregarious. One is a personality trait and the other is a choice that we make in faith in order to accomplish our purpose on earth. God created (or allows for) all sorts of personality types, calls people to all types of responsibilities in his world, and then requires – and supplies upon earnest request – faith and courage for each of us to do what he calls us to do.

Though he urges us over and over not to “fear” (somebody counted 366 times in the Bible, one for every day, even in leap year!), he doesn’t object to *fear* as much as to *fearfulness*. Being afraid of snakes is natural and has its upside, while a tentative or timid tendency may not be so natural and carries with it mostly a downside, especially as it impedes us from following God in his adventure. If he’s honest, the brave soldier will admit, with people dying all around him in battle, that he’s scared but chooses to do his duty in spite of it. It’s that general sense of apprehension, a universal sense of insecurity, with which so many believers are afflicted. They’re afraid to live in an upstream direction in a downstream culture, to be identified as an adoptee of God, and to tell people the truth about their Father.

Paul was about to have his head removed by sword on the Appian Way in Rome. Afraid? Terrified, I’m sure. Tempted to recant? Undoubtedly. Even Jesus was *“tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin.”* He even asked his Father to come up with an alternative plan that didn’t include him hanging on a cross. Jesus was *afraid*, but not *fearful*. He was the bravest Man on earth, who dealt with his fear by facing it down and denying it control.

Are you ashamed of Jesus?

They say that “a text without a context is a pretext,” and you’ve probably noticed that before and after Paul told timid Timothy to be brave he referenced the young disciple’s ministry assignment. The Message Bible makes the context clearer:

“The special gift of ministry you received when I laid hands on you and prayed—keep that ablaze! God doesn’t want us to be shy with his gifts, but bold and loving and sensible. So don’t be embarrassed to speak up for our Master or for me, his prisoner.”

You may not be called to be a street preacher or missionary to the lepers in India, but whatever your assignment, it will require courage on your part to fulfill it. If, due to fearfulness, your gift has ebbed to a smoldering cinder, and your timidity holds you back from admitting to others that you’re a Jesus person, you need to tap into the power, love and self-discipline that the Spirit puts into your spirit.

Throughout the letter – his final one before his own beheading – Paul told Timothy not to be “ashamed,” which is another way to say, “Don’t be afraid.” *“I am not ashamed because I know whom I have believed... He (Onesiphorus) was not ashamed of my chains... Don’t be ashamed to testify about the Lord or of me his prisoner...”* Fear and shame are cousins. We fear the consequence of being shamed or embarrassed by something or someone. I hate it when someone treats me condescendingly and I walk away feeling less. It’s this prospect that tempts me toward timidity. I have lots of excuses and worries – *I might fail, I might look stupid, they might not like it, God might not show up and help me.* With each alibi the flame inside me recedes and the voice of the Spirit fades. Conversely, when I push my fears aside like obstructing branches on the trail that I’m cutting with the sword of the Spirit, fear subsides and faith commences to blaze again.

Are you ashamed of his followers?

“Don’t be ashamed to testify about our Lord or of me his prisoner...”

You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus. 2 Timothy 1:15-18

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 2 Timothy 4:16-17

If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 1 Peter 4:16

I wonder if our skittishness about following Jesus in public is due in part to the blunders of his other followers – whether true followers or not. The terrible reputation of the Church in general and many churches in particular is obvious, and because we don't want to be identified with that, many of us are shy about being associated with such an "organization." It's funny that most people I talk to about Jesus say the same thing, "I don't believe in organized religion." I always say something like, "*We're not as organized as you might think and you're smart to flee religion. Religion is bad but Jesus loves you, and so do all his unreligious true followers, of which I am part.*"

I know Christians who have lived in their neighborhood and worked on the same jobs for many years and yet no one knows they follow Jesus. What's up with that? Are they ashamed of him or just embarrassed of those who follow him (or claim to)? Granted, a lot of stupid stuff has been done in the name of our Christ (stuff he didn't authorize), and we have a terribly bad rap in the world – don't get me started! As a result, I often apologize to people who've been hurt or offended by the mistakes of our supposed brethren, and beg them not to blame Jesus for the failures of the people who love him and the posers who use his name as an excuse to act like idiots. But that doesn't mean I'm ashamed to be identified with him or with his family.

Among Christians these days it's in vogue not only to disassociate with, but to *diss* (slang for disrespect) our family, "I love God, but woe, the Church is messed up!" Trust me, I was a pastor for over thirty years, and I know about all our warts, plenty in bygone centuries and multitudinous in our very own time. I often say to people who are disgusted with the Church, "*The Church is like Noah's Ark. There were eight people and hundreds of animals on that boat for over a year with no Lysol (or deodorant for that matter)! It must've stunk so bad they were tempted to jump off and take their chances in the sea. In the same way, the Church may have a foul odor, but it's the only thing floatin'!*"

But I want to say that I'm intensely honored to be associated with my brothers and sisters with authentic faith in Jesus. I've had friends over the years who've saved my life and sanity, who serve the poor and marginalized in Africa, South America, Russia, and in the streets of San Francisco. I know many simple saints who walk the walk as well as talk and talk. I am proud to be in the company of such heroes who've endured in their faith and integrity for decades. Jesus told us that the Church would include both wheat and weeds, until on some future day he would separate them in order to punish the one and reward the other. In the meantime, we're to do our best to maintain our own authenticity, proudly bear his name, love those who love him, and those who don't.

The Spirit, a spirit, or what?

What is “*a spirit of power, love and self-discipline*”? Is he talking about the Holy Spirit, the human spirit, a right spirit (as in, attitude) – or all three? You probably know that, in the Bible, the word “spirit” can be seen in all those ways and it usually takes the context to decipher the difference. I think Paul might have had in mind a montage of these meanings. In other words, the **Holy Spirit**, who lives in our **human spirit**, enables us to have a **healthy spirit**.

Something Paul wrote in another passage clarifies this one... “*You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you receive the Spirit of sonship. And by him (the Holy Spirit) we cry, ‘Abba Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we God’s children.*” Romans 8:15-17

Though the context is different, it’s clear that the *Spirit of God* interacts with the *spirit of man* to produce a *spirit of sonship* (a revelation and appreciation of the fatherhood of our God). The Holy Spirit, when given unlimited access to our human spirit, will do in us what we couldn’t do for ourselves, create a healthy spirit, which in Timothy’s case replaced the *spirit of fear* with a *brave spirit* (in 2 Corinthians 4:13 it’s called the “spirit of faith”).

I’m no pilot, but my friend Jim is, and believe me, he loves to talk about his plane. I asked him, since what goes *up* must come *down*, what instrument with which his plane is equipped is most valuable in preventing him from going down prematurely and unintentionally. He mentioned something called an “Attitude Indicator,” and told me it’s used to inform the pilot of the orientation of the airplane relative to the ground. In other words – and I did need *other words* – when for some reason, you can’t see the ground, the Attitude Indicator shows you if you’re tilting to the front or back or to the left or right. I guess that’s pretty important when you’re airborne in a metal casket with wings.

It’s equally important to have the right “attitude” while soaring above the clouds in the adventure of God. In order to continue on our airborne course and avoid bad landings and deadly crashes, this Spirit-empowered attitude of *power, love and self-discipline* is indispensable. Those who fail to fight their fear of flying miss out on the panoramic sights along the way and the possibilities at the flight’s destination. Let us not fearfully avoid the opportunities of the spiritual flight, but let the Holy Spirit invade our human spirit to create a healthy spirit of courage, embrace the risks of adventure, and soar with our Adventure Guide to places unknown and unexpected.

Treating timidity with power...

Driven by the context of Paul’s advice to his timid protégé, as I talk about overcoming timidity, I want to remind you that I’m primarily referring to the kind of fears that we experience while serving in the daunting adventure of God. I’ve more often heard (and used) this passage to urge people to defeat their phobias and quell their fears of “lesser demons.” And, no doubt, many of those types of fears are the brainchildren of dark spirits to keep us embroiled in skirmishes of little consequence in order to avert us from the actual front lines where the actual kingdom advances into enemy territory. While Timothy might well have been afraid of his own shadow, so to speak, what concerned Paul was his timidity regarding his humanly impossible mission in Ephesus. His mentoring advice was intended to embolden him for the eternity-sized tasks at hand.

He gave him a three-fold prescription to dispel Timothy’s fear of the mission – the Spirit promises to saturate him (and us) with more than enough **power, love and self-discipline** for any world-changing chore to which he assigns us and for which he trusts us.

Have you ever thought about how these three things counter fearfulness? Why did Paul pick these things in particular as an antithesis of timidity? How does this three-fold prescription neutralize our nervousness and allay our fears?

“**Power**”, of the three, is the most obvious antidote for timidity. When we’re persuaded that we have the power of the Spirit available for ready access in our spirit, we don’t have to fear anything that we might encounter in our service to God. He readied us for every scary eventuality by guaranteeing, “*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you shall be my witnesses...*” The degree to which my spirit is full of the Holy Spirit is the degree of courage that I carry into whatever chilling adventure into which he might insert me.

With Paul on death row in Rome, Timothy was the heir apparent of his apostolic position in Ephesus, if not beyond. Talk about a daunting prospect! From a different prison cell, earlier in his ministry, to that same church where he’d commissioned Timothy to serve, Paul wrote a mandate: “*Be filled with the Spirit,*” that is, make sure to keep a spirit full of the Holy Spirit. Doubtless, the apostle-in-training, looking for all the encouragement and support he could find, along with all the correspondence of his mentor, constantly poured over that particular letter to the Ephesians. His spirit saturated and spilling over with the Holy Spirit would be key to facing his intimidating assignment. I know that for me, when my spirit is exclusively and excessively occupied by the Holy Spirit, I tend to forge forward in a spirit of courage rather than in fear.

If you tend to toward timidity, I can’t highly enough recommend getting saturated to the point of spilling over in the Holy Spirit. As I understand it, we are initially infused with the Spirit when we receive Jesus, but are filled and empowered with the same Spirit by asking the Father, believing his promise, and receiving the gift from his hand (Luke 11:13; Galatians 3:2; John 20:22). After the Holy Spirit filled them, the disciples of Jesus appear to be altogether different men than the ones who followed him previously. Before their spiritual saturation they hid behind locked doors, the same doors through which they emerged to change the world after the Holy Spirit came upon them, and with this same “Spirit of power” we can overcome fearfulness and timidity as we serve in the grand adventure of God.

Treating timidity with love...

“**Love**,” as a deterrent for timidity, may not be as obvious as “power,” but it’s just as critical. Imagine the mother who suffers a phobia of heights, but for love of her child, scrambles up the tall tree in which her child is stuck. The claustrophobic man will take one last vehement breath and enter the caved-in mine to rescue his beloved wife. Ready and willing to brave whatever danger, their fears are trumped by their love. It was love that compelled Jesus to risk coming all the way here from his splendid neighborhood to ours (not so splendid) and then to go all the way to an dreadful bloody cross, and love makes us brave beyond our normal limits, willing to follow him wherever he leads us, able to carry our cross.

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” **Romans 5:8**

“This is how God showed his love among us; he sent his one and only Son...” **1 John 4:9**

“God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit...” **Romans 5:5**

The Holy Spirit is willing and able to give us this kind of fear-neutralizing love in such a way that it exudes from our pores – the “spirit of love.” When he injects God’s agape into us, the way we think about our fellow-earthlings, the way we feel about them, and the way we treat them, is love.

“Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends.” **John 15:13**

“There is no fear in love...” 1 John 4:18

Could it be a symptom of *lovelessness* when we let our timidity get the best of us and prevent us from doing God’s bidding? Is it an indicator that we don’t love people enough to suck up our fears in order to help them? I might be afraid to talk in front of people, but because I love them (and it’s clear that God wants me to do this) I have to overcome my fear. If I’m reticent about confronting a friend in their sin, because I love him, I must forge ahead and speak the truth to him in love. Imagine that you’re with a small group of friends, and the Spirit injects into your heart a prophecy to share with them, but you’re scared. *“What if this isn’t the Spirit’s word, or the right time to share it? What happens if I don’t say it exactly right?”* Understandable concerns, but love for others would compel you to step out and do your best. Your co-worker has just been diagnosed with cancer and you feel inspired by the Spirit to ask her if you can pray for her, but you’re afraid she’ll be embarrassed or that you’ll look stupid. Love gives you a shove. It always does. It inspires us to be bolder, to adventure beyond our humanly, and often demonically, induced boundaries in order to obey God’s prompting to help other humans.

“Since God so loved us, we ought to love one another.” 1 John 4:11

“Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” 1 John 4:21

Treating timidity with self-discipline...

“Self-discipline” is, to me, the least obvious piece of Paul’s prescription in the treatment of timidity. What’s the connection here? How does having *self-discipline* counter my fears about doing God’s will? Remember that the context here isn’t so much about our phobias (heights, small places, flying machines, puppies...) as much as it is about our reticence to follow God in his eternal undertakings and to use our gifts in order to bring glory to the Giver. So, how does *self-discipline* help us do that?

Though I’m no Greek expert, a simple look at the term that Paul used here might be helpful; especially since the word “self-discipline” is, in my opinion, not the best translation. Neither “*self*” nor “*discipline*” are included or even implied in the Greek term (*sophron*). “Self-discipline” sounds more like it’s about *my* ability to discipline *myself* to force fears out of my mind – a “mind over matter” sort of thing. While there is a time and place for that, this just doesn’t fit the context of the passage or the true meaning of the term here.

Other versions translate it --- *“a sound mind, good judgment, wise judgment, sobriety, discipline, self-control.”* I don’t usually do this, but let me quote some of the Greek experts’ definitions of the term (*sophron*), and then consolidate them and try to make some applications that make biblical sense to me.

Sophron is --- “acting in God’s definition of balance ... it makes someone genuinely temperate, i.e. well-balanced from God’s perspective... biblical moderation... the root of the word means “soundness” and reflects living in God-defined balance... a safe and sound inner outlook which regulates outward behavior... radically balanced, combining the legitimate extremities of truth from both sides of a matter...”

Surprisingly to me, the old King James Version of this seems like the best rendition – “*sound mind.*” The predominant concept here is a balanced and healthy way of thinking and acting. It’s a quality of keeping one’s life off the edges, not so we can be safe or comfortable, but so we avoid the extremes that cause trouble and impede the progress of God’s kingdom. When my self-talk sounds like, *“What if this happens or what if that...?”* the *sound mind* helps me fight my fears, corral my renegade thoughts and reel them in from the extreme places they like to go.

While this “sound mind” might direct us down the middle of the road away from precipitous shoulders

in no way does it imply any sort of *mediocre middle*. The balance produced by the “sound mind” is a *radical balance*. It helps us remain on the road that will actually get us to God’s intended kingdom-advancing destination, but not necessarily with comfort and safety. Paul himself (along with many of his brave but balanced friends) lived the adventure with anything but ease and security. His sound mind wasn’t the least bit mediocre.

Don’t forget, it’s the Holy Spirit working in our spirit to produce a “spirit of a sound mind.” All of these *prescriptions* to treat timidity are insinuated by the Spirit and given to us gratis. It’s the Spirit who helps us to “*cast down imaginations and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*”
2 Corinthians 10:5

I can only imagine that receiving Paul’s apostolic mantle, staying the course of protecting the gospel from heresy, and doing his part to advance the message around the known world in Paul’s absence, mortified young and skittish Timothy! While you may not have been commissioned to such a daunting assignment, you absolutely do have intimidating kingdom responsibilities, impossible to carry out in our own strength and which, to some degree, probably terrify you. You’re scared – he gets that. In fact, if you weren’t, you probably do not realize how ridiculous is the task. But as an antidote for our timidity, the Spirit gives us all the **power** we need to advance, more than sufficient **love** to care enough to proceed, and a **sound mind** to help us stay on track. God’s adventure *should* frighten us – if it never does, then we’re not on the right ride.

Well known to be a terrifying blast, there’s a popular ride at a local theme park called “*The Fire Fall*.” Here’s the park’s description of it: “*Fall head-over-heels! This thrill ride will take 40 brave riders to a height of 60 feet, then subject them to 360 degree vertical arcs as they twist, turn and spin through both fire and water effects.*” Honestly, not being the daredevil that many of you are, this is not the least bit attractive to me. But that’s just me.

Imagine that you go to the park, expecting the thrill of a lifetime. After your tense anticipation during an aggravatingly long wait in line, boarding the ride, getting strapped in, and then taking off, you find the actual ride much less than thrilling than advertised. In fact, it was downright boring. You didn’t experience any vertical arcs or any twisting, turning, or spinning through water or fire. “*Why would anyone pay for such a ride?*” When you disembark, you realize you had embarked on the wrong ride! This wasn’t the one that you’d heard so much about, the one that your friends dared you to chance. You had gotten in the wrong line to ride on the wrong ride. This one was designed not for adults, but for children! The fear factor is deliberately aimed to a child’s level, and only bores the thrill-seeking adult.

So many believers in Jesus have boarded the wrong ride, one made for kids – a little *entertaining*, but not the least bit *breathtaking*. Instead of the adult version, they’re on a children’s ride with other children, experiencing only children’s fears (phobias of lesser dragons and imposter monsters). I use the term “believers” instead of “followers,” because if they were actually *following* him they’d be experiencing the chilling ride of their lives, screaming with delight and desperation to God for *the power, the love, and the sound mind* that it takes to experience and endure the entire ride until it comes to a full and final stop. Not until then will they unbuckle their safety belt, disembark this ride, and be ushered to the next awe-inspiring trip and embark on another indescribable adventure – the one that never ends.