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YOU CAN BE COURAGEOUS!

SOMEONE ONCE SAID, “A man who is afraid will do anything.” History has proven that statement true. Fear is a powerful emotion. Fear will prevent you from doing things you normally would do and cause you to do things you normally wouldn’t do. Fear has caused proud men to beg, strong men to cry, loving men to hate, and peaceful men to be filled with fury. Like a slave master, fear is controlling.

You know this from experience. We’ve all heard others say, “I don’t want to talk to that person about Christ; I’m too afraid of his reaction.” “I don’t want to open up about what is really going on in my life; I’m afraid of what others might think.” “I don’t want to obey God; I’m scared of what that will require.” “I don’t want people to get too close to me; then they’ll find out what’s really going on in my heart.” “I don’t want to share my testimony; I’m scared.” “I know I should talk to that person, but I’m afraid of what she’ll think of me.”

Many Christians are controlled by fear. As a result, they are crippled spiritually. They come to church, read the Scriptures, hear God’s Word preached, and know what God wants them to do. But they don’t obey because they are frightened. So they compromise. They live their Christian lives incognito, going to church on Sundays and living like the world the rest of the week. They neglect their gifts and are ashamed of Christ—all as a result of sinful fear.

Fear is a problem for everyone, and it's a major problem in the Christian life. The Bible makes it clear that fear can paralyze even great men. The apostle Paul was well aware of that. In fact, that was one of Paul's primary concerns for Timothy as he wrote his second letter to him. Paul was concerned that fear would stop Timothy from living all out for Christ.

Paul wrote this second letter to Timothy from prison. He was anticipating martyrdom. The emperor Nero was acting irrationally; he had just torched the city of Rome and was blaming it on the Christians. Persecution was intensifying. This was not an easy time to be a believer. A number of Paul's friends had even given up the faith and abandoned him because of their fears (2 Tim. 1:15).

Paul understood that fear could cripple Timothy's effectiveness for Christ. That's why he exhorted Timothy, "I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God" (2 Tim. 1:6). Step up, be bold, and use the gift God has given you. In verse 8 Paul went on to encourage Timothy, "Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God."

Paul didn't want Timothy to become so afraid of the future that he would stop living for Christ in the present. This was not a time for weakness, it was a time for strength; not a time to hide gifts, rather a time to use them; not a time to shrink back, but to stand strong; not a time for fear, rather a time for courage. "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," Paul wrote (2:1). Why? "God has not given us a spirit of fear" (1:7 NKJV).

When we read this passage from the comfort of our recliners, it's very easy to miss the impact of Paul's words. Think carefully about what Paul was telling Timothy. He didn't write, "Timothy, you have nothing to be afraid of. The Christian life is easy!" No, Paul was very blunt. He told Timothy there were going to be consequences for being a Christian. He wrote in verse 8, "Join with me in suffering." You are going to suffer, but you must not fear!

Paul didn't mean we aren't to have any old kind of fear. It's not wrong to jump when someone says, "Boo!" or to be startled when you're placed in a frightening situation. The word Paul used for *fear* describes

moral cowardice. He was referring to a sinful fear that would keep Timothy from obeying God and fulfilling his responsibilities. In other words, Paul was telling Timothy, “You must not be controlled by sinful fear. It’s not from God.”

If Paul said this to Timothy, we can be sure he would say the same to us today. Yes, there’s a cost for following after Christ. Yes, difficulties will come into your life. But stop riding the fence. Stop playing both sides. Start wholeheartedly obeying Christ despite what may come. Don’t allow your fear of the future to stop you from fully obeying God now. You don’t have to be paralyzed by fear.

That’s a shocking statement. How could Paul expect us to be courageous when life is so frightening? Isn’t it normal to be afraid of suffering? Doesn’t it make sense to try to avoid it? If you look to the future and know that if you take a particular route you will certainly suffer, wouldn’t it make sense to take a different route? Why shouldn’t we be afraid? Why shouldn’t we shrink back?

THE REASON FOR COURAGE

That’s the question Paul answered in verse 7. He wrote, “For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.”

Paul wrote “For,” or in other words, “This is the reason why . . .” You should be courageous because God has not given you a spirit of fear.

To whom was Paul referring? Who is the *us* in this verse? Just naturally confident people? People with all sorts of abilities? No. Paul meant all believers, regardless of personality, regardless of natural talents and abilities. Not one believer has a right to be characterized by a spirit of fear. That spirit, that attitude is not from God.

Timothy was a naturally timid person, but notice that Paul didn’t allow him to use that as an excuse. He didn’t say, “Poor Timothy. You’re a fearful person. That’s okay. Just hang in there.” Instead Paul began by rebuking Timothy: “Timothy, stop being afraid. It’s not from God. The reason you’re dominated by fear and anxiety is because you’re in sin.”

If you are a non-Christian, you are trapped by your personality. Oh, you may learn some gimmicks and tricks that help you cope with

life despite your personality, but you are, basically, enslaved to it. If you are a Christian, however, you have been freed from this kind of slavery.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones explains:

Here is the miracle of redemption. We are given our temperaments by God. . . . All our temperaments are different and that also is of God. Yes, but it must never be true of us as Christians that we are controlled by our temperaments. We must be controlled by the Holy Ghost. You must put them in that order. Here are powers and capacities and here is your particular temperament that uses them, but the vital point is that as a Christian you should be controlled by the Holy Spirit. What is so tragically wrong in a Christian is that he should allow himself to be controlled by his temperament. The natural man is always controlled by his temperament, he cannot help himself; but the difference that regeneration makes is that there is now a higher control even over temperament. The moment the Holy Spirit enters in, He controls everything including our temperament, and so He enables you to function in your own particular way through your temperament. That is the miracle of redemption. Temperament remains, but temperament no longer controls. The Holy Spirit now controls.¹

So if you are saying, “I’m fearful because that’s my personality,” or “I just don’t have the strength to be courageous in this situation,” it’s time to throw those excuses out the window. They just don’t work. You may have a naturally timid personality, but you still can be courageous.

Perhaps you are wondering how we can say that when we don’t know your situation—that we couldn’t help but be scared if we were in your shoes.

If those are your thoughts, you are considering yourself to still be the same person you were before God saved you. But you are not the person you used to be. When you see your situation the same way you would if you were still an unbeliever, you are failing to realize what a great gift God has given you.

1. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 101.

That was precisely Paul's point. He was telling Timothy, "You've got to pull yourself together and understand that you are not just like everyone else anymore. God has given you the Holy Spirit." And He is not the "spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom. 8:15).

Once again Dr. Lloyd-Jones explains:

Our fears are due to our failure to stir up, a failure to think, a failure to take ourselves in hand. You find yourself looking to the future and then you begin to imagine things and you say: "I wonder what is going to happen?" And then your imagination runs away with you. You are gripped by the thing; you do not stop to remind yourself of who and what you are, this thing overwhelms you and you go down. Now the first thing you need to do is take a firm grip of yourself, and speak to yourself. As the Apostle puts it, we have to remind ourselves of certain things. . . . The big thing Paul is saying to Timothy is, "Timothy, you seem to be thinking about yourself and your life and all you have to do as if you are still an ordinary person. But Timothy, you are not an ordinary person. You are a Christian, you have the Spirit of God within you."²

Something tremendous has happened in our lives. We're not who we used to be. God has given us the Holy Spirit, and He is not a spirit of cowardice. This means there is hope. Your situation may be difficult, but you are not alone!

THE SPIRIT WITHIN YOU

Recently good friends of ours took a trip to Canada. They were on a tight budget, so they carefully planned for the trip, not wanting to spend a cent more than necessary. The wife packed meals for the entire family for each and every day. They stayed in a nice hotel, but ate all their meals in their room. At the end of the week, as they checked out of the hotel, they learned that the hotel had been offering a special that

2. Ibid., 99–100.

week—lunch at the hotel restaurant had been included in the price of the room! They had missed out on having free lunches because they were unaware of the resources available to them.

Many Christians live their lives the same way. They've never considered the resources that are available to them in Christ, so they fail to take advantage of the privileges that belong to them. The result? They live like nonbelievers.

You see, the world says, "The key to courage is self-confidence." But face the facts. You aren't that great; you aren't that powerful; you don't have control over all situations; and if you are trusting in yourself, you're going to be sorely disappointed. You're going to let yourself down. You can believe in yourself all you want, but that's not going to stop your plane from crashing. You can be completely self-confident, but that won't protect you from failure. Don't close your eyes to reality. If you're trying to become courageous by trusting in yourself, you're eating sandwiches in your hotel room when you should be dining in the restaurant!

Biblical courage is not based on foolish self-confidence. Paul doesn't point Timothy toward Timothy. He points Timothy toward God. Think about the great resource God has given you. He's given you the Spirit! You should be courageous, not because of who you are and what you've done, but because of who God is and what He has done!

The Spirit of Power

Paul wanted us to think specifically about the Spirit God has given us. Yes, you are weak, but the Spirit God has given you isn't. He is the Spirit of power.

You are frightened. You look to the future, and you get all worked up. You think, "There is no way I can handle this, I'm not that strong; I'm going to fail!" You start to lose hope.

Do you want to know what your problem really is?

You don't understand how powerful the Spirit who is at work within you really is. You are unaware of the resources that are available to you in Christ.

Picture a great king who is very powerful. He has all sorts of bodyguards who are with him wherever he goes. One snap of his fingers and two dozen Navy SEALs and Army Rangers will be at his side.

Then one day the king goes out for a walk, and a scrawny four-year-old boy cries out, “King, come over here. I’m going to beat you up!” The king hears this threat and immediately is seized with fear. “What am I going to do? I don’t want to get beaten up! He’s threatening me. I’m in trouble.”

The great king trembles and is paralyzed with fear because of the threats of a four-year-old boy. Finally someone goes to him and says, “King, remember you’re the king. Remember all the resources at your disposal. You’ve got a dozen bodyguards around you and armies at your disposal. With all those incredible resources, why are you afraid of the threats of a puny little boy?”

Yes, it’s a silly story. Yet that’s often how we respond to the troubling circumstances of life. Our most difficult circumstances are nothing when compared to the power of the Spirit. Our problems arise because we don’t realize just how powerful the Spirit really is. We think we need more power, when instead we need to realize the power that is already available to us. In Ephesians 1:18–19, Paul wrote to the believers, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know . . . what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” Paul didn’t pray for us to have more power; he prayed that we might know the power that is ours in Christ. The power that is ours in Christ is “surpassingly great”!

If you need proof that He’s powerful enough to help you in your time of weakness, consider this: what is the greatest problem anyone will ever face? Death. Yet the Spirit has already overcome that.

Paul wrote in Romans 8:11, “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” In other words, the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is in you, and if He could raise Jesus from the dead, He certainly is able to give you the strength to deal with the problems that are going to arise in your life.

You think about your future and think, “I couldn’t handle that, I’m not strong enough.” But you aren’t in that situation yet, so your lack of strength is no reason to be afraid. God’s not going to give you the strength for a situation until you are in that situation. Instead of fearing the future, trust God for the strength for today. Remember you are not alone. You have incredible resources. The Spirit of power dwells in you.

The Christian is a person of great strength. The Christian has the power to endure great hardship, to stand strong when life is difficult, and to hang on in the midst of great pain.

Why can Christians stand strong? Is it because in and of themselves they are naturally strong people? No! Believers can stand strong because the Spirit within them is so powerful.

Often we tend to put courageous people on a pedestal, thinking that we could never do what they have done because we are not as strong as they are. Scripture won’t allow us to do that. The Bible goes to great lengths to show us that many of the men and women who accomplished great things for God were very, very normal. In fact, sometimes it seems as though God went out of His way to choose the weakest individuals just to make the point that it wasn’t about them and their abilities to make the difference; it is about God and His power.

Think of Moses. Here was a great man. He stood up to Pharaoh and an entire nation. He led God’s people out of Egypt. Surely he must have been a man endowed with a naturally bold and courageous personality! But was he? How did he respond when God called him to this great task? “Not me, Lord,” he said. “Anybody but me. Please no, Lord.” Reading the story, we are almost embarrassed by Moses’ lack of courage. (We say “almost,” because most of us would have probably responded the exact same way!)

Think of Joshua. What a leader. He took over after Moses’ death. He led God’s people into the Promised Land. He was one of the greatest military commanders of all time. He must have been a naturally courageous person, right? It doesn’t appear so. God had to tell him over and over and over again, “Be strong and courageous.” Why would

God have to say that so many times? Because Joshua was tempted to be weak and afraid.

Think of Paul. Here was a man's man. Though he was stoned and beaten for preaching the gospel, no man could stop him from spreading the message. Paul stood boldly before great leaders and large crowds, never shrinking back. Yet even Paul seems to have struggled with fear. To the Corinthians Paul wrote that he came to them with much weakness and in fear and trembling (1 Cor. 2:3).

The point is this: these men were just like us, yet they were able to be incredibly courageous. How? Because of the Spirit's work within them. Because they relied on God! Don't say, "I can't be courageous, I'm too weak." God hasn't changed. The same God who enabled Moses, Joshua, and Paul to stand courageously for Christ and for God's glory is at work within you! Stop looking to yourself for courage. Stop making excuses. Start relying on God!

The Spirit of Love

What's the opposite of a spirit of fear? Most people would automatically say the answer is a spirit of power. It makes sense. But according to the Bible the opposite of a spirit of fear is a spirit of love.

You must understand this. If you are dominated by sinful fear, worry, and anxiety, your problem is that you are too self-centered. You are a selfish person. You are thinking about yourself too much.

That's why John wrote, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Fear and love are opposites. Dr. Jay Adams explains:

The enemy of fear is love; the way to put off fear, then, is to put on love. . . .

Love is self-giving, fear is self-protecting.

Love moves towards others; fear shrinks away from them. But . . . love is the stronger since it is able to "cast out" fear. In dealing with fear, nothing else possesses the same expulsive power.³

3. Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Nutley, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1973), 414.

You know this from everyday life—a mother may be very afraid of water, but if she sees her baby drowning in a lake, that fear disappears and love takes over and compels her to dive right in.

This same principle applies to all of life. When your eyes are on yourself, you will be afraid. But when your eyes are on God and on others, that casts out fear.

If you are thinking about yourself, you might be scared to talk to new people. But if you get your eyes off yourself and start thinking about their needs, their good, that casts out the fear because you're not worried about what they will think of you. Instead you are thinking about how you can serve them.

Believers should be characterized by a spirit of love, not a spirit of selfishness. We should be marked by an awareness of God's love for us, a true and deep love for Him, and an overflowing love for others.

When you are in a frightening situation, you need to reflect on God's love for you. Remember that nothing—"neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing"—"will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38–39).

Thinking about God's love produces great courage. Why did Paul preach the gospel fearlessly? Why did he risk his life day after day? "The love of Christ controls us" (2 Cor. 5:14). He was a man controlled by the love of God.

Thinking about God's love should create in you a great love for Him. When you love God, you will stand up courageously for Him. If I were to see my wife being attacked by two very strong men, I wouldn't sit on the sidelines and wonder what I should do or if I should get involved. I wouldn't pretend like I didn't see it happening. No, love casts out fear. I wouldn't think about any of those concerns. My love for her would compel me to jump in to help her.

The true believer demonstrates love for God by loving others. The apostle John explained, "If you don't love you don't know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8, author's paraphrase). In 2 Timothy 1:7 it's as if Paul were saying, "Remember, you are a Christian and the Spirit

that resides in you is producing love. Don't respond to these trials like a worldly person. An unbeliever sees suffering coming and runs. That's because he's an unbeliever, and the person he is most concerned about is himself. You are not an unbeliever any longer. Remember who you are and what you are about. Stop being so concerned about yourself, start thinking about others, and boldly use the gifts God has given you. Your first concern in this difficult situation should be not your own safety but God's glory and His people's good. God has given us a spirit of love."

The Spirit of Sound Judgment

Fear produces confusion and chaos in the mind. That's where it does its most damaging work. It creates irrational thinking. When you talk to someone who is really afraid, what do you find? His or her thought life is all messed up.

Some people won't go on planes because one plane crashed, but they will drive a car even though many more people die each year as a result of car accidents. Some people won't go over a bridge because they are scared it won't support them, even though every day thousands of cars and trucks drive over that same bridge and it has never broken under the pressure. That is irrational thinking.

Some believers won't talk to others about Christ, about their eternal souls, because they're afraid of what those persons might think of them, even though they will probably never see each other again. Other people don't want to obey God because they are afraid they'll never be able to enjoy life again.

Christian, you are not to be controlled by irrational thinking. You have been given the Spirit of sound judgment. *Sound judgment* literally means to have "a secure and sound mind. It also carries the additional idea of a self-controlled, disciplined, and properly prioritized mind."⁴ When God gives you sound judgment, you are able to think clearly about your life—the good, the bad, and the ugly. You apply godly wisdom to every area of your life.

4. John MacArthur, *2 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 19.

When you find yourself in frightening situations, you will be tempted to think irrationally. However, you need to stop and pray and work hard to think straight about things. My mother used to say, “Don’t make a mountain out of a molehill. Don’t allow your circumstances and feelings to dominate you. Instead live by truth.” That’s what the Spirit enables you to do—to stop being controlled by your circumstances and to be controlled instead by the Spirit. To stop being controlled by irrational thinking and instead be controlled by sound biblical thinking.

Paul’s counsel to Timothy is very different from the world’s counsel. The world says, “When you see a frightening situation coming, protect yourself at all cost! Compromise your relationship with Christ. Don’t endure hardship for Christ. Run from the situation.” But when people think this way, they create a prison for themselves. They are always thinking about their own protection. As a result they have no peace, and they are dominated by fear, worry, and anxiety. God says, “Remember the Spirit I have given you.”

Don’t be so eager to stay safe. Make pleasing and glorifying God your top priority regardless of what may come your way.

What happens to people who stop fearing the future and step out in faith? They find freedom. You can lock them up, you can beat them, but you can’t take their joy and their courage away, because their joy and courage don’t come from something changeable, like circumstances. Their joy comes from Someone who never changes, God Himself.

If your primary concern in life is protecting yourself, you are going to create a prison for yourself in your mind and throw away the key. But if your primary concern is glorifying God by His grace, by the enabling work of the Spirit who produces power, love, and a sound mind within you, then you’ve found the key to be free even if your body is locked up in a real prison.

Fear can be spiritually crippling, but it doesn’t have to be. Fear has destroyed many lives. Yours does not need to be one of them.

This is a book about overcoming fear. But this entire book would be pointless if 2 Timothy 1:7 weren’t true. Please take this to heart: You can be courageous. In fact, Paul says you *must* be courageous.

4. How could Paul expect us to be courageous when life is so frightening?
5. Who was Paul writing about in 2 Timothy 1:7? What difference does that make?
6. According to Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, what is the miracle of redemption? Why is that truth so encouraging?
7. Without knowing your particular situation, how is it possible for us to tell you that you must throw your excuses for fear out the window?

8. What does this statement mean: “Your problem is that you are thinking of yourself as though you are still the same person you were before God saved you”?
9. What excuses do you tend to give for your fear?
10. What is biblical courage not based on? Why is that significant?
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11. What is biblical courage based on?

20. Where does fear do its most damaging work?
21. What are some examples of irrational thoughts with which you have struggled? Why are they irrational? (Support your answer with Scripture.)
22. What does it mean that we've been given the Spirit of sound judgment?

23. How is Paul's advice to Timothy different from what the world's advice would be?
24. What's the result of the world's advice? What's the result of God's advice?

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