

Don't Feed The Fears 2 Timothy 1:7

Portions adapted from a sermon by Wayne Lawson @ SErmonCentral.com

I don't know how you feel about our current news coverage these days, but it is beginning to wear on me. It seems as though there is a new fear for every evening: who is politically attacking or investigating who, who is threatening the next war, and where is the next flood, tornado, fire, mass shooting, church bombing, or plane crash? Fear seems to be the prevailing sentiment these days.

- Fear of Terrorist Attack
- Fear of a Stock Market Crash
- Fear of guns in the hands of citizens
- Fear that Guns will be taken out of the hands of law abiding citizens
- Fear that our Government is out of control that our Nation is on the Decline
- Fear of those that don't look, talk, or think like us
- When did we become such a Scary and Fearful Nation?

I believe that a demonic spirit of fear and divisiveness has invaded just about every corner of our nation's, culture, politics, and even private life. All this bad news, environmental, economic, political, terrorist, is enough to make you want to lock yourself in your house and not come out. Fear paralyzes you, makes you unable to do what needs to be done. Fear is a great tool in the hands of the devil to keep Christians from being effective witnesses in our world.

So to all our fearful thoughts, I have a simple message this morning...

God did not give us a spirit of cowardice,
but rather a spirit of power
and of love and of **right thinking**.
2 Timothy 1:7

Right thinking. You may notice that your Bible translates those last words as "**self-discipline**" unless you have a King James Bible which translates them as "**having a sound mind.**" Having a "sound mind" or "right thinking" are actually a better understanding of that what Paul wishes to remind us here. Which is that **if we are thinking rightly about who God is and what He can do both for or against us depending upon our relationship to Him, if we have this right kind of fear, we need not fear anything or anyone else.** Because, while the wrong kind of fear is a powerful tool which the devil can use to his advantage in our defeating our life and witness, the right kind of fear should make us fearless and resistant to all other Demonic attacks.

Of course the right kind of fear that I am referring to is the "**fear of the Lord**" as opposed to just plain fear. Our Bible talks about both of these fears and uses the same Greek words, but the effects are completely opposite. The fear of the Lord brings with it

faith, power, love, and self discipline. While just plain fear brings nothing but doubt and distress. Let me explain.

Talking to the crowds, Jesus said do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell.

Luke 12:4

(cont). *Yes, I tell you, fear him! Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.* After further teachings on how we can add neither inches to our height nor days to our life by worrying about such thing, Jesus goes on to explain that God knows what we need, and that we are of far more value to Him than even "many sparrows." God is just waiting to give us everything we need if we will just trust him to do so. After which Jesus concludes with *Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom* (Luke 12:1-34, cf. Mt 10:28-31).

So, in the same sermon Jesus has switched from telling us to fear God to concluding that we need not be afraid of God. Because if we "fear" God – in the right sense of the word – we need not fear anything else since God is not only in complete control of our world, but he is keeping close track of our lives and has already decided to give us everything – the keys to the kingdom!

So what is this healthy fear of God that makes us immune to all other fears?

The dictionary defines "**fear**" as a feeling of anxiety, a frightening thought, the act of worrying, but also as "**reverence;**" **respect or awe for somebody or something.** Needless to say that anxiety, fright, and worry are all the wrong kinds of fear that God wants to relieve us from, because we have respect, reverence, awe for who God is, what He can do, and how He cares for us. Remember, *God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, love, "right thinking,"* meaning that if we have a clear understanding of who is really in charge around here, we need not fear anything else.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever.

Psalm 111:10

Psalm 111 is a wonderful passage worth thinking about and meditating upon. In fact it opens with this advice: *Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them* (vs.2). So Basically this psalm is a listing of God's attributes and His power used in concern for His people. In this Psalm, God is described as:

- Being Full of honor and majesty
- His righteousness enduring forever
- Being gracious and merciful.
- providing food for those who fear him
- He remembers His covenants forever. (meaning God never breaks his contracts, never forgets)
- The works of his Hands are faithful and just
- all His precepts are trustworthy (His rules are worth following)
- and He has shown his people the power of his works

Thus the Psalmist concludes: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.* In other words, they are thinking rightly about their life under God's care.

Yes, when we finally realize who God really is and what He has the power to do to us or for us, that can be a very fearful experience. But when we also realize His love and desire to save and care for us through this life, that should transform our fear into respect, reverence, and awe of who it is watching over us. And having right knowledge of God's concern for and control over our lives should then give us the courage to face every other difficulty the world could throw at us.

This is how Paul explained our reverential fearless relationship that we live with God: *all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption* (Romans 8:14-15).

Paul concludes ...

if God is for you, who can stand against you Romans 8:31
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So if God is your adopted Father then you have nothing to fear from anything or anyone else in the world. Because nothing can separate you from God's love, then you can become "*more than conquerors*" in your life.

But this respectful reverential attitude that we should rightly have towards God our Father, should also remind us that He expects a right kind of living, thinking, and doing on our part. The apostle Peter expressed that thought this way.

If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live [your life here] in reverent fear.
1 Peter 1:17

So that is part one, of today's message. If you have a healthy respect and reverential relationship with God, then you should be fearless towards anything else the world would throw at you.

But here is a word of caution. When you take your mind off your relationship with God, even you, Christian, can once again fall victim to just plain old fear.

Matthew's Gospel tells the story of Jesus having sent his disciples across a stormy sea of Galilee one evening. And while they are struggling with the weather and the waves, Jesus comes walking out on the water towards them – which of course terrifies them until he identifies himself to them. Peter, in typical Peter fashion then asks Jesus if he can also walk on the water. Jesus simply replies "come." So Peter climbs out of the boat and walks towards Jesus. He is doing just fine until he takes his eyes off Jesus and begins looking at the wind and waves surrounding him. Immediately he begins to sink into the water and calls out in fear. Jesus Grabs his hand pulling him back up while gently chiding him for his doubts that took over (14:28-33).

So here's the second thought for today: **When we give in to just plain fear on any front, it is because we have stopped trusting God; you might say that we have taken our eyes off Jesus.** In other words – DON'T FEED YOUR FEARS.

I don't know if there is a lack of food in the mountains, or the bears are just having a population explosion, but this summer, more than any other year I can remember, people seeing a lot more bears walking around their properties than in the past. Everyone except Roy and Sally, who always have bears messing with their stuff. It was bears that sadly shut down their honey business. Now this year a bear has discovered their bird seed storage can.

It can be a very frightful thing to hear that bump in the night and looking out the glass door to see a bear up on your porch, getting ready to carry away your can full of feed. And the thing is, that once a bear has found food in your location, they remember, and they will be back. That is why the game service always strongly cautions everyone: **DON'T FEED THE BEARS.** Either intentionally or unintentionally leaving a vulnerable food source. Because once a bear finds food, it will continue to return to the place

where it found food. Finding food near your home will change a bear's habits, bringing them out of the wilderness right up to where you live. **Interestingly, that is also how fear works?**

If we continue to feed our fear, we will continue to return to it, time and time again; fear will move right back in to where we live.

If we continue to feed our Fear, it will change our nature away from trusting God to once again being a prisoner of fear.

When we take our eyes off God, we will always end up sinking down.

Jesus said in "the thief comes not, but to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10)

- When Gods people are free from fear, they can walk in power, authority, and victory!
- When Gods people are free from fear, they will experience a more Abundant life in Christ!

On the other hand

- Fear will Steal our Joy
- Fear will Kill our Motivation
- Fear will paralyze our life.

Please Don't Feed the Fears.

Multiple fears begin with lies that the enemy has told us, which shows why the devil is called the "FATHER OF LIES" (John 8:44) The devil uses the natural emotion of fear against us to make us feel helpless in resisting him. He wants us to doubt the Lord and ourselves because it makes him appear stronger than he really is!

Thinking of the Devil's tactics, I am reminded of that standard cartoon joke, where people suddenly see a huge looming shadow of a supposed monster only to learn that it was a mouse standing very close to a spotlight. That is why Christians need not be afraid of what they think they are seeing. Because ...

We Walk By Faith, Not By Sight 2 Corinthians 5:7

Another cause of fear is looking at our circumstances instead of Jesus. We need to think rightly about God's ability to save us even in the worst of times. When Peter started sinking after first walking on the water, the waves hadn't changed, the wind had not gotten any worse, they were just the same as when he bravely at first stepped out of the boat. What changed is that Peter stopped focusing on Jesus and started looking

at the wind and waves. When we start looking at our surroundings based upon our own perceptions of what is happening, we remove God from the process, and when we do that we are susceptible to fear.

Horses are interesting animals. They are strong, powerful, and fast. But being a prey animal (carnivorous animals like to eat them) they are also quite fearful; they spook easily. That is also why a horse's eyes are on the side of its head giving it a nearly 360 degree field of view in which to look out for things they might consider dangerous, and they consider anything that startles them or they don't understand "dangerous."

So, you often see carriage horses, sometimes race horses, wearing "blinkers" or "blindings" – stiff square patches attached to their harnesses that keep them from seeing things beside them or coming up behind them. When they can only look straight ahead, they are less nervous.

Perhaps we need to take a lesson from the horse. Especially in troubled times, if we keep looking straight ahead at our savior rather than around at the troubles beside or behind us, we will be a lot less fearful --- please don't feed the fears.

Which brings us back to Paul's second letter to his young disciple Timothy. In Paul's First letter, he was in Jail but expecting to be released. He had sent Timothy to Ephesus to straighten out a Church that was beginning to listen to false teachers and to imitate its surrounding culture.

Most New Testament Scholars believe that some time has elapsed between Paul's first and now his second letter to Timothy. According to church traditions, Paul did get out of jail those years ago and he promptly proceeded out on another missionary journey, perhaps getting all the way to Spain.

But now with the writing of this second letter, Paul is in another Roman Jail, this time from which he does not expect to be released. Paul writes to Timothy that he expects soon to be executed which according to church tradition he was (2 Timothy 4:6-8). So this letter to Timothy is more nostalgic. Paul is writing his last bits of advice and encouragement. Timothy may get to see him one more time, when he brings a cloak that Paul had left behind, for him to wear through the approaching winter season, but after that Timothy will be on his own.

So in this his farewell letter, Paul writes to Timothy to keep his eyes on Christ and not to fear. Because the spirit that God gives is one of power, love, and right thinking. And in this arena, Paul certainly knows what he is talking about. **He certainly knew stress.** He had struggled both with the ingratitude and excesses of individuals in the churches he had founded and with imposters coming along behind him trying to undercut the Gospel message he had been preaching.

And Paul certainly experienced **a lot of dangers** on his missionary journeys – which should have made him very fearful. In his letter to the church at Corinth he details some of the struggles he had endured: SHIPWRECKED – STONED – BEATEN – IMPRISONED – COLD – NAKED – HUNGRY... most of these multiple times! He had also suffered the ravages of poverty and ill health. Facing such enormous challenges in life, most people would find themselves in “THE SPIRIT OF FEAR”— that is to say, a strong sense of wondering if they have the necessary ability to deal with all these pressures of life. Often they feel OVERWHELMED – ANXIOUS – WORRIED about the future. So instead, when Paul writes to Timothy of a spirit of POWER – LOVE - and SOUND MIND, he certainly knows what he is talking about. It’s not that real dangers are out there, but it is a matter of whether we keep our focus on God’s promises versus the very real dangers around us.

In the Old Testament book of Numbers (chapters 13 & 14), Israel after having walked some 50 -60 days since leaving Egypt, is now standing on the edge of the Promised Land that God had given them for their inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey. To prepare them for entering the land, God told Moses to send out twelve spies to look over the land to see if all that God said was true.

But when they came back, there was both a majority and minority report which were completely different. Ten spies came back could only talk of **strongly fortified towns** and **giants** living in the land. They were afraid. They said, “*We felt like grasshoppers in their eyes.*” And they warned the people, to reject God’s assurances of victory and NOT to enter the promised land, but perhaps to go back to Egypt.

However, in stark contrast, the other two spies came back excited. They were carrying a single bunch of grapes so big, they had it slung on a pole between them. The land they said was indeed flowing with milk and honey. And with God with them they could easily conquer the land.

They saw the same giants, but theirs was a report of faith. They were convinced that God’s Word was true. Sadly, the people chose to believe the fearful report and refused to enter the land. For this reason, they spent the next 40 years camped in the wilderness until the last of the fearful people had died, and the next more fearless generation was ready to take the land God had promised them. Please Don’t Feed the Fears

God has not given us the Spirit of Fear. Fear will cause us to ignore the Power of God. Fear will cause us to walk by our sight not by our faith.

You may say, “But I do have giants in my life.” Faith and a Sound Mind does not deny the giants; it trusts God’s promise that you can defeat them.

When you are sick, faith doesn't deny the pain or the condition. Faith relies on God to remedy the condition whether in this life or the next.

When people are faced with debt, faith doesn't deny the bills or the job that doesn't pay enough. Faith remedies the situation by introducing God's teaching and power into a person's life

To have a sound mind, to think rightly, means we must first have a Strong Relationship with the Lord. Often in the church we speak of God's salvation as the deliverance from the power of sin and death. But the root of the word "SALVA" means health and wholeness. Part of the way that we experience God's grace is to use the God's power, love, and right thinking to allow us to face the issues of life and to be able to navigate them in such a way that we are neither shipwrecked nor drowned –

Please Don't Feed the Fears.

We don't need to fear the Giants in our Lives

We don't need to fear ISIS or Korea, or China, or Iran.

We don't need to fear any Terrorist Attacks

We don't need to fear the suggestion we are no longer a great nation

We don't need to fear who is in the Whitehouse, or the crazy laws coming out of Congress.

No matter what we are faced with we can do so with God's power, God's love, and our right thinking about His care for our lives – which spans beyond this world into the next.

Don't Feed the Fears

David as a skinny teenager who refused to be fearful of the giant Goliath.

--Goliath with all his armor was not match for God, David and His Sling Shot

Joshua standing at the Walls of Jericho, refused to be fearful of the great army behind that Wall. He just did as God commanded and started a parade around the city, with the Praise and Worship Team leading the way. – those Walls fell down Flat

No matter what you are going through, **Don't Feed the Fears**. You may be faced with giants or a great wall, perhaps you can't see your way through, Still, don't Feed your Fears *because God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of **right thinking***

Let's pray about this.