2 Timothy 1

Series: Tim Bits.

Sermon: “What’s in Your Spirit?”

Bill Vaughan reminds us that “Of the two basic certainties, death and taxes, death is preferable. At least you’re not called in six months for an audit.” Winston Churchill is quoted as saying, “I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter.” We laugh about it but the subject of death usually stirs up our anxiety. Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher, wrote extensively on our “existential anxiety”.

He meant the anxiety we all feel when confronting our mortality. An anxiety that actually dominates our thoughts, and even effects our behavior. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld has an interesting take on this anxiety, when he makes the following observation. “According to most studies, people’s number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than giving the eulogy.”

We all are intimately acquainted with fear. It is also a subject that seems to come up far too often. We know from our own experience that there are two general types of fear. There is the good kind, or rational fear that helps us be motivated to preserve our health and lives. Fear keeps us from running into traffic, or swatting a rhino on the nose. In such cases, fear tells us that such actions are potentially lethal. Fear is what drives us to the doctor when we discover a lump, or an unusual mark on our skin.

There is also a type of fear that keeps us from making fools of ourselves, or embarrassing ourselves. In this case, we avoid making social gaffs, or doing shameful things to avoid public scrutiny, like afore mentioned public speaking. There are some positive aspects to this type of fear, but there is a direction our fear can take that is anything but healthy. In fact, it is a kind of fear that is harmful. Paul calls it a “spirit of fear and timidity”.

It could also be called irrational fear. This kind of fear paralyzes us, and keeps us from doing things we should do or could do. It is this kind of fear that can keep us up at night or put our stomachs in a knot. Even now, this spirit of fear and timidity is stalking hearts among us. This spirit of fear is a great weapon used by Satan against God’s people. Frankly, Satan knows how to manipulate our fears, magnify our fears, and twist them into soul destroying forces. Worry and fear can make our lives miserable.

Maybe you have heard the story of Hetty Green or perhaps similar stories. Hetty died in 1916 and she has been called America’s greatest miser. When she died, she left an estate valued at $100 million dollars. But she lived a miserable existence. She was so miserly that she ate cold oatmeal in order to save the expense of heating up the water to cook it. When her son severely injured his leg, she took so long in finding a free clinic to treat him that the leg had to be amputated because of advanced infection. The point is that Hetty Green was so afraid of losing her wealth that she never enjoyed living and she cause untold misery on herself and others.

A spirit of fear is a joy stealer. When we are always worried about the other shoe to drop, we miss the good things going on around us. We become like Eeyore the donkey in the Winnie the Pooh stories. Always grumbling, always sad, never seeing the bright side of life. I mean, have you ever met a “worry wart” who wasn’t miserable.

Fear also makes us ineffective, particularly ineffective to the Kingdom of God. How many times have we avoided sharing our faith, or at least admitting that we possess faith in Christ, because of fear? Fear of what will they think of me? What if I turn them off? What if I mess up? We even get into self-defeating debates with ourselves. They probably won’t listen to me anyway! What a potent weapon fear is for Satan.

Sometimes we don’t get involved out of fear. I can’t teach Sunday School. I can’t help in the nursery…I could never be a pastor or a missionary…I can’t sing on the praise team…I can’t share my testimony. For a group of people who are supposed to be able to do all things through Christ who strengthens us, there is an awful lot of ‘I can’t” being bandied about. Fear keeps us from serving God, and reaching our full God given potential. Satan has lots of tricks in his bag to mess with us using fear. One of his most potent tricks is dragging up past sins.

He reminds us of things we have done in the past that we are ashamed of. Sometimes things from years ago. Despite our knowledge, and experience of God’s grace and forgiveness, these past sins being dragged up make us doubt we are truly saved. It is kind of like being at a family reunion, and your family members in attendance who love to bring up things you did, or said that you are embarrassed about. You just wish they would forget it.

Well, God has forgotten it. To him the sin doesn’t exist anymore. Christ covered it with his blood. So, when you feel shame from your past, remember who it is who is dragging this stuff up. A second trick used against us is our fear of the potential to fail. How often have we resisted doing something because of the potential for us to fail? Given a circumstance where we are being challenged, or stretched a bit, our minds run through scenarios of what can go wrong.

Our whole society is geared this way. Every organization, every home owner, ever corporation is working out of fear. Certainly it is prudent to plan for every contingency, but it has become obsessive. Mostly our fear is stoked by our litigious society, in which every accident, every mistake, is an opportunity for someone to sue us. The “what ifs” become the focus of our attention, instead of what can be accomplished for the greater good. It is a momentum killer.

We already looked at Satan’s use of fear of failure, but it is so prevalent a weapon that it needs to be stressed again. Unlike the “Little Engine that Could” who repeated the mantra, “I think I can”. We adhere to “I doubt I can”. And so opportunities are lost. Opportunities to further the Kingdom and also develop our gifts and experience. But there is one more that I need to mention. One more trick that Satan uses.

The one fear that is used against us, unfortunately, is a fear that is very real, and that is the fear of the certainty that we will face criticism. No matter how gifted you are, how careful you are, how conscientious you are, you will face criticism. There are always critics. Do you know who Marie Henein is? She has been in the news a lot lately.

She was the very capable lawyer who successfully defended Jian Ghomeshi. Ms. Henein has faced very intense criticism for even defending Mr. Ghomeshi. Some of the social media tweets have been particularly vehement. She has been accused of setting back women’s rights seventy years. How this assessment is even logical escapes me? So why are we so critical. Our judicial system is predicated on one simply important fact. You are innocent until proven guilty. If there is any reasonable doubt, the conviction must be thrown out. Every accused person deserves a competent defense. Ms. Henein did her job very well, and yet she faced criticism.

You can do things for the Kingdom of God very well, but there will still be critics. Sometimes lots of them. I personally have been a critic, and I have received criticism, even from some of the lovely people here. It is part of the territory. But if we let the potential of criticism keep us from Kingdom work, Satan’s tricks have worked on us. God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but what has God given us?

Well, the first thing Paul says is that God has given us a spirit of power. To overcome our fears, we need to take assurance that God has given us power. A power that flows into and out of me by the Holy Spirit. A power that I can do anything God wants me to do. Phil. 4:13- “I can do everything through him who gives me strength”. How many things? All things. The sky is the limit with God’s great power.

John 1:12- “Yet all who receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” God gives us the power to witness for him. Acts 1:8- “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” God gives us the power to be joyful.

Romans 15:13- “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” God gives us the power to become strong in our faith. Romans 16:25- Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past.” God gives us power to endure trials.

If we want power, then we know where to find it. 2 Cor. 12:9- My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest upon me.” If we trust and believe in the one who is the source of power, he will give us all the power we will ever need.

Another way we can counter this spirit of fear and timidity, is with love. One of the most helpful verses I have ever read is in 1 John 4:18, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” It may seem somewhat odd that love is an antidote for fear but it is. The more we love God, the less we have to fear.

It is a matter of trust. When we realize that God will take care of us, it relieves our fear. Those who have children understand this concept very well. Our children, do not worry about what they are going to eat. They know that when they get hungry food will be there for them. Mommy or daddy will get him or her something to eat.

Our children trust us on this important matter. Now imagine what would happen if we didn’t provide for our children. They would get worried, and over time this could traumatize a child, and create fear in his or her life. But our children know we love them and provide for them, so they are not afraid. Romans 8:28 reads, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, and who are called according to his purpose.” Love of God relieves our fears.

It is also true that the more we love others the less fear we will have. We see love overcoming fear most starkly on the nightly news. Rescue workers-paramedics, police officers…parents who rush back into a blazing inferno to rescue their child, a soldier braving a hail of bullets to rescue a wounded friend. Love of others can motivate us powerfully to overcome our fear. Love of God can help us overcome our fear to tell others about Jesus, to teach a Sunday school class or to help sacrificially someone in need.

Paul also tells us that we can overcome a spirit of fear and timidity with self-discipline. We often think of this phrase self-discipline as referring to ethical living and that meaning is correct, but it doesn’t cover the whole meaning. Self-discipline is really about cultivating a sound mind. Our spirit of fear and timidity is never fully gone without a renewing of our minds. Most often this centers on our need to stop bad thinking.

Romans 12:2 reads, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is…his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Our own thinking can be quite flawed. It often involves a great deal of negative thinking, fueled by anxiety. We need to confront that negativity with a renewing of our minds.

We need to discipline ourselves to recognize the lies Satan tells us, or the world tells us. The moment we begin to harbor thoughts that God does not love us, or will not take care of us, is the moment we are not thinking soundly. Our thoughts have become undisciplined. I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon today, that one of the greatest fears people harbor is a fear of death. It can be a crushing anxiety.

If we have such a fear, our minds need discipline. 2 Cor. 5:8 reads, “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” Bible verses are not just clichés. They are truths that we can claim and hold onto and let guide our hearts. Have you ever found yourself in a situation, and suddenly a verse or a bible story will enter your mind and heart? That’s the Holy Spirit striving to keep your mind on track.

Christian music can have the same effect. In a moment of distress or uncertainty a little tune can ease the heart and reconfigure our thoughts. With sound thinking, fear just doesn’t make sense.

The heart of the matter is that conquering fear is not a matter of self-determination, it is a matter of dependence on the God whom we can trust and love.

If we want to overcome fear and timidity, we need to be aware of the crippling pitfalls the devil places before us and claim the gifts of power, love and self-discipline God gives us to counter act it.

It is no secret that one of the most majestic of all creatures in the world is the tiger. Unfortunately, they are an endangered species, being pushed to extinction. However, there is one thing about tigers that has puzzled researches for decades. When tigers are hunting and come across prey they have this amazing ability to make their intended prey become paralyzed by fear. It is a skill no other big cats have mastered.

As a tiger charges its prey it lets out a spine chilling roar. You would think that this roar would be enough to motivate the prey to run off as fast as it can to save its life, but instead it often freezes and soon is dinner for the tiger. It is only since the turn of this last century that researches think they know why prey behaves this way. The Fauna Communication Research Institute in North Carolina has discovered why prey including humans are more prone to freeze for a tiger than flee when the tiger charges.

As the tiger begins its charge it lets out a mighty roar; a sound that in itself is terrifying, but it also lets out a sound that is at a frequency so low we cannot hear it but we can feel it. As the tiger launches itself, flashing its black and orange stripes and lets out it low frequency roar, the senses of its prey are overwhelmed. The effect is that of being momentarily paralyzed, thus giving the tiger enough time to close the gap and snag its prey. ([www.storiesfor](http://www.storiesfor/)preaching.com)

Our fear has the same effect on us, and although Satan has been described as a roaring lion seeking to devour us, maybe a better description is that of a tiger. That voice of his that paralyzes us into inaction.

So a good question to ask ourselves today is “what’s kind of spirit is in you”?