

# The Fear Factor

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The Art of Neighboring / Evangelism; Mission; Boldness / 2 Timothy 1:3–8

When it comes to sharing their faith, many believers have given into a posture of fear that leads to inactivity. Paul's message to Timothy reminds us that our faith was designed for vibrant, loving proclamation, characterized by God's power. The recovery of this faith is the antidote to the fear factor.

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## Overcoming fear

### **Fear Factor show**

Are you familiar with the show, *Fear Factor*? It has had some reboot attempts, but the original run was from 2001-2006 on NBC. In the show, contestants compete in challenges that many people would be too scared to do. The first challenge in each episode was normally a physical feat with a fear - such as of heights - involved. The second was the worst, in my opinion: a challenge that involved eating something disgusting. Some involved eating cockroaches, pizzas with worms on top, a cappuccino with pureed bugs, or parts of animals that you just don't consume, such as cow eye juice.

So why did the contestants do this? What was the motivation for completing these feats? \$50,000 for one of them. As a picky eater, this amount is not motivating enough for me to consume some of the things contestants ate on the show.

### **A fear factor exists for many of us when it comes to gospel-minded neighboring**

This reality TV show reveals another reality about our faith. We have our own "fear factor," one that prevents us from gospel-minded neighboring. Fear prevents us from living out our faith and sharing it with others. When presented

with the idea, some of us become squeamish. Christians are willing to come to church and sing praise songs loudly, maybe even raising their hands in praise. They'll open up about their struggles with a Bible study group. They'll close their eyes for extended periods of time around other adults when praying. They'll give money sacrificially for God's kingdom and serve in ministries that take a lot of time. But ask them to share their faith, and many will break out in sweats. It's the fear factor.

We are in the last week in our series, "The Art of Neighboring." We've been challenged to take seriously the idea of being a good neighbor by building relationships, making time in our schedules, being a help and even asking for help, as the McGaffins led us to work on earlier in our Merge Sunday School. We even confronted our own motivations so that we simply love our neighbors as people and not treating them as projects. Our closing message reminds us that part of neighboring really is sharing the gospel. That can mean a full-blown gospel conversation, but today I will also use it to mean even those starting steps, where you bring up matters of faith within conversations. The reality is that for many this leads to debilitating fear.

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*Sharing our faith with neighbors includes both the small steps of mentioning your faith and full conversations about the gospel.*

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We feel like the kid in this picture, going up against a sumo wrestler. It feels like we have no chance to win this fight.

What is the antidote to this fear? It's faith. Faith is the opposite of fear.

If you remember the story of Jesus walking on water, you'll remember that Peter stepped out on the water at Jesus' word and began walking toward Jesus. That's faith, and he had the faith to do this. But then Peter began to sink when fear crept in because he saw the huge waves around him. Those waves had been there all along, but in that moment, Peter allowed his faith to give way to fear.

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 1:3-8

A faith overpowered by fear is rather unlike *Fear Factor* the show. A fearful game show contestant misses out on something disgusting. A fearful Christian misses

out on adventure. Just like Peter's fear cut short the experience of a lifetime, our fear means we lose out on all sorts of amazing experiences God has for us.

## **How can you recover a faith that overcomes the “fear factor”?**

Here's what Peter didn't realize. With his faith, he wasn't the kid in the picture. He was the sumo wrestler. That's what I pray each of us realizes for our own gospel-minded neighboring. You can recover a faith that overcomes the fear factor. We will do this today, not by looking at Peter's story but by reading Paul's encouraging words to Timothy.

### **2 Timothy 1:3–8 ESV**

I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. 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 gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

So there are several reasons why Christians might be afraid to share their faith - to be gospel-minded neighbors

- They aren't sure how to bring it up
- If they bring it up, they don't know what else to say
- They don't know how their neighbor will respond
- They are afraid of questions they don't know how to answer
- They have a relationship that might change if they share the gospel

- They are afraid things will feel uncomfortable
- They are fear violating a cultural taboo that tells us to be silent about their faith

Fears like these and many others keep people from being more vocal about their faith.

Instead of addressing each fear that keeps Christians from sharing the gospel, it is more appropriate to address the single solution to them all: Faith.

We've already established that faith is the opposite of fear. If your faith is to overcome fear, you'll have to look at it differently.

## View your faith as an entrusted heritage

That means viewing your faith as an entrusted heritage. In our passage, Paul tells Timothy he is reminded of Timothy's sincere faith in verse 5. Then he describes that faith as dwelling in his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice and in Timothy, too. Timothy's faith had been passed down through his family. That doesn't mean a parent's faith is good enough to cover their kids. Paul said he was "convinced" that faith resided in Timothy, which is like saying, "I can tell - I can tell you've embraced that same faith."

How many of you have a family heirloom of some kind? Maybe it's a piece of furniture or a picture or jewelry or fine china, but it used to belong in your parents', grandparents', or great-grandparents' home; and now it's in your home. Your goal is to keep it nice and on display, and even make use of it on certain occasions. When you do that, you think of your family, and you know that this honors them and the heritage you share. Because it is something irreplaceable and even valuable, when you received it you probably thought, "I'd better take care of this."

Here's the thing. In our culture, many of us think of our faith as a personally held set of beliefs. That's true. I don't want to de-emphasize that, but I do want to emphasize something we tend to overlook. Our faith is more than that. It was first bought and paid for by Jesus' blood, and it has been maintained by the

sacrifices of hundreds of generations of believers since then. Your faith was preserved for you, and it represents a heritage we all share.

Philip Towner puts it this way:

**The Letters to Timothy and Titus A. Thanksgiving for Timothy's Faith (1:3–5)**

Loyalty or faith in modern Western culture often operates more on the intellectual than the interpersonal level, and this puts us at a disadvantage when we seek to understand a passage like this. It boils down to this: authentic faith in God requires more from us than simply adherence to doctrinal ideas.

To take it a step further, faith isn't simply a heritage entrusted to you. It was entrusted to us. We hold and live out this faith together. Believers gather around a shared faith. We live it out, talk about it, encourage each other through it, and use it for guidance and deepening our walk with God. Do you see how this is more sumo than kiddo?

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*Do you see your faith as a sumo or a kiddo?*

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Faith is a personal set of beliefs, but it is so much more. It is a confident hope shared among a community of believers who stand on the shoulders of prior generations of faith.

That means when I'm scared to walk across the street and talk to my neighbor, I should remember I'm connected to the Christian who marched across the floor of the Colosseum toward the lion. It means when I'm hesitant to bring up my faith at a backyard barbecue, I have to reconcile that with the Christian who wouldn't recant their faith at the stake. We have connection to others who hold our faith.

We bear some responsibility to them, too. Other people sacrificed for their faith so that it could be passed on to you. Our call is to pass this heritage of faith to others so they can possess it. If our faith is like fine china that has been passed down to us, then it should have chips, dings, and scratches on it, because we regularly use it. If it's like that jewelry, then it should need frequent cleaning as

we wear it. If it's a picture, we should talk about it often, so others actually know why it is significant.

I don't know how your ancestors would want you to use your family heirlooms, but I do know our spiritual ancestors passed a faith on to us that was meant to be used, displayed, and talked about often. Living our faith out like that is one way we show its value.

## Starve your fear and feed your faith

We show that value even more when we work to let our faith shine more brightly. To do that we need to starve our fear and feed our faith. Faith takes work. Paul describes this work in vivid words about tending a fire. Joseph Fort Newton says something similar about faith: "Belief is a truth held in the mind. Faith is a fire in the heart." Your faith isn't just mental assent; it's a fire that must be tended.

Verse 6 says,

### **2 Timothy 1:6 ESV**

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,

So you might ask why I'm talking about faith when the Bible mentions the gift of God, and you might wonder how that gift was given "through the laying on of [Paul's] hands." This moment appears to be when Timothy said, "Yes," to God and to the offer of Jesus to save Timothy from his sins - when Timothy turned away from his own effort and placed his faith in Jesus and his finished work on the cross. Paul was there, leading Timothy to faith and affirming him. So Timothy had the seal of approval from an apostle, but more importantly, he had the gift of the indwelling Spirit of God through faith - the same sincere faith Paul already mentioned.

Paul gives Timothy a reason to fan into flame this gift of God. He writes, 2 Tim 1:7

### **2 Timothy 1:7 ESV**

for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

He says, “God gave *us*,” not, “God gave *you*.” That includes Paul *and* Timothy *and* his mother and grandmother and every other believer. This gift of faith and God’s Spirit is one that all Christians have. Christian, by faith you have inside you a spirit of power and love and self-control. What God didn’t give you is a spirit of fear.

I showed you that picture of the kid and the sumo wrestler. One is fear and one is faith. But which one? You choose. You choose daily by which one you feed. Paul describes it as a fire. You could imagine two fires, one representing fear and the other faith. Which fire is bigger? The one you supply oxygen to. Sometimes we talk about a disagreement in these terms. We say, “I’m not going to give oxygen to that.” In other words, sometimes it’s easier to just let a fire peter out. I love this wordplay. We want God’s power in our lives, and the Holy Spirit is the same word used for wind, and Paul tells Timothy to fan into flame this gift of God.

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*There are two fires: fear and faith. Which one will you give oxygen to?*

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At home we cook on a charcoal grill, and last week we had neighbors over for the first time. After grilling some chicken, my kettle grill was closed up with the lid on it, so I was surprised a few hours later when it was still hot. The vent at the bottom wasn’t closed. Those coals were still receiving oxygen. Isn’t it like that with fear? We think we’ve put a lid on it, but somehow it’s still fed. But we’re called to fan our faith, not our fear.

That word for *fear* is interesting. Paul didn’t use a more common word, *phobos* (φόβος). *Phobos* has a wide range of meaning, and it’s where we get the word *phobia*. Often it’s used when people are scared to a panic and are terrified. It’s when their flight or fright is engaged. Before Peter walked on water toward Jesus, the disciples saw Jesus in the storm and thought he was a ghost. They were terrified - *phobos*. The word is mentioned 46 times in the New Testament, and 11 of those are from Paul, including his last letter to Timothy. But the word Paul uses here - which we translate fear or timidity - Paul only used once. The word is *delia* (δειλία), and it mostly refers to a cowardly fear. This fear doesn’t send you running and screaming in fright. It simply holds you back.

*Delia* can be good - it's good when *delia* causes you to stop and look both ways before crossing the street - but it can be very bad, too. The soldier with *delia* shrinks away from battle precisely when his courage is needed. Instead he is cowardly. This is the fear factor that prevents gospel-minded neighboring. It paralyzes us and prevents us from taking the very action that would make our faith shine brightly.

Christian, the *delia* you experience does not come from God, and it holds you back from so much vibrancy. So God reminds us of what is ours - what dwells in us through our faith: power, love, and self-control. If you want to see God's power at work in your life, step out in faith where God's power is the only option you have. If you want to see a courageous love that chases fear away, step out in faith and get to know someone and start loving them. If you want to see a self-control you didn't know you had, step out in faith, where you'll quickly see things go beyond your control.

"Fear imprisons, faith liberates, fear paralyzes, faith empowers, fear disheartens, faith encourages, fear sickens, faith heals, fear makes useless, faith makes serviceable - and, most of all fear puts hopelessness at the heart of life, while faith rejoices in its God." -Harry Emerson Fosdick

Let's read how Paul builds on this truth about what God has given us.

## Exercise your faith by embracing and sharing the gospel

**2 Timothy 1:8** *ESV*

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,

Our sincere faith - this heritage we have - and the gift God that we fan into flame are directed toward one key goal. Staying confident in the message of the gospel and sharing in it, even to the point of suffering. **Exercise your faith by embracing and sharing the gospel.** Paul writes about his confidence in the message of Jesus in Romans. He writes,

**Romans 1:16** *ESV*



For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

This is almost the same message as he writes to Timothy. Don't be ashamed of the message, and embrace the power of God to save. **Exercise your faith by embracing and sharing the gospel.**

We have lived in our home five years now, and I haven't lit a single fire in our fireplace. Karen does that. I almost never fetch and restock our supply of wood. The kids do that. They don't leave me completely out of the loop; I get to buy the firewood. It's neat to see Karen tend the fire. Glowing embers rest under logs that are no longer lit but still very hot. Karen will place a new log or two on top, stoke the ones underneath, and give a blow. Soon the fire is blazing again as new logs ignite and brighten the room with flickering light.

Don't miss this:

**The fire of our faith shines more brightly when we ignite new logs.**

The best way to reignite your walk with Christ is by making new disciples and talking about that faith with them. The flickering light of their faith illuminates your own and helps you see it differently. Your Bible reading takes on new energy, and so does your prayer life. You look forward more to Bible study with other believers, too.

Paul tells Timothy to share in the suffering of the gospel. That doesn't mean, go and find the nearest gospel gulag. It means actively participating in the work of the gospel by sharing it with others. It means to continue sharing that gospel with others even if it leads to suffering. In order for Timothy to do that, he needed the same reminders you and I need. A reminder of the heritage of faith we share and a reminder to fuel that faith over fear. We can do it because God has given us the gift to overcome that fear.

If you needed your appendix removed, I'm assuming you'd go to a hospital, where a doctor could perform the procedure. How about an assistant pharmacist? Would you do it? What if that assistant pharmacist wanted to use a regular knife instead of a scalpel and kitchen spoons to hold the incision open during surgery. This would sound like a good time for some healthy *delia* to kick

in as you found another option. But that other option wasn't available for Darrell Rector. The date was September 11, 1942. His appendix was about to rupture, and he was aboard the *Sea Dragon*, a fully submerged submarine behind enemy lines in the Pacific. Wheeler B. Lipes, Jr., was aboard, too. He was a lab tech who was serving as pharmacist's mate, and he was the closest thing to a doctor these men had. Having once witnessed an appendectomy, he was the man for the job. That's like getting qualified for surgery by watching one of those hospital TV shows. The men sterilized the instruments using alcohol from a torpedo, and they administered ether through a tea strainer. Then, with knife and spoons, Wheeler Lipes performed the world's first appendectomy on a submerged submarine. It was successful, and Rector was back to his post 13 days later.

I doubt anyone would have faulted Lipes for not doing the procedure. He didn't have the training, experience, tools, or environment to pull it off. Lipes himself did not plan to do the procedure. When he informed his commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander William Ferrall, of Rector's situation, he made clear that Rector would die without an emergency appendectomy. Ferrall asked Lipes what he planned to do, and Lipes answered, "Nothing." Ferrall then made clear that the importance of each person aboard doing all he can and asked the 23-year-old if he could perform the procedure. Lipes said he could do it, but that all was going against them and their chances were slim. Upon his commanding officer's command, Lipes did the procedure. Can you imagine the camaraderie that developed among these men? They experienced something incredible because of stepping out to do something nearly impossible. I imagine what would have happened if Lipes had not done the procedure. A man would have died, morale would have been low, and Lipes would have missed out on the amazing.

We have a Commanding Officer, too, and he doesn't want us to miss out on the amazing. When we obey his command, we abandon the paralyzing fear and embrace the power, love, and self-control he provides. As a result, we'll see the fires of our faith blaze in brightness.

Now our time comes to a close, and we have an invitation for you to respond. Are you tired of the fear? Are you tired of the paralysis? Are you tired of missing out? Are you ready to embrace the adventure of sharing your faith? We began this

series by reminding ourselves to take the command seriously. My prayer today is that you are ready to move past the barrier of fear and live it out. Which fire will you feed?

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*"The way from God to a human heart is through a human heart." - S.D. Gordon*

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