

Biblical Solutions to Handling Fear

*2 Timothy 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear;
but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

Fear, a four-letter word that strikes a heightened sense of awareness of who and what approaches, and that which is around and about. We look, we worry, we approach each day, situation, person, and context with caution and much care. How is it that such a small word causes such great angst? Whatever the weight that this one word brings, God is able to come against it and all its anxieties. The song says, "Be not dismayed, what'er betide, God will take care of you."

Oddly enough, the origins of fear came with reason and purpose. Fear, in a Godly context, has purpose. Let's look at the very first instance of fear in the bible...

Ge 3:8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. 9 ¶ And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? 10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

Fear was the response of Adam and Eve when they realized that they yielded to the temptations of their and God's chief adversary, satan. Keep the designation "adversary" in mind, it will be a key part of our understanding of "fear" late in this lesson. In short, if it is fear, it typically comes from the adversary. As to the text, Adam and Eve's fear was the direct result of their disobedience to God's command. The adversary always has a way of introducing God's guidance as a hindrance, or something that God wants to keep from you, as opposed to keeping us from the danger that it poses for us.

Notes: _____

1. FEAR DEFINED AND UNDERSTOOD

Biblically, there are characteristics of 'fear' in both the Old and New Testament. "Fear" is the translation of many words in the Old Testament; the chief are: yir'ah, "terror," "reverence," "awe," most often "the fear of God," "fear of Yahweh" (Gen 20:11; 2 Sam 23:1-3; Prov 1:7; Eccl 12:13). Terms that are often extensions of and used synonymously and in conjunction with fear are: Fearful (timid), Fearfully, and Fearfulness.

In the New Testament the chief words are phobos, "terror," "affright" (Matt 14:26; 28:8; 1John 4:18, etc.), phobeo, "to put in fear" (both used of ordinary fear) (Matt 1:20; 10:26; 28:5). The New Testament words "phobos and phobeo" are where we get our English word phobia, which, clinically and according to Harvard Health, "A phobia is a persistent, excessive, unrealistic fear of an object, person, animal, activity, or situation. It is a type of anxiety disorder. A person with a phobia either tries to avoid the thing that triggers the fear, or endures it with great anxiety and distress."¹

Fear is a natural and, in its purpose, beneficent feeling, arising in the presence or anticipation of danger, and moving to its avoidance. Fear, in some instances, can lead us to avoid certain dangers that could cause us harm or even death. Thus, fear in and of itself is not always bad, but one must consider its context. For instance, Psychology Today contextualizes it as follows: *Fear* is a vital response to physical and emotional danger—if we didn't feel it, we couldn't protect ourselves from legitimate threats.

According to our English language, Dictionary.com defines fear as a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined; the feeling or condition of being afraid. The bible doesn't give a definition of fear, but it does tell us what to do when we are experiencing it...Ps. 56:11; Is 54:14; Ps. 23:4,5.

Now that we have a basic understanding of and definition of fear, let's begin to unpack dealing with its challenges and the biblical response to it.

2 Timothy 1:7 is a rich verse for this Bible study because Paul gives us both a warning about fear and a picture of what God has actually given us: **power, love, and a sound mind**. "*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*" The first significant observation is that, in the text, we notice what God has not given us: the spirit of fear. But what's more important is what God has given us.

Notes: _____

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT & NARRATIVE FOCUS: "PAUL TO TIMOTHY"

We will begin here by framing the context of this key verse as Paul's encouragement to his young protégé and son in the ministry, Timothy. 2 Timothy is one of the inspired letters that Paul wrote to Timothy, his son in the faith, and it is the last of his writings (67 AD) before he was martyred in Rome. Paul urged him to rekindle his spiritual gift, replace fear with power, love, and a sound mind, and willingly suffer for

¹ W. L. Walker, accessed from Power Bible CD Commentary References

the gospel, holding on to the truth as a spiritual leader ready to assume the duties of ministry leadership. Although extreme hardship lay ahead, Paul wanted Timothy to continue in the teachings he had learned from the rich spiritual heritage passed down to him by his mother, grandmother, and Paul himself.

Second Timothy was written during a time of political upheaval in Rome, when Emperor Nero deflected blame for the destructive fire in the city from himself by accusing and harshly persecuting Christians, which included Paul. Paul's final instructions to Timothy focus on several key principles that Timothy - and believers today - can apply to their lives: enduring and persevering through hardships, remaining faithful to the gospel while handling it accurately, using scripture as the inspired and authoritative source for equipping believers for ministry, and staying prepared to address false teachings and the increasing ungodliness that will mark the last days.

Context: Paul writes from a Roman prison facing imminent execution. Timothy is a young leader in Ephesus facing opposition, false teaching, and heavy church responsibilities.

Key Theme: Timothy wasn't facing a hypothetical threat—his fear was understandable. Yet Paul reminds him to "stir up the gift of God" (2 Timothy 1:6).

Reflection Prompt: *What "gift" or calling in your life are you holding back on because of fear or timidity?*

Fear may be present in our lives, but it does not have to control our lives. God has equipped the believer to confront fear through His power, His love, and a sound mind.

Notes: _____

3. FEAR IS NOT FROM GOD

Main question: If God hasn't given us fear, where does fear try to lead us?

Explore:

- Fear can make us hide, hesitate, or remain silent.
- Compare **2 Timothy 1:7** with **Isaiah 41:10**, **Psalms 56:3-4**, and **John 14:27**.
- With these scriptures in mind, let us discuss the difference between being **afraid** and choosing to **act in faith despite fear**.

The context of our key scripture implies that Timothy needed the exhortation "to stir up the gift of God in him," as he was constitutionally "timid": "For God did not give us the spirit of fear." The spirit which He gave us was not the spirit of timidity (literally, "cowardice," which is weakness), but of "power" exhibited in a

fearless "testimony" for Christ (2Tim. 1:8). Power is the invariable accompaniment of the gift of the Holy Ghost (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). Fear is the result of "the spirit of bondage" (Rom 8:15). Fear within exaggerates the causes of fear without.²

So, what does Paul mean by "God Hath Not Given Us the Spirit of Fear"?

Paul is writing to Timothy, who is facing the responsibility of ministry and opposition. Paul reminds him that fear does not come from God as the governing force of his life. Notice the contrast: *Fear vs. Power; Fear vs. Love; Fear vs. Sound Mind*. The verse doesn't simply say, "*Don't be afraid.*" It says, essentially: God has already given you something greater than fear. Fear is not your identity. A person may *feel* fear without being *defined* by fear. "*Feeling fear is not the same thing as surrendering to fear.*"

To further push the point, "God Hath Not Given Us... Fear," notice that fear is always speaking LOUDLY! As children of God, we can't allow fears to be bold and speak untruths to us that God has not spoken over us. For instance, and contrast:

- **Fear can tell us:** "You can't."
 - **Faith says:** "God can."
- **Fear says:** "What if everything goes wrong?"
 - **Faith says:** "God will be with me."
- **Fear says:** "I am alone."
 - **Faith says:** "God is with me."

Listen to what God says in this regard from the prophet Isaiah:**41:10** "*Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God...*" And: **Psalms 56:3 (KJV)** "*What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.*" This verse is particularly useful because David doesn't say, "**I will never be afraid.**" He says: "*When I am afraid, I will trust in thee.*" This is a powerful assertion and truth spoken by the king.

Notes: _____

4. UNDERSTANDING WHAT FEAR IS

Fear can be a natural emotional response to danger, uncertainty, loss, rejection, failure, or the unknown. The Bible, however, distinguishes between appropriate concern and the kind of fear that keeps us from trusting God. Fear comes in many forms: hidden, adversarial, mental, emotional, and physical manifestations. Consider some of the following and see if you have experienced any of these.

² Jamieson-Faussett-Brown Commentary on the New Testament, 2 Timothy 1:7

Forms of Fear...

- ❖ *Fear of the unknown*
- ❖ *Fear of failure*
- ❖ *Fear of rejection*
- ❖ *Fear of losing someone*
- ❖ *Fear of financial insecurity*
- ❖ *Fear of sickness or death*
- ❖ *Fear of people*
- ❖ *Fear of the future*
- ❖ *Fear of making the wrong decision*
- ❖ *Fear of what others think*

Sometimes, we can be conditioned to employ fear even when there is no immediate danger. Fear can operate in our minds before circumstances actually happen. In other words, we can worry and be fearful about things that haven't happened yet. This is what the spirit of fear can condition us to do. This would be an instance where, as we try to figure it out, God has already worked it out. Isa 65:24 *And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.*

Fear Can Be a Battle of the Mind

The enemy can use fear to produce:

doubt → anxiety → isolation → discouragement → paralysis

Fear can cause us to stop doing what God has called us to do. That's particularly relevant to the context of **2 Timothy 1** because Paul is encouraging Timothy not to shrink back from his calling. Fear doesn't always tell us to do something wrong. Sometimes fear tells us not to do something right.

For example:

- Fear keeps us from witnessing.
- Fear keeps us from serving.
- Fear keeps us from forgiving.
- Fear keeps us from starting something.
- Fear keeps us from trusting God.
- Fear keeps us from stepping outside our comfort zone.

Our biblical exploration of fear now directs us to those whom the Lord used to show us what facing fear looks like. Let's discuss some of the **Biblical Examples of People Who Faced Fear**

- ✚ **Moses, Exodus 3–4** Moses felt inadequate and afraid. God's response was essentially: **"I will be with thee."**
- ✚ **Joshua, Joshua 1:9**, *"Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid..."*
- ✚ **David, 1 Samuel 17**, David faced Goliath while others were paralyzed by fear.

 **Elijah, 1 Kings 19**, Even a great man of God experienced fear and discouragement.

Jesus and Fear

Fears sometimes are wrapped in the storms of life, both literally and figuratively. The greatest example of dealing with temporal and figurative fear is the Lord Jesus himself.

Mark 4:35–41 — Jesus Calms the Storm

The disciples were afraid because of the storm. Jesus asks: “*Why are ye so fearful?*” Notice something important: **The storm was real.** Jesus didn't tell them the storm wasn't happening. Instead, He demonstrated that the presence of the storm did not mean the absence of God. That's a tremendous lesson for the church today. A storm can be real without fear of being in control.

These biblical examples of fear are important because they teach that being afraid does not mean you don't have faith. Sometimes, faithful people experience fear. The question becomes: What will you do when fear arrives?

Now that we have dealt with the idea, ideology, and the constructs of fear, our next lesson instruct and guide us through how to deal with and overcome fear with biblical solutions as our answer. Now the central question that looms once the shackles of fear have been loosed is, “**What would you do differently if fear no longer controlled you?**”

Consider the following ideas:

- What would I attempt?
- Who would I forgive?
- Who would I witness to?
- What ministry would I pursue?
- What decision would I make?
- What would I trust God with?

Remember: “*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*” — **2 Timothy 1:7 (KJV)**

Discussion question:

What fear has the potential to keep you from doing what God has called you to do?