

THE RECOVERY OF LOST JOY - Part four

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WHEN THE UNCERTAINTIES OF THE FUTURE ROB YOU OF PRESENT JOY

The three previous messages in this series have centered around **two central truths: Message one** dealt with the principle that there are a lot of things that look like conversion but aren't quite. Any misconception about the beginnings of the Christian life at the point of entry don't just cause **failure** (which is **most** important), but they will cause untold confusion and misery farther down the road as well.

Messages two and three dealt with the idea that the past has to be thoroughly dealt with if the present is to be faced with joy. **Condemnation for past sins** that have been confessed and forsaken and **vain regrets about missed opportunities** and mistakes are baggage that Jesus never intended you to carry in your walk with Him.

Today's message has to do with the **fear of the future**. But I don't mean that carefulness we all feel about walking into a realm about which we know almost nothing. I mean something more specific than that. I mean that gnawing worry that **I will fail, I will fall, I will not be able to cope with what life will throw at me**. It's the fear that I won't be adequate. We don't know what the future holds. Good things may happen, bad things may happen. We aren't sure we're ready for the bad.

God's Word speaks to this fear. Paul writes some relevant words to his young companion, Timothy:

2 Timothy 1:3-8 - "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. [4] As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. [5] 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. [6] 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, [7] for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. [8] 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...."

Consider some of the things we know about Timothy:

- a) He was much younger than many in the ministry - "Don't let anyone look down on you just because of your youth." And Timothy needed to hear this because he was **very** young. There isn't a church in Canada that would have hired Timothy as its pastor. He was just too young and inexperienced.
- b) He was subject to frequent illnesses - **1 Timothy 5:23** - "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments."

Note, “**frequent**” ailments. Being sick was Timothy’s **pattern**. We would have called him **sickly**. It was a way of existing for this young pastor. And almost nothing sucks the life and joy out of the souls more than **always** feeling sick. Frequent, nagging illness can wear you down, sap your emotional strength, cloud your outlook and enthusiasm.

And let’s not overlook something else. This was a **faith** battle for Timothy. Given what we know about Paul whenever he encountered people with sicknesses, it’s almost impossible to believe he hadn’t prayed for Timothy, his “**beloved son**” in the gospel. So Timothy had to live with **both** constant illness and unanswered prayer. He received **no explanation** for his ongoing agony.

- c) He wept when Paul left him alone in Ephesus - **2 Timothy 1:4** - “**As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy.**”

Timothy’s world changed when Paul left him all alone. He had learned everything he knew from Paul. He depended on Paul. And Ephesus was a stubborn, cult worshipping city.

- d) Timothy was emotionally prone to bouts of fear and worry - **1 Corinthians 16:10** - “**When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am.**”

Paul had to tell people to **put** Timothy at ease. He was a bit like an unbroken horse awaiting his first rider. Questions would come to his mind. What if he never saw Paul again? What if Paul were killed? What if the persecution intensified? How could he cope with the work at Ephesus alone?

Sensing that these concerns might weigh heavily on Timothy's shoulders, Paul writes some words dealing specifically with **how he should face the future**. They're powerful words of hope and courage.

2 Timothy 1:6-7 - "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, [7] for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

First, Paul says there is something **Timothy himself must do - vs.6** - **"fan into flame the gift of God..."** And **second**, Paul says there are **resources God has given - vs. 7**. Paul says God has given Timothy **"power and love and self-control."** I want to look at the second part first and close with the first.

1) **THERE ARE RESOURCES GOD HAS GIVEN FOR THE FUTURE**

2 Timothy 1:7 - "....for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

Paul says God has given Timothy (and us) the resources of **power, love and self-control**. Paul says, "Timothy, when you are gripped by fear, when it reaches up and seizes you by the throat, remember that this is not God's heritage for you. God has something better. He has marvelous provisions to overcome and defeat the spirit of fear.

Let's look at each of these three gifts from our Heavenly Father:

- a) ***In Christ we are given power***. Now think back for a minute. What I said in the first message in this series - that ***misconceptions about the gospel will haunt and harm us farther down the road in our Christian walk*** - is so applicable here.

In the last twenty-five years we have seen a radical shrinking of the New Testament gospel in the mind of the average churchgoer. What has been sucked out of it is the power of God - the almighty, unceasing, unending, transforming, cleansing power of the Creator of the universe to make old things pass away and give birth to a totally new order of existence.

Paul tells Timothy that he has to bring certain truths to mind - ***"Timothy, you seem to be thinking about yourself, and life and the challenges ahead of you as if you were still just an unresourced person. But Timothy, you have been born of the Spirit of God. God is in you. Timothy, what matters now is not what is true of you, with all your weaknesses and limitations. What matters now is what's true of God!"***

There is an enormous and still growing tendency in Christian circles today to look at our lives only in terms of what we have been in the past or what has happened to us in the past. More and more Christians come to view their present and their future as solely **defined** by the accumulation of their past experiences and responses.

Now, I am not one who paints all psychology as sinful or higher education and research as of the devil. Please don't put me in that camp. Much good and help can come from those fields.

But I want to say something that is becoming increasingly important to me. After you've said it all about inner healing, or healing of the memories, or recovery groups to help me over the wounds and habits of the past (all of which can be helpful things), there is still something in me that wants to shout from the rooftops:

"Wait a minute! In the gospel there is a new power that cuts right across the cycle of life. Whatever may be true of my past, and whatever may still be true of my environment, the power of the Holy Spirit brings a new factor into the equation. The Bible says you must never look at your life as merely the accumulated product of the years. There is new life. There is transformation. God doesn't just give us some **instructions** to follow. That's **not** the Gospel. He gives new power!"

I recognize that you may very well be of a certain temperament type. About twenty years ago **Tim LeHay** started a big trend with his writings on spiritual temperament. People began to explain almost everything they did on the basis of their **temperament group**.

Listen, you may be of a certain temperament. And that's valid as far as it goes. Even after conversion your temperament **remains**. But Paul says it doesn't **control**. That's the important point for the Christian. There's something above and beyond that dominates and fills the child of God.

The **natural man** is filled and **dominated** and **controlled** by his temperament. Not so the **Christian**. The Christian **has** a temperament. But He is **dominated** - propelled - empowered - by the Spirit of God.

I think this concept helps explain some difficult words from the ministry of Jesus. Here are some words that are confusing to many - **Matthew 23:8-9** - **“But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. [9] And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.”**

What can these words mean? Are they just a slap on the wrist to Roman Catholics and those who use more formal religious titles? I have come to think there is much more than that going on in Jesus' words. **Verse 8** reminds us that no earthly authority replaces or overrules our one teacher, Jesus Christ, our Lord. And in the same way **verse 9** reminds us that while we certainly **have** earthly fathers (and mothers) our **nature and destiny** isn't ultimately **determined** by earthly heritage and relationships.

Hear this. In Christ Jesus we have - actually **have** - a new Father. Our lives are certainly **influenced** on a certain level by the genes we inherit. But the power of God is so effective and pervasive that what God has called you to become is given by our Divine Father in fashion that is much more **powerful** (remember - we're still talking about Paul's Words to Timothy about being given **power** from God instead of fear) - that power is more effective in shaping your future than anything else about you.

It's significant that when Paul talks about the things that mark the person in Christ, the first thing he talks about is **power**. There's power for weaklings, power for the timid, power for the abused, power for the widowed, power for the abandoned, power for the stressed out and busy. Power for the disappointed.

Paul says to Timothy - "I know you're young. I know you're fearful. I know you're naturally timid. I know that nobody even **knows** what happened to your father - or how young you were when he was out of your life. But I want you to know, my young brother, those aren't the determining factors about you. You have been given power to **overcome**, and power to **endure**. You've been given power to **suffer**, and, if need be, power to **die**. Don't measure your life by your own power any longer or circumstances any longer!"

- b) ***In Christ we are given love - 2 Timothy 1:7 - "...for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."***

This is a little more confusing. Power for Timothy's weakness we can all understand. Power will give Timothy hope for the future. But **love** - what is this all about? How does love fuel Timothy's soul?

To get at this truth we need to look at the context of the verse. **Before** Paul tells Timothy what God **has** given, he takes one specific sentence to tell Timothy one thing God **hasn't** given. Paul says, "God didn't give us the spirit of fear."

Now that's just stated as a bare fact. There are no more details or explanations given. But it begs a good question. ***If God didn't give it, then where did it come from?*** If God didn't give this fear, why does Timothy have it?

And immediately Christians spring to the answer. "Well, from the devil, Pastor Don. That's where this fear comes from." Maybe. But I have the feeling this may be going a little too quickly. And it might just give us **part** of the answer without giving us **all** of the answer. Certainly the devil is intricately involved in this whole process. But **how** does he do it? Where does this fear come from?

And the answer is while the devil has his grimy hands all over this, he has a partner. And the inward partner is **self**. The spirit of fear comes from **self-concern, self-love, self-protection, and the craving for self-fulfillment. Fear has its roots in the life of self**. I'm afraid I'll lose reputation, or my material success, or my health, or my pleasure, or my happiness. In other words - and this is very important - my fears come from my own persistent looking out for number one. The root of all fear is the fear I won't be successful in that quest.

And now we're ready to discover Paul's linking up the delivering power of the Spirit of God through the gift of God's love. Paul very specifically says the Spirit of God enters a person and brings first **power**, and then **love**.

So how does this love work in Paul's thinking specifically to free the life of fear? What **kind** of love does Paul have in mind?

- i) **Love for God** - Most of us don't think of it this way very often, but when Jesus said the greatest command was to "Love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength," He was giving the death sentence to fear and worry about the future.

In Romans chapter 8 Paul unfolds all of the rotten things that can come into any life down the road - **Romans 8:35-39** - **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ [37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

This is a highly realistic view of the world. And it's a highly realistic view of life. But then he reminds himself - "**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?**" And what you're witnessing is the fear of the future disappearing as the power of God's unfailing love fills Paul's heart all over again. When the love of God **overrules** the love of self and comfort and wealth and esteem it deals a strong dose of medicine to the fear of the future. Because what I love **most** I can't **lose**.

- ii) ***Love for others*** - Sometimes reaching out to the lost is dressed up as something optional - something on the elective list for those who have outgoing personalities. But this misses the greatest blessing one can have in this earthly life. Love for others is one of the key ways to keep the life of God alive in your soul.

Try to hold your life to yourself and you lose it for sure. Lose it for the sake of the gospel and you find it in fullest measure. Jesus said so.

If you want to overcome fear of the future and all that it holds you need to discover the spiritual power of giving your life and time and resources away as God by His Spirit pours His love in and through you.

- c) ***In Christ we are given self-control*** - Central to the Christian message is the difference the Holy Spirit makes to the mind and nature of a person.

This is what we've been considering. Timothy was fearful. Timothy was timid. But there is an over-riding factor of the Spirit of God. He can give stability. He can give peace. This is Paul's message to Timothy.

But Paul has one more resource from God for Timothy and for us. Paul calls it **self-control**. God gives a kind of Spirit inspired sound judgement that lines our minds up with the mind of the Father - **2 Timothy 1:7** - “....for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

This is an essential part of our resources. Fear of the future and our own adequacy for it not only drains our bodies of **energy**, but drains our minds of **soundness and understanding**.

So Paul wants Timothy to know **God does not abandon us to our own limited situations, our minds, our temperaments, our bare chemical make-up**. He **gives** (we don't have to **earn** it) a kind of **patient perspective**. He helps us take a long view of things - an **eternal perspective**. And this will always keep us from making huge blunders in how we try to secure our lives.

The redeemed are given - if they embrace it - the capacity to move beyond themselves - to have their minds renewed - to see God's perfect will proven in all of their circumstances.

But this only **first** part of our text. These are precious resources indeed. And God **gives** them. They aren't **earned**. They aren't **reserved** for very special Christians. So the issue before us now is, **how do we avail ourselves of these resources?**

Remember, I said there were **two parts** to Paul's message. **First**, we looked at the **resources given (7)**. Now I want to close looking at the **second** part. **What Timothy was to do about all of this (6)**.

2) WHAT TIMOTHY HIMSELF WAS TO DO

2 Timothy 1:6 - "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...."

This is very important to me. Paul knows all about Timothy's Godly training and upbringing. He knows all about his gifting and ministry. But neither of those truths frees Timothy from what Paul is about to say.

Let me tell you one of the reasons (not the **only** reason) Christians feel the heat of the hour more than past generations of believers. It's not that we're persecuted more. It's not that we work harder. It's not that we have less material goods than we used to. It's not that our lives are tougher. Remember, Paul wrote these words from prison, facing execution. Our lives are softer than Paul's by quite a stretch. We have more time-saving conveniences than any other generation in human history.

In fact, later on in this very letter, Paul is going to tell Timothy that the pastoral ministry in the last days is going to be a very difficult one - primarily because people will be ***"lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God"***

That doesn't mean they will have little idols with the word pleasure on them. Or that the pleasures will be immoral pleasures. People will grow, more and more, to center their lives on only those things that seem to be immediately pleasing to them. And in doing so they will miss the things that will make them safe and satisfied ***eternally***. They will look at self-satisfaction as the goal of everything they do.

And as they ***do*** they will come to be dominated by ***fear*** that they can't possibly keep these things long term. Life fills up with threats to the worshiper of the temporal. God's plan and remedy for a sound mind can't grow in self-satisfaction.

Now, I know we aren't the unredeemed. I know we want to love and serve God alone. So did Timothy. But I'm almost haunted by the way Paul feels the need to remind this pastor - ***"....I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you...."***(2 Timothy 1:6).

"Timothy, don't forget there is something precious - something latent - something still deep in your heart. It can burn and warm your life. It can set your soul aflame. Have you forgotten it? Are you losing your way? Here's the way home. ***Fan it to flame, Timothy. Fan it to flame all over again!"***

While you remember the little things of life - groceries, your work appointments, your conference calls, your kid's soccer game - are you missing the biggest thing of all? There's power and love and a sound mind waiting. Let the Holy Spirit remind you where they're to be found.