

Transcribed from
Stir Up The Gifts
Empowering Believers for Victorious Living and Ministry Tasks
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CHAPTER 2 **Overcoming Intimidation and the Spirit of Fear**

The Spiritual Gift of Love is a weapon for spiritual warfare. *We are more than conquerors through him that loved us* (Rom 8:37). The premier Spiritual Gift of Love can overcome any stronghold of this world. The Spirit of Fear rages against the Spiritual Gift of Love. Love conquers fear and perfect love casts out fear. “*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world*” (1 John 5:4). Intimidation is a servant of the Spirit of Fear. But God has not given us a Spirit of Fear, but rather a spirit of power, love, and sound mind (2 Tim 1:7). As a slave to the Spirit of Fear, intimidation causes believers to live lives that are less than victorious.

If we are honest, we will admit that we all have been intimidated at some time in our lives. We face intimidation on a regular basis. We face intimidation on our jobs, at home and in the Church. Supervisors intimidate subordinates by threatening to fire them. Spouses intimidate each other by withholding affection. Boyfriends and girlfriends intimidate each other with threats of dumping each other. Church members attempt to intimidate pastors by withholding their contributions and threatening to move their membership. Peer pressure is a form of intimidation. Young people are influenced to do wrong by the power of intimidation when they know to do right. Professional athletic coaches accept fines for attempting to intimidate the game official in an attempt to get the winning edge. Contests are won or lost due to intimidation. The praise worship that God is so worthy of has suffered because of intimidation. Lost people are going to hell because of intimidation. When was the last time you were intimidated? Have you ever withheld a praise because you were intimidated by the stares of the congregation? Have you ever failed to witness to someone because you were intimidated by the thought of rejection. Church leaders, as well as believers are challenged on a daily basis to overcome intimidation.

Intimidation can be overcome by the powerful Spiritual Gift of Love. *No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper* (Isa 54:17a). The challenge is to stir up the Gift of Love for the purpose of overcoming.

RECOGNIZE THE ENEMY

First, we must recognize the enemy. God has explicitly told us that He did not give us the Spirit of Fear. If God did not give us the Spirit of Fear, who did? Satan is the giver of the Spirit of Fear. Notice, it is a spirit. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places* (Eph 6:12). Fear is not just an attitude or an emotion, it is a spirit. If it were just an attitude or emotion, it could be overcome by the help of a therapist, psychiatrist, or a psychological technique such as behavior modification. But because it is a spirit, it must be confronted with a spirit. The Spirit of God (Love) is the only spirit that can overcome the Spirit of Fear. Perfect love casts out fear. We fail in our efforts to be overcomers because we rely too much on flesh. Flesh cannot successfully overcome a spirit. That is why God admonished us to stir up the Gift of God.

God refers to Satan as an old lion. The adversary is walking around like a roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8). Young lions don't roar, they simply pounce on their prey. Old lions roar to frighten their prey into lying down, so they are easily captured. God is saying that Satan is like an old lion roaring to frighten us into vulnerability. The roaring of the Spirit of Fear will not frighten a stirred up Gift of Love. Don't be afraid, stir up the Gift.

ABANDON COMFORT ZONES

Begin to abandon your comfort zones. We all have comfort zones. Amos said, *Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion...* (Amos 6:1). Churches and believers have simply gotten too comfortable living the spiritual "Life of Riley." The twenty-first century intellectual mind-set, protected by the stained glass windows of mainline theology provide a safe haven for many believers. Your comfort zone may not let you attend group Bible study because of the embarrassment you may encounter due to your lack of biblical knowledge.

Break free from it and join a systematic Bible study group. Your comfort zone may not allow you to follow after the Spirit of God due to the fact that you enjoy being in control. Break free from it and release yourself to the Spirit of God. Your comfort zone may not allow you to give God any expressive fervent praise due to various reasons including your basic personality, family upbringing, previous church experience and background affiliation. Abandon it and give God some praise, even if it means dancing like David danced. Whatever your comfort zones are, abandon them, destroy them, annihilate them.

KNOW AND EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF PRAISE

Know and experience the power of praise. As previously mentioned, this may mean abandoning one of your comfort zones. Many know the power of prayer, but few know the power of praise. There is victory in the praise. Praise has many benefits. One of the most overlooked and underused benefits is the use of praise as a weapon against Satan. We read in Psalm 150:6: *Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord*, but we overlook the Psalm 149:6-9: *Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the LORD.* God has given praise to the believer to bind Satan. Learn to praise God with fervor in your voice in singing. Singing is the most user-friendly mode of praising God, but the dance is the most liberating. If you really want to be set free, dance like David danced.

STARVE THE FLESH AND FEED THE SPIRIT

Enter into daily warfare by starving the flesh and feeding the spirit. Stop avoiding spiritual conflict. Like God, the devil has promised never to leave us alone. Unlike God, he is a liar and a deceiver. However, the way to control him is to treat the flesh ruthlessly. Stop avoiding spiritual conflict and put on your spiritual armor and enter daily into spiritual warfare by eliminating those things in your life like Sodom and Gomorrah locations and Babylon associates.

Watch what you read and who you listen to and associate with. Remember the thought is the father of the deed and often overcoming means changing playmates and playgrounds.

Starve the flesh of evil thought and its opportunity to get a stronghold on your life. As you starve the flesh, also feed the spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a one-time event. Wake up every morning and ask God to fill you. Practice quiet time with God and community time with fellow believers. Practice private praise. Incorporate praise into your prayer life and pray without ceasing.

MULTIPLY AND CELEBRATE YOUR VICTORIES

Victory begets victory. Know that each victory will help you to win the next victory. Once there is a victory, there is another victory on the way. Look for it. Put the devil to fleeing, one day at a time and a victory at a time. Don't let up. Take authority. Celebrate your victory by giving God a victory shout or victory testimony. You may run a victory lap on His behalf, or you may even want to give Him a victory dance.

STAY AWAY FROM AVERAGE

Average is a killer of spiritual maturity. Average is the best of the worst and the worst of the best. It is undesirable. Remove the spirit of mediocrity from your presence. Study to show thyself approved. Follow after a greater relationship with Christ. Equip the saints, edify the Body of Christ and exalt the living Savior. Prepare to march into the new millennium with a powerful anointing. Max out your spiritual capacity.

LIVE ABOVE THE SNAKELINE

I am told that reptiles cannot live in high altitudes. I was visiting a spiritual retreat center in Glorieta, New Mexico where the altitude is approximately 5700 feet above sea level. Although much of the retreat center was a wooded area, we were told we did not have to be concerned about snakes because they could not exist at such an altitude. It occurred to me that the same is true of that old snake we call Satan. We need not ever give him home advantage by fighting him in his own backyard. *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.* (Rom 12:21).

If someone mistreats you, take them to the higher ground of prayer. Remember, you cannot throw a person in a ditch without getting in the ditch with them and you can't overcome the devil with ground-level flesh. But, if you take him up to the higher ground of love, he simply cannot exist. Finally, when all else fails, put on the armor of God and stand. But don't just stand anywhere, Stand on higher ground, above the snake line.

STAY AWAY FROM HOLLYWOOD CHRISTIANITY

Everything that glitters is not gold. Beware of those who would gold plate the rugged cross and polish it with a watered-down gospel designed to make people feel good about their current spiritual condition. The key is to keep your eyes on the prize. Religious entertainment is deceptive and the deception robs us of true freedom. Religious showmanship does not have the power to break strongholds. As a matter of fact, religious entertainment *is* a stronghold.

DEVELOP A POPEYE MENTALITY

My friend, Rev. Fred Luter, Pastor of the Franklin Avenue Baptist Church of New Orleans, often speaks of what he calls a "Popeye mentality." that is needed for spiritual warfare. It involves the attitude of being so sick and tired of being defeated that you come to a point where you say, in the famous words of the cartoon character Popeye, "I can't stand it no more." In this cartoon series the plot always follows the same pattern. Popeye's girlfriend, Olive Oil, is in trouble and Popeye's adversary, Bluto, is winning the ongoing fight with Popeye. Just as it seems that Popeye is doomed to lose the fight with

Bluto, Popeye suddenly gets tired of losing the fight and says, “I can’t stand it anymore.” About this time a can of spinach appears and once Popeye eats his spinach the fight begins to turn in Popeye’s favor and he dramatically wins and saves his girlfriend, Olive Oil. My friend, Pastor Luter, compares this situation to our current daily spiritual warfare with Satan. Satan is winning, but it is time for us to get tired of losing this onslaught from Satan and say, “I can’t stand it no more.” Satan, give me back my child. I can’t stand it no more.” “Satan, give me back my respect, I can’t stand it no more.” “Satan, give me back my joy, I can’t stand it no more.” “Satan, give me back my peace, I can’t stand it no more.” “Satan, give me back my hope, I can’t stand it no more.”

It is time for us to be filled with the power of the Holy Ghost (spinach) and stir up our God power and start winning this battle against Satan. Get a Popeye mentality and overcome intimidation and fear.

TIMID TIMOTHY: AN INTIMIDATED BIBLICAL LEADER

Timothy was the pastor of the Church established by the Apostle Paul in the city of Ephesus. Paul had apparently ordained him by the laying on of hands. *Wherefore I put you in remembrance that thou stir up the Gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands (2 Tim 1:6).* Paul, from his death row jail cell in Rome, is concerned about a problem young pastor Timothy is experiencing in the Church. Timothy was encountering intimidation. It seems evident that Timothy had a genuine faith. *When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee... (2 Tim 1:5a).* Although Timothy had a great faith, something in his ministry had gone awry. His witness had grown cold. His boldness had been lost. Timothy had become timid. Timothy was experiencing timidity. Timothy was like a junior high school teacher who knows his subject matter, yet cannot maintain discipline in the classroom. Timothy was like a great pulpiteer, but afraid of the deacon board. Timothy seemed to avoid confrontation. Therefore, Paul reminded him to stir up the Gift of God.

With the exception of being ashamed, the Bible does not tell us what the problems in the Church were that needed confronting. Drawing from the dynamics of the Church today, one of the problems needing to be confronted may have been in the area of leadership. There may have been deacons and trustees serving on the boards who were not tithing. Such a problem needs to be confronted. Or there may have been choir members or praise team members in leadership roles who were living in overt sin, such as cohabiting with the opposite sex (living together unmarried). Such would need to be confronted. Or maybe the leadership was not attending Bible study or keeping the commitment of their responsibilities. Or maybe the ministerial staff were not functioning according to their job description. For sure, they had become

ashamed of their testimony. *Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord... (2 Tim 1:8a).*

The solution to the problem was to stir up the Gift of Love. The remedy to the shame was to stir up the Gift of God.

THE CHURCH AT EPHEBUS AND THE CHURCH TODAY

The Church that was founded by Paul and pastored by Timothy had left her first love. *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou has left thy first love (Rev 2:4).* God commended them for their strong doctrinal position, but they had moved away from loving God wholly. God is a God of love and He has always required that we love Him first. God, in the Old and New Testaments, commands us to love Him wholly. *Duet. 6:5-6: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart (also) Matt. 22:37-38: Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.*

Moving away from loving God first will leave you vulnerable to the enemy. Leaving your first love is a dangerous posture. The Church at Ephesus was located in a seaport city. Seaports, then and now, are notorious for sinful living. The Temple of Diana was the religious institution of competition. Apparently, under Timothy's leadership, God's criticism of the Church had not changed. They had left their first love and were now in need of a prescription for healing. They needed a path to lead them to return to their first love. Paul writes the prescription-stir up the Gift of God. Stir up the Gift of Love. That is the catalyst for the stirring up of all Spiritual Gifts.

The Church today and her believers, is much like the Church at Ephesus. We have left our first love. We, like they, live in a culture that resembles the sins of seaport cities. We live in our contemporary Sodom and Gomorrah. Babylon has become our home turf. Temples of Diana, in the form of drugs and prostitution houses, organized crime, institutions of cultic religion and satanic mass media and telecommunications influences penetrate every facet of our society. We, like the Church at Ephesus, have let down our defense because we have left our first love. Stir up the gift.

We have gone off worshiping idol gods. The idol gods of greed and sex have eaten the hearts out of contemporary society. The need for a physical relationship takes precedence over the need for a personal relationship with God - we have left our first love. The need for prestige and power and material possessions rules over the call to love God first and love others as we love ourselves. However, the prescription is the same today as it was yesterday. The

prescription is to stir up the Gift of God, which is the powerful Gift of Love. If we are going to become overcomers, we must stir up the gift. If we are to be more than conquerors, we must stir up the gift. *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world* (1 John 4:4). God has gifted us for the battle. The premier weapon is the Gift of God. God gave it and He expects us to use it.

The late singer, Marvin Gaye, gives us the answer in the lyrics of the R&B recording, "What's Going On?" "Brother, Brother, there are far too many of you dying; Mother, Mother, Mother, there are far too many of you crying; You know we've got to find a way to bring some love in here today..." That's what's going on. The Gift of Love is what's going on. Stir up the Gift of Love.

Checkpoint

Q1. Since intimidation is caused by fear, how can intimidation be overcome?

A1. Since perfect love casts out fear, and intimidation is caused by fear, intimidation can be overcome through the Love of God.

Q2. Where does the spirit of fear come from?

A2. Satan sends the spirit of fear.

Q3. What does the author mean when he says, “Starve the flesh and feed the spirit?”

A3. To starve the flesh means to deprive the flesh of the Sodom and Gomorrah locations and Babylon associations, watching what you read and whom you listen to and associate with. To feed the spirit means to feast more on the Word of God in order to strengthen your spirit while at the same time weakening the flesh.

Q4. What does the snake line mean as it relates to character?

A4. Snakes cannot survive above a certain altitude. The analogy made refers to fighting the adversary on the level of love and prayer rather than on the lower level of the flesh. You cannot overcome the devil with ground-level (carnal) weapons. But if you take the battle up to the higher ground of love, he simply cannot exist.

Q5. What does the author mean by Hollywood Christianity?

A5. Hollywood Christianity is religious entertainment. It is glamorizing church and Christianity. It deceives the Christian into believing that all that glitters is gold.

Q6. What does the author mean by a Popeye Mentality?

A6. A Popeye Mentality says, “That all I can stand and I can’t stand no more” just like Popeye when he got fed up with Bluto’s abuse. He would eat his spinach (the Holy Spirit) and defeat his enemy.

Q7. According to Paul, what was Timothy’s problem?

A7. He was being intimidating. Although Timothy had a great faith, something in his ministry had gone awry. His witness had grown cold. His boldness had been lost. Timothy had become timid. Timothy was experiencing timidity.

Fill in the Blank

1. Perfect _____ casts out fear.
2. Fear is not just an attitude or emotion, it is a _____.
3. _____ is the only spirit that can overcome the spirit of fear.
4. Be not thou therefore _____ of the testimony of the Lord.

Helpful Dialogue

1. Can you think of some past incidents in your life when you used the weapon of love to overcome evil?
2. Identify three areas where you rest in your own comfort zone rather than breaking free to do God's will.
3. Examine your life today and determine where you need to apply the weapon of love in order to overcome intimidation or another evil work.
4. You will not be able to operate in the Gifts of the Spirit while fear and intimidation have a stronghold on you. Decide now that you have had all you can stand and fearlessly join with the Holy Spirit who will lead you to victory.

What If I Don't Believe

If I don't believe....

- I will be forever subject to the Spirit of Fear, Jealousy, and to the world that war against the Spirit of God and Love in me.
- I will not be able to fulfill God's call in my life. I will not be a good steward of the Gifts. I will always be intimidated by the wiles of the enemy. Afraid of what people will think, do or say. Doubting God and myself. Never abandoning my comfort zones.

A Challenge

Romans 8:37

1 John 5:4

2 Timothy 1:7

Isaiah 54:17a

Ephesians 6:12

1 Peter 5:8

Amos 6:1

Psalms 149:6-9

Romans 12:21