

Osaka International Church
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Title: "Are you timid?"

Key verse: 2 Timothy 1:6-7 (NASB)

"And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline [sound judgment]."

Good morning, everyone. It's good to see you all here today. For the past two years, Pastor Alistair has had me deliver the sermon here once every few months, so I am standing here again before you with today's message. In my recent sermons, I have been sharing with you some of my favorite verses and Biblical themes. In May this year, the theme of my message was *Running the Christian race* – that is, turning away from our old life of sin and following Jesus ... and then living out our lives in a manner that makes us *a winner* in our Christian life. In my next sermon, in September, I shared with you a word of admonition given to me thirty years ago when I became a member of a church in California: one lady in the church welcomed me eagerly and then she told me something I have never forgotten. She said, "I'm so glad to see you join the church. Welcome! Next, here's what you do: *Find your niche!* Find your niche, the place where you fit in at this church." I passed on this word of admonition to you here at OIC and encouraged you to find a place of service in the Christian community where you can exercise your spiritual gifts – you might have a *large task* to do or a *small task*, but *we all have a part to play* in the Body of Christ, the church. Today, I asked the worship team to lead us in singing that song we sang just a few minutes ago: "Though we are many, we are one Body, we are one Body in Christ." Each of us is different and we all have differing abilities and differing gifts – and in this international church, we come from a variety of countries and denominational backgrounds – but we are *one* Body, we are *working together* to build up the church, the Body of Christ. As I pointed out in my previous sermon when I quoted 1st Corinthians 12:27 – "Now *you* are the body of Christ and *individually* members of it." And verse 7 – "*To each* [of us] is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the *common good*." (ESV)

After both of those sermons I delivered earlier this year, I got some positive comments from several of you folks here, especially after the sermon "Find your niche." Some of you wanted to hear more on that topic ... and some of you wanted to hear more of my personal testimony. Indeed, I myself wanted to share more of my testimony, so today I am going to continue that theme and also share quite a bit of my own life story, especially my activities in ministry as a Christian layman.

Although I am going to share several different passages of scripture with you today, I decided to start out with this one and make it my theme verse for today's sermon: 2nd Timothy 1:6-7 – "And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline."

Verse 7 again – "*For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.*" Many times over the years, as I read my Bible and I come across this verse, it has really spoken to me – that's because of that word "*timid/timidity.*" I tend to be a rather timid person – I have always been rather shy. You might not think that of me because you all have often seen me speaking in front of groups, but back in my twenties I was terribly shy and introverted – I was a perfectionist who was afraid of making mistakes. So, from this verse, I have taken the title of my sermon today: "Are you timid?" The answer for me is: Yes ... though I

have also learned how to break free from my timidity, and I will share some of that story with you today.

“*God has not given us a spirit of timidity.*” The old King James Version says “*a spirit of fear.*” A Bible dictionary I consulted told me that the Greek word here is *deilia*, and it basically means *fearfulness*. I must admit to you that this feeling has often characterized me. The Bible dictionary went on to say this: “That spirit is not given us by God. The word denotes cowardice and timidity and is never used in a good sense.”

The reason I have brought up this subject is because I suspect that I am not the only one who has suffered from this. And maybe some of you have. Even the Apostle Paul’s great partner in ministry Timothy suffered from it – that’s why Paul brought it up so early in this epistle. This is the last epistle that the Apostle Paul wrote, so Timothy must have had several years of ministry experience and church leadership behind him ... and yet he still suffers from timidity, from fearfulness. Throwing off this spirit of fearfulness is something we have to always be reminding ourselves to do, since it can continue to afflict us in our later years – especially if you are like me, with a perfectionistic and overly introspective personality. An overly introspective personality can get you so focused on yourself that you forget that you have a part to play in serving the Christian community with your spiritual gift.

Many years ago, I heard a wise missionary make the following comment – there is kind of a play on words here, so you might not get the point at first. He said this: “The person who is all wrapped up in himself ... makes a very small package!” *The person who is all wrapped up in himself ... makes a very small package!* Do you get the play on words here? “The person all wrapped up in himself” describes someone like I was in my twenties and sometimes afterwards as well: so very much focused on self and afraid to reach out socially and have contact with people. So focused on self that we say he is “all wrapped up in himself,” and thus he “makes a very small package” indeed! We have the image here of package that has been wrapped up. We have a small package because it is only him.

But if he or she would reach out and touch others, then he or she is larger than just oneself. Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV) – “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Stir up one another to love and good works. Encouraging one another.

But my twenties was characterized by being that small package all wrapped up in himself. I was so perfectionistic and introspective that I was afraid to try new things lest I make a big blunder that other people could see – how embarrassing that would be. Whether it was in group situations or in one-to-one relationships, I was so afraid of making a mistake that I felt really stifled in any kind of social interactions, so I was often silent. Actually, this was strangling me both socially and spiritually.

Again, 2nd Timothy 1:7 – “For God has *not* given us a spirit of timidity, but of *power* and *love* and *discipline*.” That spirit of fearfulness, of timidity, is *not* what we have received from God. What I have received from God is the Holy Spirit. And if the Holy Spirit is living in me, then I have access to His *power* ... and I can *love* people with God’s love ... and I can live a life of *discipline*. In the marginal note of my New American Standard Bible, it says that the word “*discipline*” in this verse literally means “*sound judgment*.” The old King James Version of the

Bibles translates this as “*a sound mind.*” Fundamental to a disciplined life is to have a sound mind, to have sound judgment about the matters surrounding you.

Whenever I read this verse, it reminds me that I do not have to fall into my trap of timidity and fearfulness. That does not come from the God who gave me new life and gave me the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, you and I ... *you and I* ... have the *spirit of power*, we have the *spirit of love*, we have the *spirit of sound judgment*, of *discipline*.

1st John 4:18 (NIV) – “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.” The love of God does not lead to fear but rather *His perfect love drives out fear*. We should let God work in our hearts to let this happen.

Romans 8:15 (NASB) – “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’” We have been adopted into God’s family and we are safe under the loving arms of our Heavenly Father.

Jesus told His disciples in John 14:27 (NASB) – “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”

Let me read that one more time: “*Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.*”

Philippians 4:13 (NASB) – “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

Somebody gave me a Christian book entitled “Failure: The Backdoor to Success.” I read the first few pages, but I am sorry to say that I have never actually read the book. But it still sits on my bookshelf and sometimes my eyes glance at the title on the spine of the book: “Failure: The Backdoor to Success.” The title reminds me of the fundamental point the book is trying to make: failures (mistakes) are a natural part of any endeavor of trying something new. That’s part of being human, and there is no shame in an occasional failure. You learn something from your mistake, you make adjustments to your procedure, and then you move on and have better success next time.

Well, I would like to tell you my story – here is an extended version of my personal testimony and how I got from *where I was* to *where I am today*, standing here before you.

I told you a moment ago that during my twenties, I felt that my fear of making mistakes was strangling me, so I avoided any situation that had the potential of me making a mistake of some kind.

And then I came up with an interesting way to overcome this problem. I fulfilled a life-long dream to travel around the world. Not only did I want to see the world, but I also knew that traveling would force me out of my protective shell. These were equally important objectives of the trip. Being in a foreign country and having to arrange train tickets or find a hotel or a youth hostel for the night would certainly get me out of my shell and get me talking, even using phrases in a foreign language. And when meeting new people, I could try being bolder in social skills – and if I say anything foolish ... well, I’m going to soon be moving on to my next travel destination and I don’t have to face that person or persons again. Actually, social blunders barely happened at all during my journey, but I certainly tried to be more bold and I gained a lot of self-confidence in the end. One year around the world. I returned home a different person.

By the way, most Sundays during that journey, I tried to be in church, even if the service was in a language I didn’t understand. And I wasn’t always moving and sightseeing. I sometimes stayed put for a little while. I spent six weeks at a Christian study center called L’Abri Fellowship, which

was started by a Christian philosopher/theologian named Francis Schafer, my favorite author when I was in my twenties. He founded L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland, but I spent six weeks studying at their *second* branch, the one in England. In addition to our studies, we would have long discussion times around the dinner table. That also helped me get out of my shell. Although we did most of our study by books and tapes, with the guidance of a tutor, there were also live lectures there three evenings a week. I vividly remember one Christian psychologist who spoke there on the subject of perfectionism among Christians and the ways it can be detrimental to us. I am certainly not the only Christian struggling with that issue.

Well, I returned home to California a different and more self-confident person. Not long after that, I became a member of a Baptist church in San Diego. That's the story I told you last time when a lady at church urged me to *Find my niche*. Soon after that, I started out small in ministry, listening to children recite their memory verses. Later, the pastor asked me to help organize the men's retreat.

But let me back up about eight years. When I was in university, I went to the Urbana Missions Conference, sponsored by Intervarsity Christian Fellowship. We heard some inspiring teaching and lectures from people like John Stott and Elisabeth Elliot; Luis Palau and Billy Graham. One of the things they urged us young college students to do was to "Try missions for a short term – a summer or a year or two years – and *see if the Lord might be leading you into full-time missionary work*." Well, even though I attended some smaller missions meetings in California in the following years, I did not act on that plea for nearly a decade.

Then, just before the age of 30, I was praying to the Lord to "Shake me up," because I was feeling kind of complacent in my life, kind of static. Well, that's a dangerous prayer to pray. God did shake me up – whoa! "OK, Lord, You got my attention, what is it you want to say?" Well, at the next meeting of our singles group at church, one lady shared about her summer missions trip to Japan the previous summer. She had joined a ten-week program that recruited about a hundred American and British Christians to be sent to churches all over Japan to teach English conversation lessons in the church, and after each lesson, a Japanese member of the congregation would give a short gospel message in Japanese. Hey ... I have heard about this type of thing before, how missionaries have used English lessons as a way of introducing Japanese people to the church and to the gospel. It sounded like a good program, so I joined it the following summer. That was the first year of the Heisei era – golly, that is exactly 30 years ago this year.

Well, the program was really great. But I have to tell you that I was fearful – actually kind of terrified to step out in a new and serious endeavor. But ... "*God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline*." Yes, I sometimes felt terrified at what I was about to face in Japan – what if I make a fool of myself in ministry ... or if I make a real blunder in front of the English classroom? Well, OK, maybe such a thing *might* happen. But I am still going to move forward with this. I felt that the Lord was telling me that it was time to act on that admonition at the Urbana Missions Conference to "*Try missions for a short term*."

So, I did that program for one summer – they gave us excellent training in English teaching, in cultural sensitivity and in ministry. Yes, I made some major cultural blunders, but actually I didn't make any significant teaching blunders. I came back to the program for a second summer. Fewer cultural blunders the second time. And they made me M.C. of the English Camp which was held at the end of the six-week English conversation program. The M.C.? I don't like being in front of big groups. But I did it. God has given us *a spirit of power and love and discipline*.

And then I heard of a missionary in Shikoku who wanted an English teacher to come help him for a year. So, I went there for one year. Yes, I made some more mistakes. And I suffered some loneliness. And I gave my first sermon – well, the missionary I worked for wanted me give a little message at the evangelistic Thanksgiving dinner at church, so I guess you could call that my first sermon. Frankly, I didn't like the experience. I realized I didn't like preaching. During that year in Shikoku, I had some highs and some lows.

And at the end of that year, I felt that I had fulfilled the admonition I heard at the Urbana Missions Conference. I had *tried missions for a short term* – for two summers and then one year – and actually I did not feel called to full time missionary work. For one thing, I found that having the label “missionary” was maybe too much for me – with that label on me, people would have high expectations on me which I knew I couldn't match. In fact, I would have high expectations on myself that I knew I couldn't match. I was still painfully aware of my shortcomings.

I made this conclusion: Not all of us are called to be full-time Ministers (a pastor or a missionary or a chaplain, for example), but we are all called to be full-time Christians. *We are all called to be full-time Christians*: if you name the name of Christ, then you pledge to live by the precepts found in the Bible *and* you are to be an active member of the Body of Christ, the church.

Not all of us are called to be full-time Ministers, but we are all called to be full-time Christians, to be active members of the Body of Christ. That was my conclusion nearly 30 years ago. I was surprised at our recent OIC retreat in Ikoma when I heard Hugh Brown say very much the same thing: even if you are not a pastor or a missionary, you should be *an active disciple*.

After my short-term missions experiences, I returned to America and I was surprised at some of the things people said to me. They would say things like, “Gee, I'm glad you could do something like live in Japan. I could never do something like that.” Hmm. Frankly, I didn't think living in Japan was so hard at all. And actually I enjoyed the English teaching. I looked at America and I looked at Japan and I saw that there are many Christian witnesses in America but few in Japan. So, I decided to return to Japan and see if the Lord might open up doors for me to an English-teaching job and an English-speaking church. And He did. I have now been in Kansai for over 25 years, with much of that time spent at OIC.

In my last sermon here, urged you to *Find your niche* in this church, a place where you could exercise the spiritual gift God gave you. I told you how I started small in ministry at my church in California. Today, I have told you more of the story of how I tried short term missions work and then returned to Japan to be an active layman at church.

Well, what I have said up to this point in today's message is Part 1 of this sermon.
Part 1: Don't be timid.

Timidity is not from God – in contrast, we have the “*the spirit of power and love and discipline*.” You can break free from stifling timidity like me, if you focus on God and the power He gives us through the Holy Spirit. Remember: we have the Spirit indwelling us and empowering us to do the works of service that He would want us to do. He has given each of us one or more spiritual gifts to exercise for the good of the Christian community.

Part 2 of today's sermon: Don't be inactive.

Part 2 will be shorter than Part 1. However, the scripture I want to share with you next is rather long: it is the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25, verses 14 to 30. By the way, in Judea at the time of Christ, a “talent” was a unit of money – it wasn’t a coin, but this word designated a certain large amount of money, like “*ichi-oku yen*,” for example. It was equivalent to about 20 year’s wages for a laborer. The newest version of the NIV Bible translates “talents” as “bags of gold.” Here is the parable ... it teaches us not to squander what God has given to us, but to be faithful:

¹⁴“For it [the kingdom of heaven] will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ ²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant, You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ ²²And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ ²³His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ ²⁶But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful [lazy] servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’.” (Mathew 25:14-30, ESV)

The first thing I note in this passage is that we all have differing abilities. And God gives us different tasks in accordance with whatever ability we may have. He will not give us a task that is beyond our ability – *man* might do that to you, but *God* will not. The responsibility God gives us will be in accordance with our ability. As I look at my own life in the light of this parable, I think that I am not a one-talent person nor a five-talent person. I suppose I am a two-talent person. I suppose I have average ability, or maybe a little above average.

In recent years, I have been reflecting on the wonderful privileges I have been given in life, especially in my Christian life. My mother brought her kids to the church with the best Sunday School in our town – I have spoken before of the wonderful foundation I received in the Lutheran church’s Sunday School program. I had other great foundations. During the summer months, my mother enrolled her kids in something akin to Vacation Bible School, a children’s program where we learned more about the Bible and the Christian life. And we joined YMCA camp. And then we joined the Boy Scouts. And then I went to UCLA, where I joined the Christian fraternity and was introduced to John MacArthur’s church. I have listened to hundreds of John MacArthur tapes. I listened to Christian radio too. I took seriously my Christian fraternity’s motto verse, 2nd Timothy 2:15 (NASB) – “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” Be diligent. Handle accurately the Bible, the word of truth. I also took seriously the pledge each member of the fraternity makes to

always “Search reverently for the truth.” Thus, I have always sought to understand the various theological and practical issues that we face in the church ... seeking to understand proper doctrine and practice.

And so when Pastor Alistair asked me to preach here, I felt compelled to say Yes. It felt natural to say Yes. And somehow I didn’t feel fearful as I had before. That’s because I had already been reflecting on the wonderful privileges I had been given in my younger days. I feel a sense of responsibility to share with you some of the things I have learned and pondered over the years.

Returning to the Parable of the Talents, there is a second thing I note in this story. Most of these servants did business with the money their master gave them, and they were fruitful. They were fruitful. If you do the task God gives you to do, you will see fruit.

The third thing I note is the sad case of the third servant. He let his inhibitions get the best of him and he did absolutely nothing with what the master had given him. Was it inhibitions? Or fearfulness? Or laziness? Or just really a lack of faith? Perhaps all of the above. Whatever the case may be, he had no imagination or initiative at all. He didn’t even consider the possibility of depositing the money with the bankers so that it could at least have earned some interest.

I have sometimes wondered what “earning interest” might represent in this story. You might have a modest amount of ability and God may have given you some small opportunity of service to do in the church. But for one reason or another maybe you don’t do it. But at a minimum you can at least do something positive with your Christian faith. At a minimum I would say: lead a clean life, and contribute something to the offering plate; maybe say some positive word of encouragement to somebody sometimes. Do something. Don’t do nothing. Don’t spend your life on activities that do nothing to benefit God’s kingdom or His people and His creation. The sad case of this third servant shows us that doing nothing will mean the loss of everything. You lose.

This leads me to the last portion of scripture I wish to share with you today. I shared it with you last May when I spoke on *Running the Christian race*. This discusses the rewards we receive from God at the end of time. 1st Corinthians 3:11-15 tells us what kind of things we might build on the foundation of our Christian life ... and how the day of judgment at the end of time will reveal what kind of work we accomplished, whether it was really useful or if it was useless. In this passage, useful works are represented by gold, silver, and precious stones, whereas useless works are represented by wood, hay, and straw. Let’s read the passage:

“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw – ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.” (1st Corinthians 3:11-15, ESV)

The Christian who has built on his foundation with *useful works* will receive a reward. But the Christian who built on his foundation with *useless works* will get no reward – he himself will be saved, but he gets no reward. He has lost the race. He did not *run to win* ... and so he lost. That is a sad way to end – I don’t want to end that way.

1st Corinthians 9:24 (NASB) – “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.”

And so I will close today's message with these exhortations:

Don't be timid – God has given us the power to accomplish the task He wants us to do.

Don't be inactive. If you do nothing, you lose.

Be fruitful – use the abilities and gifts God has given you.

Don't build with useless works. Build with gold, silver, and precious stones.

Run to win.