

Coach House Church BEACONS

POWER, LOVE AND SELF-DISCIPLINE

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We have the power to thrive in any situation. What do you think of that? Does it sound far-fetched? Does it even sound like a Christian statement? Your mind might be turning to those deeply cringeworthy motivational speakers, whose video clips haunt your Facebook feed, undesired and unwanted asking you to find the power buried deep within you to change the world. Personally, I just report spam and block it.

A specific iteration of this encountered in the workplace and in those speakers is the idea of a growth mindset and a fixed mindset. Basically, proponents of a growth mindset say that through humility, a thirst for learning, and a positive attitude we can become amazing at almost anything we set our minds to. Those of a fixed mindset have a greater belief in inherent limits, genetics, and raw talent which determines whether or not they have the inherent ability to accomplish something.

To be clear, these are brief summaries and caricatures of the two positions (which is how we often encounter them in real life). Even if you don't sincerely believe that a growth mindset works, at the very least if your employees believe it – they'll work their socks off in whatever area you tell them to. It's good for the guy that's really rubbish at Excel who might just become better with a positive mindset. There are qualities that are commendable within that mindset that Christians can affirm: it's hopeful, values hard work, it requires humility, it shuns fear of failure, it encourages curiosity.

A fixed mindset seems to do none of that. If I believe that I'm rubbish at maths and it's due to genetics and disposition (I do, and I am), I am likely not to improve in that area. At the extreme end, it can make you only stick to the things you think you're good at and not branch out – I'm very guilty of this – I stick to artwork, writing and

sports that I love. It takes a lot to make me branch out. Many of us are the same. Is there anything that a Christian can affirm in this mindset? Yes, actually. It is wise because when used correctly, it acknowledges and accepts how God has made us with dignity with our particular abilities and characteristics. You can be at peace when you know that certain paths and routes are not for you, and other ones are. It allows you to sharpen your focus and make your best contribution in the areas where you have learned that you are good.

So how do these things factor into scripture and the Christian life? Is it one or the other, or a mixture of both. My contention is that God gives us the power to get through any situation while trusting in him even if we do not achieve our goals or are forced to work outside of our preferred area of expertise.

Let's read 2 Timothy 1:5-7:

5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. 6 For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; 7 for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

Paul is encouraging his younger associate, Timothy, who had a role teaching the Ephesian church and who had been involved with Paul taking the message of Jesus to many groups of people. Let's have a closer look at the passage.

Verse 5 – Paul recalls the reality of Timothy's faith. He's seen it in his family, and by seeing him and knowing him personally.

Verse 6 – On the basis of that faith, which Paul knows Timothy possesses, he encourages him rekindle the gift of God he has been given. A number of things could be in view here, but it's likely it relates to his ability to teach others and share the Gospel, given his role in the church.

Verse 7 – broadens the scope of the passage with a contrast that is true for all Christians: we have not received a spirit of cowardice, and we have received a spirit of power love and self-discipline.

It is that last part that I want to focus on. We often pray asking for strength and power to get through a certain situation, but this passage tells us that it's something we possess already. Now, we don't possess power/love/self-discipline

in and of ourselves, we're not self-sufficient, but because we have a relationship with God, these are things we can grasp by faith and claim in our lives. However, Paul also chooses to tell us that these things could be accessed by Christians as he was talking about Timothy's ministry. Paul could have mentioned many other things as well, but he chooses these 3. God had given Timothy particular gifts to serve God's purposes in Ephesus and elsewhere, which cowardice would have prevented. God gives us what we need to persevere courageously in the work he has given us to do.

Let's notice what Paul didn't say. He didn't say that millions would be converted, that the work would be easy, or that people would celebrate Timothy for his wonderful teaching each week. Rather, Timothy could know that it was possible to persevere in his ministry because of what God had already given to him, because of who he was as a Christian. Verse 7 makes it clear that this is for all Christians too. Isn't it amazing to know that God gives us the strength to keep going? This is a constant fact, to which we have continual access because we know God and he lives in us. We have been given a spirit of power, love and self-discipline. We can keep coming back to this when life is hard. We know we can access God's power to live God's way in any circumstance.

This takes the burden off us. We no longer need to live under the pressure that we can do and be anything. We also don't have to mope around in a mindset which tells us we can't change or grow. We can know, with absolute certainty, that the power of God is with us to live his way. Here is the central point, God's power enables us to live faithfully for him and at peace with him. The growth and fixed mindsets we noted earlier are a problem because they are obsessed with ends and outcomes – in other words: 'will my inherent talent allow me to accomplish this?' Or, 'I can accomplish anything I set my mind to!' rather than, 'I will live a life trusting God and he will sort out the outcomes as I rely on the strength he gives me'. It might be the third or fourth beacon I've quoted this, but Romans 8:28 reinforces this point:

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[i] have been called according to his purpose.
God will take care of us as we live for him.

We may or may not become the people we hope or imagine ourselves to be. We may not reach all our goals. However, God gives us the power and strength to live his way as he achieves his goals in and through us his way. Ironically, in him, we will

reach our full potential, becoming the people we were always created to be – even if we don't see it all come to fruition on this side of eternity. God knows how to shape his people into something truly good. Let's let him do it.



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