

A community that faces fear

By [Mark Labberton](#)

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When I preach, I am absorbed in faces. I'm captured by the sustained opportunity preaching creates to gaze into the faces of those I am seeking to serve as a pastor. In worship, it seems more obvious that others are seeing me. In fact, I am truly seeing them. I see and absorb all kinds of things about people during these moments of proclamation. The most profound observation is also the most obvious: they are a gift.

When I am seeing people clearly, their giftedness becomes sparkingly apparent. This is not because all of them are easy for me to see in this way, or because I readily like and receive their gifts. Perhaps my capacity to see, or theirs to be seen, involves masks that can hide or distort the gifts that are present. These masks have to be dealt with in some way. But when I do see more clearly, the treasure trove before me changes everything about what I can give and receive--and what we can do and be together.

Knowing and using our talents lies near to the core of our common life together. It's not because performance is the point, but because our gifts are for lives of fruitfulness--not for being cowed by fear. Fear is one of the most frequent threats to pastors and people expressing their gifts. Part of being a loving shepherd is to foster a community of hope and love that names fear, faces it and learns to take faithful risks together.

To do this, pastors must face their fear and help others do so, too. We are not meant to do this alone. Flourishing will never happen if we let fear have its way.