

THE ROOT OF COURAGE

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Did you know that *no one* is born courageous?

Do you realize that no one *plans* to be courageous?

Courage is a spontaneous response to the demand of circumstances.

Courage is not a feeling that says, "Nothing can hurt me!" If you are invincible, then you are not courageous, for courage is an action taken in the face of overwhelming odds, against reason and common sense. Courageous behavior is dangerous behavior.

Of course, people, like soldiers and first responders, may train themselves to be courageous. And that is just what I want to speak to you about.

To be a courageous Christian does not come naturally. I am not suggesting that Christians are more wimpy than others; only that courage is not native to our species. But you can train for it!

What does courageous Christianity look like? I believe the Author gives us a pretty good picture of it.

Matthew 28:18 Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, as you go, make disciples from all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Mark 16:17 These miraculous signs will accompany those who believe in My name: They will cast out demons, and they will speak in new languages. ¹⁸ They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won't hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick, and the sick will get well."

Walk in the authority of Christ, making disciples from all peoples (baptizing them and teaching them to obey Christ), with miraculous signs accompanying your efforts.

Why does this require courage? Just look at the contexts in which you will minister!

- Demon-possessed people
- Unbelieving skeptics (for whom tongues are a sign)

- Life-threatening circumstances (natural and manmade)
- Diseased people

If you avoid such conditions, or refuse to embrace such people, you will not see the accompanying miracles. You won't need them.

Disciple-making Christianity requires Christ's authority and courageous action.

Courage Is The Fruit, Not The Root

In this arrangement, however, courage is the fruit, not the root.

Christ's authority is the root, from which your courageous behavior blossoms.

John 15:4 Stay united with me, as I will with you—for just as the branch can't put forth fruit by itself apart from the vine, so you can't bear fruit apart from Me.

⁵ "I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who stay united with Me, and I with them, are the ones who bear much fruit; because apart from Me you can't do a thing."

Therefore, to train oneself for courageous Christian living, you must be properly connected to the root (the Vine). Your commitment to Christ is the root of your courage.

But "commitment" can seem distasteful, like colorless drudgery.

However, in this life, even everyday life, commitment is necessary.

Without commitment to traffic rules, your life is at risk.

Without commitment to good hygiene, your health is at risk.

Without commitment to your family, your future is at risk.

Although we expect it from others, the requirement of our own personal commitment is often thought of or spoken of as the stepchild of tyranny. Therefore, "Question authority." "Don't tell me what I must do." "You don't own me." "Get off my back!"

Commitment is viewed by many in *contrast* to freedom. Commitment means to be tied down. Commitment limits my options. In fact, this is true. But only partly true. Proper commitments actually release *more* than they restrict.

What we have discovered is that one's personal commitment to Jesus Christ actually produces genuine and continuous freedom in one's life, and opens doors of opportunity scarcely imagined.

Without a commitment of faith in Jesus, your life will tend toward chaos and confusion, and you will suffer from increasing anxiety and frustration, a growing sense of emptiness and lack of significance. Unreasonable fears and apprehension will color your future.

That's a hard way to live.

What if proper commitments actually *enhance* life? What if proper commitments are a *source* of something good and strong?

Three Central Branches

From the root of Christ's authority, there are three central branches of Christian commitment:

- Your commitment to help others.
- Your commitment to speak the truth in love.
- Your commitment to do what Jesus asks.

They correspond to the threefold identity of Jesus Christ:

- The Way
- The Truth
- The Life

They also correspond to the three central reasons that Jesus came into our world:

- To seek and to save the lost
- To testify to the truth
- To do what He saw the Father doing

I am underscoring these for you, so that you might recognize the superlative value of these three commitments. These are not just "good ideas"; these are God ideas.

And these are the three branches that produce the fruit of courage that we so desperately need. Let me explain.

MOTIVE – the Way

A moral commitment to help others is a Christlike motive for righteous behavior. Without a prior commitment, an underlying vow, to follow Jesus in this purpose, the cost of helping others will seem like too great a sacrifice. That would not represent Jesus accurately.

Romans 5:7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

John 15:13 There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

The courage for such sacrifice is found in the fundamental commitment to help others. If you recognize that this simple, but profound, purpose—to help others—is what motivated Jesus to leave Heaven's glory and lay aside His sovereign power, in order to meet us in our weakness and lostness, and you are committed to the same, then you will find the necessary courage to lay down your life in a variety of ways, as the Holy Spirit prompts you.

MANNER – the Truth

A moral commitment to speak the truth in love is the manner of living like Jesus in this world. Without a prior commitment to this manner of relating to others, you will forsake the truth in favor of so-called love (expedience, really), or you will forsake love in favor of ripping and beating people with the truth (harshness, actually). Neither of these is an accurate picture of Jesus.

John 8:2 Early the next morning [Jesus] was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and He sat down and taught them. ³ As He was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

⁴ "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

⁶ They were trying to trap Him into saying something they could use against Him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with His finger. ⁷ They kept demanding an answer, so He stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!"

⁸ Then He stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

⁹ When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. ¹⁰ Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

¹¹ "No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

Both to the accusers and to the accused, Jesus spoke the truth, but gently, thoughtfully, without stripping them of their dignity, or demeaning them in front of others. The courage to confront without condemning requires a prior commitment to respecting the image of God in

even the worst of others. That means telling the truth in a loving way. That means loving others with honesty. If you are committed to such true love, you will find the necessary courage to face others with an open heart and an open hand.

METHOD – the Life

Your moral commitment to do whatever Jesus asks, or what we might call “the right thing,” is the Christian method of righteous conduct. Too often a counterfeit standard is adopted in its place: whatever has been our religious tradition, or whatever has become our church culture. The record of Jesus’ efforts to expose such culture and depose such tradition should be sufficient to convince us that these are cheap and hollow imitations of the real method of Christian living.

John 5:19 So Jesus explained, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself. He does only what He sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows Him everything He is doing.

This was how Jesus lived. With an ear always open to Heaven’s direction. With an eye always watching to see the opportunity God set before Him. With a hand ready to act on the Father’s behalf. The courage for such readiness (and its follow-through) is the result of a pre-established commitment to always do the right thing (in the sense of following the leading of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the Word of God).

This is why, in spite of physical and mental weakness after 40 days without food, Jesus could face down the devil himself with bold clarity: “*It is written,*” He affirmed, again and again.

Without such a sense of obligation to faithful behavior, one will inevitably flounder and fumble at opportunity’s door, imagining a host of options, and weighing the cost of each, until proper action is stymied. Inaction leads to disappointment; wrong actions lead to disillusionment.

“Of all the words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: ‘what might have been.’”

Empowered

God has given every Christ-follower His Holy Spirit. He will *lead* you. You *will* be led. And with His leading comes His empowerment.

You can live the way Jesus modeled, motivated to help others in Christ’s love, even when it’s challenging.

You can speak to others the way Jesus modeled, in a loving manner, and make peace, even with your enemies.

You can live each day the way Jesus modeled, following the Spirit's lead, no matter what the circumstances may be.

Don't look for a feeling, or wait until all nervousness subsides. Commit yourself to doing the right thing, in the right manner, for the right purpose—no matter what.

If you first commit yourself to Jesus... If you first commit yourself to helping others... If you first commit yourself to telling the truth lovingly... If you first commit yourself to doing things God's way...

If you will commit yourself to these things, you may still feel challenged, you may still feel tense, you may still feel uneasy or afraid, BUT YOU WILL ALSO FIND the courage of Joshua, the confidence of David, the boldness of Gideon, and the grace of Jesus that you need!

Remember this lesson: *Courage is the fruit; Commitment is its root.*