

TAKE COURAGE

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, November 9, 2014

From the child presenting her first performance before a live audience, to the Army recruit making his first deployment to combat, to the new mother leaving the hospital with her baby, to the grandfather who just received a diagnosis from his doctor—we all face unfamiliar situations that call for courage. But where does such courage come from?

First, let me dispel a myth with a revealing definition: Courage is not the absence of fear, but the will to act in the face of fear.

Yet fear is sometimes paralyzing in its effect, so how can we find the “will to act”?

Top Ten Fears

Fear comes in all sizes. You might want to take a mental inventory as I share a “Top Ten” list of common fears. Which one is tops on *your* list?

10. Fear of loud noises (thunder, gunshots, breaking glass)
9. Fear of snakes or spiders or mice
8. Fear of heights or flying or driving
7. Fear of enclosed spaces or the loss of freedom
6. Fear of the dark, the unknown, or disorder
5. Fear of pain or discomfort
4. Fear of failure or success (affecting commitment)
3. Fear of ridicule or rejection or loneliness (affecting intimacy or public speaking)
2. Fear of disappointment or loss
1. Fear of death

I’ll bet you can relate to several of the above as personal challenges. However, I think we could sum them all up with this: *Fear of the dentist!*



Actually, the list is endless. There’s even one called *phobophobia*, which is the fear of being afraid!

No wonder the Bible includes the admonition, “Do not be afraid,” over 300 times! There’s probably one for every day of the year. I know I could use one every day.

Fear is not just a personal issue; it can impact large groups of people like a wave. This is what makes acts of terrorism effective.

What Causes Fear?

For instance, when Joshua sent two spies to Jericho in anticipation of Israel's attack on the city, word leaked to the king that spies were in the city. The spies found refuge with a sympathetic prostitute, named Rahab.

Joshua 2:8 Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them. ⁹ "I know the Lord has given you this land," she told them. "We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the Lord made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. And we know what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River, whose people you completely destroyed. ¹¹ No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things. For the Lord your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below.

News of Israel's conquests had "melted in fear" the hearts of the city's residents. Bad news can do the same to you; limit your intake of frightening reports, lest your heart also melt in fear.

On another occasion, 3,000 Israelite warriors attacked the city of Ai, but they were soundly defeated. They were chased from the gates of the city and 36 soldiers lost their lives. This was an unexpected turnaround in their military campaign, and they were stunned!

Joshua 7:4 The Israelites were paralyzed with fear at this turn of events, and their courage melted away.

A sudden turn of events that occasions a serious disappointment or the news of a loss can rob you of your courage and lead you to think you should never try such a thing again.

2 Samuel 4:1 When Ishbosheth, Saul's son, heard about Abner's death at Hebron, he lost all courage, and all Israel became paralyzed with fear.

Courage is not always lost due to outside sources. Many times it is lost to what is going on *inside* of us. King David lamented, "My sins pile up so high I can't see my way out. They outnumber the hairs on my head. I have lost all courage." (Psalm 40:12)

Conviction and guilt due to known misbehavior can rob you of the courage you need to move forward again. The answer, in such a case, is the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Courage—You Can Take It

Sixteen times (in the Old Testament alone) the command has been given to "be of good courage" or "take courage." While "be of good courage" seems to suggest that it just happens to

us from outside of ourselves, “take courage” more accurately expresses the tone of the command: as an act of your will, stir it up and take it for yourself.

At the root of this lies the confidence in God’s love for you through Jesus Christ.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in [God’s] love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears punishment has not been [matured] in love. ¹⁹ We love because [God] loved us first.

“Matured in love” refers to that growing confidence that God loves us thoroughly, whatever state we are in, and His loving presence is always available to us, if we will seek Him.

When David had been chased and seized by Philistine soldiers, he wrote this: *“O God, have mercy on me, for people are hounding me. My foes attack me all day long. I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are boldly attacking me. But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in You.”* (Psalm 56:1-3)

Street Signals

We are all familiar with the street lights that direct traffic—green, yellow, and red. When approaching an intersection, if the light turns yellow, we know it’s time to “step on it!”—NOT. It means proceed with caution and use your brakes. The sense of fear rising in heart and mind is like that yellow light—a cautionary signal that indicates it is time to apply *trust in God*. *“When I am afraid (that’s the time to act), I will put my trust in You (that’s the action to take).”* Trust in God is the brake that stops fear in its tracks.

Even in the face of the “father of all fears”—the fear of death—the answer is to intentionally put your trust in God.

*1 Kings 2:1 As the time of King David’s death approached, he gave this charge to his son Solomon:
2 “I am going where everyone on earth must someday go. Take courage and be a man.*

After all, if we believe in the Creator—the Redeemer God—we are assured that death is only a temporary transition from the life we are familiar with to a grander life of which we have only had a foretaste. Jesus Christ paved the way, and He will lead us securely there.

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Courage for What?

Here’s a small sampling of the things for which we need courage. We need courage to:

- Do the right thing

- Share our faith
- Keep our word (even when it hurts)
- Give our tithe
- Love our enemy
- Do God's will

Summon Your Courage

When it is time for acts of courage, we will need to summon courage, beckon it, take it for ourselves.

2 Chronicles 23:1 In the seventh year of Athaliah's reign, Jehoiada the priest decided to act. He summoned his courage and made a pact with five army commanders.

2 Chronicles 25:11 Then Amaziah summoned his courage and led his army to the Valley of Salt, where they killed 10,000 Edomite troops from Seir.

The chief way to summon courage is to pray, whether aloud or in silence, whether in advance or in the moment. Pray for courage. Even in anticipation of the need.

Job 11:13 "If only you would prepare your heart and lift up your hands to him in prayer!

14 Get rid of your sins, and leave all iniquity behind you.

15 Then your face will brighten with innocence. You will be strong and free of fear.

16 You will forget your misery; it will be like water flowing away.

17 Your life will be brighter than the noonday. Even darkness will be as bright as morning.

18 Having hope will give you courage.

In answer to a penitent prayer of faith, God will revive your courage.

Isaiah 57:15 The high and lofty one who lives in eternity, the Holy One, says this: "I live in the high and holy place with those whose spirits are contrite and humble. I restore the crushed spirit of the humble and revive the courage of those with repentant hearts.

Recognizing the presence of Jesus will give you courage.

Matthew 14:27 But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!"

1 John 2:28 And now, dear children, remain in fellowship with Christ so that when he returns, you will be full of courage and not shrink back from him in shame.

Receiving a word from God will give you courage. And expressing that word to others can build courage in a group or a family.

Acts 27:21 Finally, Paul called the crew together and said, "Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Crete. You would have avoided all this damage and loss. ²² But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. ²³ For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, ²⁴ and he said, 'Don't be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What's more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.' ²⁵ So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said.

A Learned Response

Courage can become a learned response.

Remember, courage is not the absence of fear, but the will to act in the face of fear. The more you practice turning to God in moments of fear or discouragement, the more habitual it will become and the more natural acts of courage will seem, even in the face of strong opposition.

1 Thessalonians 2:2 You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare his Good News to you boldly, in spite of great opposition.

Habitual courage of this sort breeds patience with life's seasons of ups and downs.

James 5:7 Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. ⁸ You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

Here's the bottom line: Fearfulness is just not who you are, not who God made you to be.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

Jesus Christ is at work in you to make you boldly courageous. It's your destiny!

Long ago, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah to give us this assurance:

Isaiah 41:9 I have called you back from the ends of the earth, saying, 'You are my servant.' For I have chosen you and will not throw you away.

¹⁰ Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.

Get Ready

Courage is not the absence of fear, but the will to act in the face of fear.

Will you prepare your heart today to act courageously tomorrow? Take these three steps:

1. Acknowledge God's complete love for you (as demonstrated in Jesus Christ).
2. Claim for yourself a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline.
3. Decide to resist fear, and act courageously.

Remember, the Lord Jesus Christ is always with you. He will never leave you nor abandon you.

Remember to tell yourself (often):

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