



Curious About Courage

Fear Not #3 | Sept 24, 2023 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell

Video: “Courage” by the Cowardly Lion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiWk0T3jz9c>

Opening

Welcome back to our “Fear Not!” sermon series. Over the past couple of weeks, we’ve begun exploring the concept of fear as it applies to us as followers of Jesus. Fear is a threat to our church, we said. It is part of our culture, and it is a temptation we face. And through this series we want to help you **recognize** fear, **face** fear, and **fight** fear.

- So, in the first sermon we explored and defined fear. While fear is a natural human emotion, you and I have an obligation to *master* that fear by CHOOSING to trust God in the face of it.
- Last week, we explored the anti-virtuous sin of cowardice, and concluded that focusing on what we “ought” to do is the best way to avoid being a coward.

Fear is a wrong CHOICE. Cowardice is a wrong ACTION.

But...we can’t just focus on the *bad*. We need positive direction when we confront fear. We need guidance for the *good*...for the RIGHT ACTION. We need...courage!

Scripture says, “Fear not!” God’s people are told, “Be strong and courageous!”

And we need to understand what God means by those statements!

There’s a quote (falsely) attributed to Walt Whitman and made popular by the fictitious soccer coach, Ted Lasso: “*Be curious, not judgmental.*”

Some people might take those commands to “fear not” simply at face value, but I think you and I want to be curious, to know more. Like the Cowardly Lion, we want and need...courage! But we need to really *understand* courage. Before we start judging how courageous someone might be (including ourselves!), we need to ask some questions. We need to be curious about how courage works!

So, this morning, let’s ask some classic questions about this issue – the who, what, when, where, why and how of courage. Let’s examine it from all angles and figure out how to instill courage in our lives!



Who needs courage?

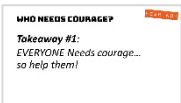
Whenever we explore a Biblical command, we should know who that command applies to. The list of Biblical figures who are given commands to “have courage” or to “fear not” is long. It includes:

- **Spiritual leaders** (Abraham – Genesis 15:1)
- **Single moms** (Hagar - Genesis 21:17)
- **Homeless wanderers** (Isaac – Genesis 26:24)
- **Old men** (Jacob/Israel - Genesis 46:3)
- **Political advisors** (Daniel – Daniel 10:19)
- **Hesitant weaklings** (Gideon – Judges 6:23)
- **Military leaders** (Joshua – Joshua 1:7)
- **Church members** (Corinthian Church - 1 Corinthians 16:13)
- **Storm-tossed sailors** (Paul and his shipmates - Acts 27:24-25)
- **Priests and governors** (Zerubbabel and Joshua – Haggai 2:4)
- **Entire nations** (Israel – Deuteronomy 31:6)
- **Scared teenagers** (Mary – Luke 1:30)

The command often comes directly from God or from his appointed messengers. But it is not just a divine command; the appeal to be courageous is given by other, ordinary folks:

- **By dads to sons** (David – 1 Kings 2:2)
- **By kings to their people** (Hezekiah - 2 Chronicles 32:7)
- **By sinners to each other** (Shecaniah - Ezra 10:4)

The command to be courageous is not specially reserved for any particular group; it is widespread and common. It is a virtue that *anyone* might need whenever fear must be faced. Some people and professions may need obvious bravery more regularly than others (*Firefighters, law enforcement, soldiers*), but courage is needed even in mundane situations like facing angry customers, difficult marriage counseling, or geometry tests.



** *Takeaway #1: Everyone needs courage...so help them!*

YOU AND I will need courage...at some time in some situation. No one is exempt from fear, and so we all need to be equipped to show the right actions.

And since the appeal to be courageous can come from others, not just from God, we can all be participants in the process of courage. We can “en-courage” each other (that’s what the word means – “to inspire with courage, spirit or hope”):



*“So **encourage** each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:11, NLT)*

That’s the “who.” Next comes the “what.”



What is courage?

We've talked about it at length (sometimes directly, sometimes implied), but now is the time when we need to be clear about what courage *is*.

So, let's do a few thought exercises to clarify. I've already admitted a few fears to you in the course of this sermon series, so what's one more?!? (Just don't judge!)

A few years back, during Vacation Bible School, our kids raised money for their mission that year...and whenever we reach a goal like there, there is a fun reward to celebrate. Typically, this reward involves harming and/or humiliating the staff – spraying silly string, a pie in the face, throwing water balloons, cutting off hair etc. (not sure what we're actually teaching the kids by doing this, but that's a worry for another day). The point is, that this particular year the challenge was to kiss a pig. So they got this little piglet in, and everyone thinks it's cute...

Ummm...No!!! It's gonna bite my face off.

Is my fear reasonable? Who cares. I'm not kissing a pig.

Now, there *are* situations in which my lips could touch a pig's...but not all of them are courageous. For example:

- Is it brave to kiss the pig if I'm asleep – if someone puts it up to my face?
- What if I trip and stumble into the pig's face?
- What if suddenly, my aversion to snogging a swine was gone? Would it be courageous to pucker up with a pig then?
- What if I say I'll do it...but then wait, and wait and wait, and never act?

So, we inherently understand that courage involves:

1. **A sense of danger or the presence of fear.** If you aren't scared, you aren't brave.
2. **A conscious decision to face danger.** If you aren't deciding, you aren't being courageous.
3. **A follow-through on that decision.** If you don't do it, you aren't valiant.

We understand those aspects of courage naturally. And when we look at the dictionary for a definition, that is what it tells us, too.

Courage is “the quality of being able to act bravely under difficulties or in the face of opposition; being prepared to do dangerous or risky things in obedience to God, in the belief that he will strengthen, guard and protect his people.”

Consider the following situation, after the crucifixion of Jesus:

MARK 15:43
Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.”

“Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, **took courage**¹ and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.” (Mark 15:43, ESV)

This Joseph had courage! He had a **sense of danger** (angering the Roman and/or Jewish authorities), he made a **conscious decision** (to ask for the body to bury), and he **followed through** (he asked Pilate). He overcame his fear.

WHAT IS COURAGE?
Takeaway #2:
Fear is a necessary ingredient of bravery.

**** Takeaway #2: Fear is a necessary ingredient of bravery.**

Sometimes people have no fear. Public speaking is easy, donating blood doesn't bother them, or they love spiders. They might be confident, or they might be oblivious to the danger (we call that “stupid”). When such people act, they aren't being brave or courageous. They're just living their lives.

But if you have fear, you have what it takes to be brave! You have something to overcome, something you can conquer. In the face of your fear, you can display courage!

That's the “what.” Next comes the “when.”

WHEN DO WE DISPLAY COURAGE?

When do we display courage?

Thursdays at 11 am.

Questions? Cool. Let's move on. (Just kidding)

Seriously, when do we display courage? There is no defined timeline – a year, a month, a date, an hour -- so we must use “relative time.”

Since courage, by definition, involves the follow-through on a decision to face fear, the “when” must include the relative time of... “during.” We are courageous *during* our encounter with danger.

But for the Christian, there is another relative time to consider. We are courageous... “after.” After what? After receiving God's word!

Last week, in our look at the sin of cowardice, we said if God has no command, then there is no sin of cowardice. Feel free to avoid the scary stuff! But if God *says* to do something, then we must be courageous AFTER we hear those words.

In the book of 2 Chronicles, we find a situation in which the city of Jerusalem and the Israelites are facing an imminent attack. The king prays for rescue, and God sends a prophet to share a message:

2 CHRONICLES 20:16-17
“And he said, ‘Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you, ‘Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed...’”

“And he said, “Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you, ‘Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God’s. Tomorrow go down against them. Behold,

¹ “dared, ventured, took a risk”

they will come up by the ascent of Ziz. You will find them at the end of the valley, east of the wilderness of Jeruel. You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.’ Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, and the LORD will be with you.” (2 Chronicles 20:15–17, ESV)

The Word of God came, and courage was commanded. In that order!

Sometimes that Word is specific to your situation. You feel an inexplicable push from the Spirit to say something or do something that you wouldn’t ordinarily do...something that aligns with God’s qualities and character.

Sometimes that Word is a general command that applies to everyone. You know that a certain action is a sin, or a certain action is a virtue. God has informed you (and the world) of what to do.

Either way, God’s Word comes first and then courage must follow.

**** Takeaway #3: Courage waits for God...and then quickly follows.**

In your fears, always be listening for God’s guidance.

“Wait patiently for the LORD. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the LORD.” (Psalm 27:14, NLT)

Yet when he gives instructions, you must obey NOW instead of LATER. You can’t put it off for next week or the next season of life!

Too often I hear people who want to obey later...you know, when life calms down a little. They’ll start coming to church once the kids are a little older. They’ll move in now but wait for the marriage until after they save up for the dream wedding. They’ll quit getting drunk on Friday night when work gets less stressful.

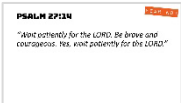
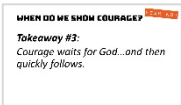
But obedience delayed isn’t obedience. If you’ve waited patiently for God, it then takes courage to follow Him in the moment you know His will.

Even if you have a history of failing, ask for forgiveness and try again...right now.

That’s the “when.” Next comes the “where.”

Where can we find courage?

To answer this question, I want to turn on the radio and pull up a Luke Combs song from four years ago. It’s a country ballad called “Even Though I’m Leaving.” The song uses a classic country music format where several different stories are told in the verses (Scene 1, Scene 2, Scene 3) and the same chorus is repeated after each verse. Yet as the song progresses, the different situations give that chorus a deeper and more profound meaning.



In this song, we have Scene 1 being a child worrying about monsters under the bed at nighttime. Scene 2 jumps ahead to that child now departing for active duty in the military. Scene 3 brings us to that grown-up child at his father's deathbed. But the lyrics of the chorus stay relevant to each scene.

*"Just 'cause I'm leaving
It don't mean that I won't be right by your side
When you need me
And you can't see me in the middle of the night
Just close your eyes and say a prayer
It's okay, I know you're scared
When I'm not here, but I'll always be right there
Even though I'm leaving
I ain't going nowhere"*

So how does this relate to the question of "where we can find courage?" It's the idea of never being out of the Father's presence. It's the classic line from the 23rd Psalm:

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...." (Psalm 23:4a, ESV)

We may need courage *wherever* our fear appears – in the moment, in the situation, face to face with danger – but in those moments we must take heart in a truth about God's nature. It's where doctrine intersects with real life.

God has many infinite qualities, and one of these qualities is that God is *omnipresent*.

God has the ability to be in every place that exists at the same time.

"Am I a God who is only close at hand?" says the LORD. "No, I am far away at the same time. Can anyone hide from me in a secret place? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?" says the LORD." (Jeremiah 23:23–24, NLT)

God's omni("all")-presence is not limited by certain events. He is always universally present (everywhere at once fully). There is no place where God isn't.

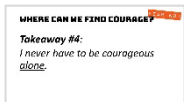
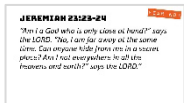
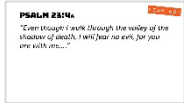
While God may choose to make Himself especially accessible in specific places for specific people and reasons (such as the Incarnation, or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit). These special "access points" do not detract from God's omnipresence. He remains present everywhere; it is simply our awareness or interaction with Him that changes.

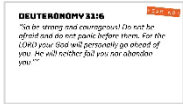
**** Takeaway #4: I never have to be courageous alone.**

God says, "I ain't goin' nowhere."

If I trust that God is the source of my courage, and I believe the Bible's teachings about his presence, then I know that I will never face my enemies alone.

Moses' words to the nation of Israel before they crossed into the Promised Land apply even now to you:





*“So be strong and **courageous!** Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.” (Deuteronomy 31:6, NLT)*

We’re never alone. That’s the “where.” Next comes the “why.”



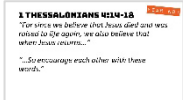
Why should we exhibit courage?

By now, I think you get the picture. You understand the reasons we need to have courage.

If you are motivated by the negatives, you should have courage because cowardice is sinful and shameful. You don’t want to be defined by those negative traits. You don’t want to be known for being scared into inaction.

If you are motivated by the positives, you should have courage because it is a virtue that allows you to do what you ought, regardless of the situation. You want to be known for that positive trait, for doing the right thing at the right time.

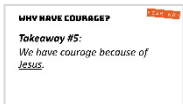
But there’s one more rationale for finding courage: We find courage in the fact of the resurrection and in the promise of Jesus’ return!!! Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians:



*“For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died. We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. So **encourage** each other with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:14–18, NLT)*

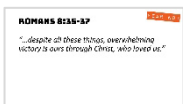
“Encourage each other with these words.”

The glorious hope we have should be enough to motivate courage. It should help us face any situation or worry, knowing that the worst will be overcome!



**** Takeaway #5: We have courage because of Jesus.**

Put another way:



*“Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, “For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”) No, despite all these things, **overwhelming victory** is ours through Christ, who loved us.” (Romans 8:35–37, NLT)*

Forget the fears. We have courage because of Jesus! It is His victory, His power that supersedes any trouble. If we have Jesus, we need not be afraid of anything no. We can be more than conquerors in Him!

That's the "why." And now, at last, the "how."



How do we gain courage?

My daughter, Chaynee, and her friend Melodee Magnussen have been studying Taekwondo for the past couple of years, and it has been interesting to watch their development. They've gone from timid beginners to pretty impressive "lethal weapons!" They kick! They punch! They can use nunchucks and bo staffs and askrima sticks like a boss!

While Deb and Jess have been the primary parents at the classes and events, I've been to enough to see how the development takes place: repetition! They go to class and do the same things over and over and over.

One concept is a "line of strike." [DEMONSTRATION?] For every weapon they learn, there are specific angles of attack they practice. Line 1 (from the right, to the head/neck), Line 2 (from the left, to the head/neck), Line 3 (from the right, to the ribs/side), etc. The instructor will have them do these moves repetitively. And eventually, they get to the point where it is a reflex, not just a decision.

Early on, of course, there was a lot of thinking involved. I might say "#7 line of strike" and they'd pause and wonder if that was the upward or the downward movement. But now it is instinctual...because they were there, learning and repeating. They were encouraged to act the right way.

Since courage is a choice...an action...it can be trained. Part of it happens on your own, but a lot happens by meeting here with each other, to remind each other of the right thoughts and actions. To practice thinking the right thoughts. This is why the book of Hebrews encourages us to keep gathering together.

*"Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but **encourage** one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24–25, NLT)*

***** Takeaway #6: Train together to be courageous.***

Train together to be courageous. Keep coming to church. Go to a class. Start meeting with a group of Christian friends for study and accountability. Talk about the scary issues of the day and the fears you face...and encourage one another to do the right things despite that fear, all while depending on God!

HEBREWS 10:24-25 Hebrews
"Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."

HOW DO WE GAIN COURAGE? Hebrews
Takeaway #6:
Train together to be courageous.



Closing

If you were curious how courage worked, I hope this sermon answered many of your questions. We covered:

- Who should be courageous (US!)
- What courage is (action in the face of fear)
- When we should have courage (after waiting for God's commands)
- Where we should have courage (anywhere God is)
- Why we should have courage (because of Jesus!)...and
- How we should gain courage (practice it with others)

Is there more? Sure. But I think you get the idea. Courage is possible in your situation. Bravery is the path forward as you face your fears. It is fearlessness based on faith; it is confidence based on Christ.

You might be scared, but you never have to be a coward.

“Be strong and courageous!”

Choose to act with courage!

Prayer

Invitation

If you are interested in:

1. Sharing a prayer request with the church body
2. Making the decision to become a member of TCC (transferring)
3. Making the decision to follow Jesus for the first time as your Lord and Savior

...then come forward as we stand and sing. It might be scary, but have courage and share with us during this song of invitation!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Notes

Who needs courage? (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Takeaway #1: Everyone needs courage...so help them!

What is courage? (Mark 15:43)

Takeaway #2: Fear is a necessary ingredient of bravery.

When do we display courage? (2 Chron 20:15-17, Psalm 27:14)

Takeaway #3: Courage waits for God...and then quickly follows.

Where can we find courage? (Psalm 23:4a; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Deuteronomy 31:6)

Takeaway #4: I never have to be courageous alone.

Why should we exhibit courage? (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; Romans 8:35-37)

Takeaway #5: We have courage because of Jesus.

How do we gain courage? (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Takeaway #6: Train together to be courageous.

Sermon Discussion ?s

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- Share a time when you had to be brave. On a scale of 1 to 10, how difficult was it? How brave was it? Share the reasons for your ranking.

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Who are some people in scripture who are told to “have courage” or to “fear not?” (ex: Genesis 15:1; 26:4; 46:3; Daniel 10:19; Joshua 1:7; Haggai 2:4; Luke 1:30)
- Is there anyone who *doesn't* need to be courageous? How could you help a friend gain courage?
- Can courage exist apart from fear? Explain your answer.
- Can courage exist apart from action? Explain your answer.
- Read Psalm 27:14. Why do we need to wait for God when exhibiting bravery or courage? What tempts us to act sooner?
- Have you ever felt like God was absent? How do you counter the feelings of spiritual isolation when you need courage?
- Review 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18. What is the future hope Christians hold? How does that give us courage (lit. “encourage” us)?
- Courage can be built through practice. How do you practice courage? Give an example.
- What role should the church play in bolstering courage among its members? How does being together regularly make us more courageous?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Pray for more and more courage to face the challenges and fears that stand in the way of serving God. Ask for boldness, patience, wisdom, and strength.
- Pray for one person you know who is facing a fear this morning.