

LIVING COURAGEOUSLY: LIVING A LIFE THAT MATTERS
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One of our pastors is driving down the street, and a 75-year-old man in front of him hit a bicycle rider and knocks him over. The guy gets up, pounds on the old man's hood and then goes over to the driver's side and starts pounding on this old man. Our pastor runs over, it's just instinct, and grabs this guy, pulls him off of this old man, and gets between them. The guy doesn't stop. He grabs his shirt and tears his shirt, grabs our pastor, starts kicking him so he can get back to beating up the old guy. Our pastor is thinking, "what am I going to do? I can't let it happen." He takes one swing, hits the biker in the jaw and knocks him out cold. Everyone in the intersection starts clapping and cheering for our pastor. The eyewitnesses are talking to the police and telling the story. So the cop asks him, "How many times did you hit the guy?" He says, "Honestly, just once." If that were you and you were in that car, and you saw the old man getting beat up, would you have gotten out of your car and tried to physically do something? Even if the guy was bigger than you? If you didn't do something, you would walk away with a sense of shame, right? One swing. I stay up at night dreaming of something like that. You say to yourself, I think it would be okay to hit him at this point! He got to do it! Someone asked his wife, boy I bet you feel like he was a total hero. "NO", he said, "she was mad that he ripped her favorite shirt."

Here is another scenario. Seventy-five-year-old man is sitting in a restaurant table near you. And you think to yourself, "Hmmm, he probably doesn't know Jesus." Do you actually get up and start a conversation with him? He doesn't know Jesus. He's going to go to hell. Do you have the courage to even get out of your seat and engage him in conversation? My point is that we can be so courageous in the physical world, but when it comes to something spiritual, something that really matters, we're cowards. We think it might hurt our reputation, or we fear rejection, he might not listen to what I have to say, so I don't want to say anything. What about an old man, who doesn't have much longer to live and is going to face his God. Where's the courage?

In Revelation 21, in the very final state when we are going to be with God, read this:

Rev 21:7-8

7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

NIV

I hated the way it starts with the cowardly. If it said the sexually immoral first, that might have been more helpful to me. Why did Jesus put that first? I think I'm okay getting in front of a crowd and saying whatever the Word of God says, but One-on-one, sitting next to a stranger, feeling like I should talk to someone, cowardly is a very good adjective. Just like the scene where the old man was getting beaten up, and you shake your head and

say “Why didn’t I do something?” Many of us feel sick to our stomach, because there are times when we knew we should have said something about Christ and we didn’t.

In Revelation, this is in light of God’s wrath, in light of the End Times, the warning not to take the mark of the Beast. Those who don’t take the mark can’t eat, face torture, and yet say, “I don’t care. I am not going to deny Jesus Christ.” Jesus says, “But the cowardly, the faithless...those who won’t stand with me, they are not going to come with me.” I don’t want to be that person that backs down.

When I was in Korea a couple of weeks ago, I got to have dinner with this guy. Do you remember there were 23 Korean missionaries that went into Afghanistan and got abducted by the Taliban, and they killed one, threw him out on the road, and killed another one out on the road. They kept telling us they were going to keep killing them one at a time until we released hostages, or whatever the situation was. I came to church with such a heavy heart and we spent time praying for those Koreans. I got to have dinner with one of the guys who had been imprisoned over there. He said the Taliban split them into groups of three and took them all to these remote places. The last time the missionaries and pastors were together, they confiscated every thing of ours. We knew bad things were going to happen. But one of the team still had a Bible in his back pocket. He tore it into twenty three sections and handed it to each of us secretly. So wherever we went, we would have at least a portion of the Word of God and at least have a few verses for encouragement, just to keep us strong. All of us said, “God whatever, live or die, we surrender to live for Your glory. If you think it will bring you more glory if I die, then go ahead. All twenty-three of us went around and said that. The senior pastor said, ‘if anyone dies, I die first. Because I’m your pastor.’” Then my friend said, “No. I am also a pastor and I am older than you. I should go. Respect your elders. I die first.” Then the other guy said, “I am the senior pastor. I am ordained and you are not. I die first.” I am listening to this. Sure enough, they killed that pastor. He’s telling me this story and the whole thing that went on over there. There’s a part of me that says, “Man, that’s courage. That’s the real thing.” My friend said, “Since we’ve been back to Seoul, I have had several team members that have said, “Don’t you wish we were back there? I was so close to Jesus when I was in that prison cell. I try to get that back, and it’s just not the same. I really wish I were back there.” There was this intimacy with Jesus that I can’t find in anything else. When you are in the midst of suffering for Christ, there is a bonding that takes place between you and the Lord.” Most of us would say, “Wow, I wouldn’t want to be back in that situation.” But these people did. And some of you would say, “yes, there was this time that I was suffering for the Gospel, and there was this peace that I felt.” I said to myself, “This is it. I’m actually standing for something I believe in. I’m actually being persecuted.” It may be when someone rejects you because of your faith and you say to yourself, “Well, that felt Biblical. I felt like Paul did that I am sharing in the fellowship of His sufferings.” I want to know what that’s like when we do get a glimpse of that there’s this peace. The truth is that comfort is way over-rated. Those of us who are believers know that there is no peace when everything is comfortable in our lives. There is something about suffering for the Gospel that gives us peace even when we don’t like it in the moment. At least I know I’m the real thing. If you’ve suffered, you can identify with what they are saying. I’ve never been to the extremes that they went to,

but I think I understand it. Because the times I've been rejected and stood up and wasn't a coward, and maybe faced some sacrifice or suffering, it just seemed right.

I want to teach in Philippians. Considering all that's going on in the world, Philippians teaches about joy despite whatever is going on in the outside. It talks about being content whether you have a lot or a little. I kept reading it over and over. You know how sometimes the Scriptures come clear to you? Like you go, "Oh, I get it." Philippians talks about Paul and how much he loved this church. I would be amazed at the love that he had for these churches that he worked with. I want that, and yet honestly, I don't feel that all the time. But then I read this:

Phil 1:1-5:

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:
2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.
NIV

Paul is chained to a prison guard right now, as he writes this. He says, "I am thinking about you guys, every time I think of you I have these great feelings. I am filled with joy."

Phil 1:7-8

7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.
NIV

He's in prison. He's chained to this guard and he says to the church, "I've got you in my heart. I think about you all the time. I have so much joy every time I remember you." Why did Paul love this church so much? It says because of your partnership in the Gospel. He loves them and he says it's because there's a partnership going on. They were out all week telling people the Good News, and Paul felt this kinship because they were partakers in the same task.

I've had a bunch of different jobs. I've worked at Taco Bell. I went to Michael's Pizza, to selling these vacuum cleaners door to door, then I worked at Ralph's Market, then I did hardwood floors, I worked at Acapulco's on Reseda Blvd. Something happened at every one of those jobs. I bonded with my co-workers. I just did. In a restaurant, you've got these waiters and waitresses, and you bond because you are working together at something. You go back to the back and you say, "Man, you've gotta see this customer. He looks so weird." "I had that person before. They are going to stiff you." You just

bond. You just do. There is a different relationship that you have with the co-workers that you don't have with the customers. With the customers, you put on this fake smile and say "Hey, hola, what would you like to order?" If you are installing a floor, on your knees with a co-worker, creating this thing, you bond.

The reason Paul had such a bond was that they were co-workers with them. They were partners in the Gospel. So much of church nowadays, and understand this is a new phenomena, that church is filled with customers. The idea of consumerism. "What would you like to see in a church? Would you like to see short services? Oh, you want this type of music? Are you guys too crowded? Are the seats comfortable enough? Does the children's program have enough to offer?" People come to church and they go shopping. "I don't know if I like this." People come up to me and say, "I was thinking about joining your church, sell me on this thing. Tell me why I should be a part of this church and not that one down the street." "Let me make sure you have a great experience here. You are the customer. We aim to please."

A church used to be a group of people who spent the whole week passionately spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, because that's all they did all week long. They would get together with the other people who had spent their whole week sharing the Gospel. There's a bond because those people are laboring together. I have felt that bond with certain people.

I was in Sao Paulo, Brazil and spent a few hours with the guy named Simon. I hear about his life. He would go amongst the poor. I asked him how he met his girlfriend. "I go out among the slums and I bring food and gifts. I tell them about Jesus. I noticed this other girl and she would be doing the same thing." So I said, "Hey, let's do this together." So he's telling me about his life and what he gave up for the Gospel, and immediately there was a bond. Same thing happened in Korea when I was sharing with this pastor, I only spent two hours with him, and I said, "Whatever you need from me, it's not my money, it's your money." You won't find in the early church when the early church got together. They don't say "Hey, let's do community. Let's have you over for the next three months, let's have Bible study together. Maybe we'll bond and start liking each other." The bond automatically happens when they are co-workers. When you are living for the same thing, it just happens. Paul says, "I love you guys. I'm crazy about you guys, because you are co-workers with me." You are fellow laborers with me.

Whenever I go on a trip to speak, I ask myself, "I wonder if I should stay here." I want to be available. "God, where do you want me?" But if I left the people I would miss are my co-workers in the Gospel. I don't bond with the customers.

Paul says, "Now that I'm in jail..." You have got to understand that back then, in the prison system, if you are in jail, they don't come and feed you your meals. You don't eat unless someone comes from the outside and brings you food. So when he sees his "fellow partners" come and bring him food, there was a bond there. There are people in the church that do that for me.

I want everyone who leaves today to ask yourself the question, “What am I? Am I a co-worker, a partner, or a customer?” Lots of people “church shop.” We don’t even feel ashamed. “Oh, I’m just church shopping, seeing what I like.” I don’t like witnessing to the people in the neighborhood. That’s just lame. I’m not going to do it.” Hanging out with your Christian buddies, it’s safe, you’ve known them forever. The thought of walking next door and teaching them about Jesus, even when you know you are supposed to, you won’t do it. You are a coward.

So you share the gospel, you get beat up a little bit, sometimes you get rejected, but let’s get together and encourage each other and go do it again.

Phil 1:9-11

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.

NIV

He says he is praying for their love to abound even more. But here’s the thing, he says it’s to abound in knowledge and discernment. Have you ever met Christians who are courageous, but they have no discernment. They talk about Jesus and you just wish they’d shut up because they have no sensitivity and discretion. But knowledge can also deaden the passion of sharing your faith. I’m saying, get even more fanatical. But as you do that, grow in your knowledge and discernment. You’ll learn how to address each person according to their needs and their understanding. But don’t stop sharing...just learn as you share. We can deaden guys that are so fired up because we tell them they don’t know enough.

I have been at this church almost fifteen years. During that time, there have been phases where I’ve had an unhealthy concern for numbers. Jesus didn’t say just to get a bunch of people in a room. He says “make disciples who will obey everything I command.” But it’s just fun to speak to big crowds. I like big crowds. But I am at one of these phases where I really could care less. I want co-workers. It’s great if you come and you are seeking and you are not sure who Jesus is, and I hope you see a bunch of people who are passionate about Christ. I hope you keep coming. Once you come to the Lord, you follow Him, you get baptized, now you are a worker with us. This is an army that you have joined. We are fighting for something, we are believing in something.

I remember as a youth pastor, I’d say, “Oh, you’re not coming? Next week we are giving away free skateboards. Come, just come.” What’s that about? It’s about people risking their lives for their faith. Even if your family rejects you, you still need to share your faith. Showing up to church means that you don’t necessarily believe what I believe. When you’re out there, we’re partners.

Phil 1:12-14

12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

NIV

See, this was the crazy thing about Paul. He was so focused. He's got this one-track mind. "I've got the Good News. I want to share it with the whole world." When you are in prison and you are dependent on others for your next meal, what are you going to write? I'm hungry? The last guy brought me tacos. I don't really like spicy food. All Paul cared about was the Gospel, and he was writing that his imprisonment was helping the Gospel spread. "This was pretty cool. I got to preach to my guard today. He's a captive audience. He's chained to me. Pretty soon, I got to share with the whole Praetorian guard. All of these soldiers now know why I'm in here. Now the Christians who've heard what I've done are getting more bold and courageous. Man, this is working out great." When all you care about is the Gospel, there will be a natural bond. You don't have to fake it or force it. It's what you live for. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ. To die is gain." That's me too.

I've been praying for your courage. We are so fearful. Sometimes one-on-one, I just fold. I back down. I don't want to be that. We've got to make a turn here. Let's lay down our lives to lead others to Jesus. Be brave.