

BRAVE HEART
KEEPING THE HEART 6

Courage is the great motivating affection.



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Brave Heart
Keeping the Heart 6
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Welcome to *Brave Heart*

Courage is one of the most important affections to nurture in our hearts. Our natural tendency is to seek and occupy a zone of comfort, taking few risks, and avoiding as much as we can of whatever may be cause for inconvenience.

We need courage to overcome the fear of growing, serving, or reaching out to others in new ways. Courage rises in our hearts out of the combination of fear of God, love for God and neighbors, gratitude, and hope. We can't gin up courage; it must be nurtured along with all the other affections in our heart, so that it is always at the ready and sufficient for every challenge.

In this study we'll take a look at *Christian* courage and see how God intends this affection to operate in helping us to fulfill our Kingdom-and-glory calling.

Brave Heart is Part 6 of a multi-part study on the heart, the affections, and how we can exercise diligence in making sure that what issues from our hearts is what the Lord by His Spirit intends.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Out of the Fullness of the Heart

“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Luke 6.45

Where your treasure is

It is often possible to discern the priorities of a person’s heart by listening to his conversation. If Jesus is correct, that by our mouths we express what fills our hearts, then the topics of a person’s conversation can be a reliable indicator of the “treasure” he has stored up in his heart.

When I taught in a theological seminary, I would occasionally require students to keep track of their activities, including their conversations, for a week. They used a simple 3x5 card and wrote down their activities each day. Then, when we would come back together for class, I would ask each student for a report. Topics of conversation ranged from family matters to issues or projects at work, the fate of the local sports team, interesting things on TV or the latest film, and, as we might expect, things related to their faith in Jesus Christ.

After all the students had shared their summaries, I would ask, “OK, based on these conversations, what would you say is the *fullness* of your own heart? What do you think about most often? Feel most strongly about? Talk about with others most readily?” The answers were what you might expect: family, work, diversions, and, oh yes, faith.

The heart is the heart of the matter in life. The attitudes, desires, longings, aspirations, hopes, and fears that rule in our hearts will determine, to a very great extent, the priorities of our lives. It is of the utmost importance, therefore, that we guard our hearts with all diligence, making sure that the affections harbored there are properly focused and nurtured to the right intensity, so that we can fulfill our Kingdom-and-glory callings from the Lord.

And if there is one affection that brings together all the most powerful and positive affections of our hearts, it is surely courage. The word itself has the word, “heart,” “*cour*”, at its root. When we are acting courageously, all our most powerful affections come together as one to move us in extraordinary ways. Fear, love, gratitude, and hope, all in place and working as God intends, should engender *courage* in every believer – the courage to act in line with our calling to God’s Kingdom and glory. Courage is the great *motivating* affection of the heart.

Courage

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines courage as “That quality of mind which shows itself in facing danger without fear or shrinking,” and equates courage with “bravery, boldness, valour.” While courage certainly engages our minds, it originates in our hearts, where, to find expression, it must overcome such other powerful emotions as complacency, tentativeness, timidity, and fear. Courage rises from the fear of God, love for God and neighbors, gratitude in every situation, and the hope of glory. It binds love, devotion, determination, hope, and zeal into a single, powerful affection that enables us, when it is engaged, to overcome our fears, exceed our expectations, and surmount our greatest challenges.

We tend to think of courage as a momentary affection, something we call upon or summon for extraordinary situations. So it’s not surprising that normal conversation probably doesn’t reveal the presence of courage in our hearts. But the things we *do* talk about, as they reveal the fullness of our hearts, can help us to know whether, when push comes to shove, we will have the courage we need as the situation requires it. If our conversations revolve mostly around ourselves and our daily occupations and preoccupations, and if there is little talk about the Lord and His Kingdom, promises, and glory, then it’s likely our hearts are full of trivial affections, such as complacency and self-interest. We’ll need to do some work on our hearts to make sure the

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courage we need for obeying and glorifying God is there when we need it.

Christian courage

If we want courage to serve us well, and to move us to act as followers of Christ in every situation, then we shall have to sharpen the focus and build up the treasury of our hearts.

We can nurture Christian courage by making sure that we fear, love, and delight in the Lord above all else, that we love others with the love of Christ, and that we are zealous for the truth and glory of God at all times, and in every situation. The more we give thanks to the Lord in every situation, and focus on Christ exalted and His Kingdom coming as our great hope, the more we may expect to have courage at the ready, to act in line with the mind of Christ and the heart of God's Spirit.

When these affections represent the fullness of our hearts, we will talk about the things of Christ more consistently and with more evident joy and delight. And when that is the case, anything that threatens these cherished values and priorities, or offers us the opportunity to express them, can spark within us the fires of Christian courage.

For reflection

1. How do people decide what their values and priorities in life should be? What are some ways these come to expression in their lives?
2. Many Christians seem to lack courage when it comes to talking with others about their faith. Why do you suppose this is so?
3. Is there a difference between courage *per se* and *Christian* courage?

Next steps – Preparation: Try it yourself: Monitor your conversations for a week or so. Download the free worksheet, “The Time of Your Lives” ([click here](#)) and follow the instructions. What comes out as representing the fullness of your heart? Is that fullness sufficient to engender courage whenever it might be required?

2 Christian Courage

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3.20, 21

A powerful affection

Courage is a powerful affection. It flows from the primary affections of fear of God, love for others, thanksgiving, and hope, and it brings together a wide range of other affections – love, devotion, even anger at times – into a single motivating power within us.

Courage can lead us to say or do things we might never have dared to think possible. In that sense, courage has the power to take us *beyond* ourselves into realms of action that we do not typically pursue, but that shape and mold us, to become more or other than what we've ever been before.

But courage in and of itself is not necessarily a good thing. Lots of people over the years have shown great courage for unjust causes and improper ends. *Mere* courage – a power that works within us to enable us to overcome fears and surmount challenges – is not what the Christian should be seeking. The Christian wants the treasury of his heart to be filled with distinctly *Christian* courage.

But what do we mean by that? We can approach an understanding of Christian courage from a variety of angles, and we shall do so in subsequent installments in this series. Most importantly, however, we need to understand that Christian courage – the ability to overcome fears and surmount challenges in the name of Christ and for the sake of His Kingdom – *Christian* courage is a work of the Spirit of God, Who dwells within each believer.

A work of God's Spirit

Why must this be so? Why do we need a work of the Spirit of God to move us to acts of Christian courage? Can't we just gin up courage whenever we need it, like the Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz*? Why must we have God at work within us, willing and working, so that we may act out of brave hearts as the situation requires?

A couple of reasons: First, we are not *naturally* courageous – at least, not in the right directions. By nature, we are self-interested and self-protecting. If it were otherwise, we would not have to be commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves; we just would.

But we don't. Love must be learned, and so also, Christian courage. We must be *taught* the proper ends toward which courage should be directed. Slicing off an unarmed servant's ear in a dark garden is not the kind of Christian courage we require. Standing firm when others accuse us of being followers of Jesus, especially when taking such a stand is not convenient, or perhaps safe, that requires courage. Peter was not courageous in the garden of Gethsemane, and he was not courageous in denying the Lord three times. But he would become one of the most courageous Christians of his generation. He had yet to learn the true nature of Christian courage, which the Lord was at pains to teach him through these patent failures of courage.

But beyond *learning* about courage, we need the power of God if we are to act courageously. Again, by nature we do not act courageously, whether by word or deed. But if we can *learn* the true nature of Christian courage – what it is, where it comes from, why it matters, and how to express it – then, when the opportunity for courage arises, we can draw on the Spirit of God to take us *beyond* our fears, *beyond* our comfort zone, *beyond* any previous experiences, *into* realms of word and deed that we can only account for as the work of the Spirit within us – words and deeds we've never dared to think possible or to ask the Lord to do through us.

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Exceedingly abundantly more

Real Christian courage enables us to do more – even exceedingly abundantly more – than we would ever have thought we were capable of in serving Christ and advancing His Kingdom. As we grow to understand the key components of Christian courage, and as we discover the means for engaging the indwelling Spirit of God, we will surprise even ourselves to see how God can work within us in surprisingly courageous ways.

Christian courage is a work of God's Spirit, so we will never take credit for it, never boast of being brave at heart, and always make sure to give God the praise, glory, and honor whenever any of His people act in courageous ways for Christ and His Kingdom.

Jesus commands us not to be afraid, but overcome our fears by looking to Him. He has overcome the world and everything in it, and as we grow in Him – in His mind and heart – we may expect to have brave hearts sufficient for every challenge and every opportunity for glorifying God and advancing His Kingdom.

For reflection

1. Give some examples of courage directed to improper ends. How does such courage differ from Christian courage?
2. Why do we say that Christian courage is a work of God's Spirit? What are the implications of this for becoming more courageous?
3. Meditate on Acts 1.8, Galatians 5.16-23, and 1 Corinthians 12.7-11. Given what we see in these passages, how might we expect the Spirit to try to *encourage* us?

Next steps: Where does courage come from? How can we become more courageous? Talk with some Christian friends. How would they advise you to become more courageous for Christ and His Kingdom? How can you help one another to grow in Christian courage?

3 Courage and Promises

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. Hebrews 11.8

Moving beyond our comfort zone

Is it possible to grow in Christian courage? I believe it is. In the power of God's Spirit, and in line with the promises of His Word, we can overcome our fears, looking to Jesus, act out of a brave heart, and, in the process, grow into Christ and His image more completely.

Christian courage – the ability to go beyond ourselves in the face of danger, challenges, or other opportunities to serve Christ and seek His Kingdom – is a work of God's Spirit. God's Spirit works within us to make us *willing* and *able* to do what pleases the Lord (Phil. 2.13). He is *able* to do in and through us exceedingly abundantly more than we've ever dared to ask or think. And He has the *power* to meet us as we act out of a brave heart, so that we do what pleases the Lord in every situation.

Christian courage comes into play when we move beyond our comfort zone into areas of uncertainty and even fear, where all we have to hope in is the Word of God.

The Spirit of God works in just such situations. Consider Abraham: God came to Abraham with a challenge sure to scare the wits out most of us: Leave your familiar home and family, set aside your career, forget about the religion you've known since childhood, and go somewhere you've never been before, among foreign peoples whose language and culture you do not know.

Now that's scary. But God moved Abraham to obey His call and to head out toward the land of Canaan, there to discover God's purpose and plan for his life. How did God do that? What did He give the Spirit to work with to engender such courage within Abraham?

Exceedingly great and precious promises

He gave him promises.

God made promises to Abraham, and they were sufficiently compelling to create a new vision in Abraham's mind, a compelling sense of mission, and the courage to leave his comfortable surroundings.

It's interesting to consider that Abraham knew the *promises* of God even before he really knew *God Himself* very well. He would get to know God over time, and discover Him to be infinitely wise and powerful – a God to be feared, trusted, and even loved – a God in Whom he could rest all his hope. But it was the promises God made to Abraham which made the initial deposit of godly courage in his soul.

Peter refers to God's promises as “exceedingly great and precious” (2 Pet. 1.4), and, indeed they are. The promises God made to Abraham included an *intimate relationship* with the living God, *influence* beyond anything he'd ever imagined before, *provision* for all his needs and *protection* against all foes, and the ability to channel the blessings of God to *all the people of the earth, for all time* (Gen 12.1-3). Nothing in Ur of Chaldees had anything like those promises to offer. Those were indeed to Abraham “exceedingly great and precious.” And by *focusing* on those promises and *moving* toward them day by day, Abraham gained *more* than what the promises held out in and of themselves: He gained fellowship and friendship with the living God Himself.

Caught up in the promises

Abraham was *encouraged* to go beyond what was familiar and safe, to venture in new directions of obedience,

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because he was captivated by the promises God made to him. The Spirit of God worked in the *mind* of Abraham to make those promises a constant focus and a powerful impetus to vision. He worked in Abraham's *heart* so that he *desired* those promises above all else. The Spirit lodged the promises of God in Abraham's *conscience*, where they became the default choices in all the decisions of his life.

And as the promises of God thus filled his soul, Abraham acted courageously to lay hold on those promises, and to lay hold on God Himself. Not that he didn't stumble, falter, or fear from time to time. He did. But as he returned to the Lord and remembered His promises, Abraham's heart was renewed in courage, and he became the true friend of God.

We can grow in Christian courage when we understand the promises God made to Abraham as promises to us as well (Rom. 4.13-25). Study the promises of God. Envision them working out in your life – what each of them would look like in your daily experience. Pray that God will make His promises “exceedingly great and precious” to you. As the promises of God begin to command your imagination and rule in your heart, you will find that your treasury of Christian courage is increasing, and you will live more consistently out of your brave heart toward those promises day by day.

For reflection

1. Meditate on Genesis 12.1-3. Summarize the promises God made to Abraham.
2. How would you expect to see each of these promises come to expression in your own life?
3. Peter describes these promises as “exceedingly great and precious” (2 Pet. 1.4). What does he mean by saying these promises allow us to “partake” of God's own nature? Is this what Abraham came to know? Is this what you expect for yourself?

Next steps - Transformation: Look at the promises God made to Abraham in Genesis 12.1-3. What would those promises look like if you were to begin to realize them in your own life? Then meditate on Romans 4.13-25. Make a list of steps you can begin to take today that will help you move more consistently – and with Christian courage – toward the promises of God. Share this exercise with a Christian friend.

4 Courage and Fear

Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land.
Genesis 12.10

Misplaced fear

The Christian life requires courage, because Jesus intends to take us *beyond* where we've ever been before in our outlook, desires, and actions as His disciples. You cannot follow Jesus and remain the same person you've always been. In Jesus Christ, everything is being made new (2 Cor. 5.17), and each of us is called to grow in the Lord, to seek His promises, and to take up challenges and step into opportunities that are beyond our comfort zone. The Lord intends us to be brave in our hearts, filled with gratitude and hope, and not afraid, so that we will follow wherever He leads and do whatever He requires.

Since the Christian life requires courage, we do well to understand and nurture it as a primary affection in our hearts. But not just *any* courage – *Christian* courage, courage that acts toward the promises of God, in the hope of gaining God and partaking of Him.

Abraham showed courage in fleeing the famine in Canaan and taking his wife to Egypt. True, it was not an *admirable* courage, and in many ways looks more like *fear*. He was bold to lie to the king of Egypt about his relationship with his wife. Lying to kings – especially those who are looked upon as deities – takes courage. But Abraham's courage was misguided. He feared the king of Egypt and so he lied to him to protect his own hide.

Yes, I know, that's not really courage at all, even though doing what he did involved a lot of risk. If Abraham's *fear* had been lodged in the right place, he might have acted in *true courage* in this situation, and remained in Canaan, waiting on and moving toward the promises of God.

Abraham's fear was misplaced. Fear, as we have mentioned, is one of the affections that sometimes plays into courage, enabling us to do things we've never done before. In this case, Abraham feared the famine in Canaan. He was afraid he might starve to death. So, rather than keep his eye on the promises of God and stay put, he allowed the fear of famine to move him *away from the promises* of God into the unknown terrain of a place beyond the one God had indicated.

Then, once he was in Egypt, Abraham feared the king, and feared what he might do to him to steal his wife. He probably rationalized his lie to the king of Egypt as a very risky and therefore courageous thing to do. But God had another take on the situation.

Two lessons

Abraham learned two things about God through this situation, and they set him on a course of knowing God and *fearing Him*, so that he would *not* fear to continue pursuing the promises of God.

First, Abraham learned that God has power over people and nations. God, we read, “plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.” (v. 17). Abraham learned that God had power over the creation, over human health and wellbeing, even over powerful nations and their god-like kings. God is powerful. And if God can do so much to those who displease Him, what might He do to us when *we* displease Him?

But Abraham also learned that God is gracious, because He spared Abraham the judgment he should have received at the hands of Pharaoh, and He enriched and blessed him instead – *just as He had promised He would*. So Abraham learned to fear God, but he also learned to rest in His power and might, as these work on behalf

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of those who have found favor in the eyes of the Lord. The first great promise God made to Abraham – that He would draw him into a blessed relationship with Himself – was beginning to be fulfilled, even though Abraham had lost sight of the promises and was living in cowardly disobedience.

Growing in the Lord

We will grow in Christian courage as we grow in our relationship with the God Who offers exceedingly great and precious promises to guide us in this life. Through studying God's Word, praying daily, looking to God and His promises in the face of trials and challenges, and seeking out the counsel of trusted Christian friends and advisors, we can live courageously for the Lord when push comes to shove in the everyday situations of our lives. His promises will be our supreme desire; we will know His presence with us always; and we will deny lesser fears – whether of circumstance or people – to live in the fear and love of God in all our everyday words and deeds.

Christian courage begins in the fear of God – and love for Him and hope in His promises.

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, as we know (Ps. 111.10). But the fear of God is also the beginning of courage. When we fear God more than the threats and challenges that confront us, and as we love Him, and rest in His grace and promises, we'll be surprised to discover how truly courageous we can be.

For reflection

1. What would be some examples of Christians living with misplaced fear?
2. Is it right to fear God? What does that mean? Why should believers maintain a healthy fear of God?
3. Why is it important to balance the fear of God with love for Him?

Next step – Preparations: Make a list of some of the things you fear—things that might distract you from following the promises of God in your everyday life. How can growing in your relationship with God prepare you to overcome these fears? Share your thoughts with a Christian friend.

5 Courage and Obedience

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. Hebrews 11.17-19

Promises and commands

What do we do when something God has promised appears to conflict with something He is leading us to do?

For example, God has promised to give His people a great name, a name that is able to influence others for good and lead them into the blessings of God. But He has also called us to bear witness to Christ, and we're not very good at that, and we fear that the people around us may not want to hear about Jesus. How can we bless them if we don't share the Good News? How can we influence them for the Kingdom if we never talk to them about it? But if we do share the Gospel, we're just going to make them angry and drive them away.

How can we reconcile what appear to be conflicting promises and commands of the Lord?

By acting in obedience, that's how. By taking God's Word at face value, and putting into practice whatever He commands, knowing that He is good and wise and loving and true, and hoping in His glory with thanksgiving.

Consider Abraham again: He was told that Isaac would be the one through whom all the promised blessings of God's relationship with Abraham would begin to flow to the nations and peoples of the world. Abraham surely must have taken good care of young Isaac – feeding him well, teaching him all the right ways to make a living and serve the Lord, protecting him from danger, and so forth. Now God was commanding the unthinkable. He ordered Abraham to take his son to a high mountain and offer him up as a sacrifice.

Faith and obedience

How was Abraham to reconcile this apparent conflict between the promises of God and this unmistakably clear command?

By holding on to the promises and acting in obedience. By taking the steps of obedience that would lead him to carry out the command of God, Abraham showed that he *believed* God would fulfill what He had promised, even if He had to raise his son from the dead! We hear this in Abraham's instruction to the servants who went with him and Isaac to the mountain: "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you" (Gen. 22.5). Abraham *believed* God's promise and he *obeyed* God's command.

Here is faith courageously at work along two tracks – the track of *faith* in what God has promised, even when we can't figure out all the details of how this is going to work out; and the track of *obedience* according to what God had plainly revealed.

Abraham must have felt great fear and dread in this situation, but he did not allow his fear to keep him from acting courageously. By focusing on the promises of God and taking explicit steps of obedience, Abraham engaged the Spirit of God for the courage to do the unthinkable. His act of courageous obedience *reinforced the promises of God* and *strengthened his relationship with the Lord*. And this is yet another way that we can increase in Christian courage.

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Moving toward the promises

Do you know the promises of God? Do you meditate daily on these exceedingly great and precious promises? Do you long above all else to partake of God through these promises, so that you know His glory and show His glory to the world?

Don't worry about figuring out how these promises are going to work out. God has His ways, and He works in His time. Our job is to stay focused and keep moving toward what God has promised. Faith in God and obedience to His Word: this is what creates a heart brave enough to live for Jesus, whatever He requires.

And when He directs us to specific acts of obedience – repent of that sin, get to know that hurting friend, share the Good News with your co-worker, give of your time and substance for this worthy endeavor – by keeping focused on the promises of God and taking the small steps of daily obedience, we will find the presence of God with us to encourage and strengthen us for whatever He calls us to do.

Courage arises from hoping in God and living toward His promises. And it is sustained through the fear and love of God, as it acts according to the revealed will of the Lord.

For reflection

1. What does it mean to be always “moving toward the promises”?
2. What are some things that can keep us from doing that? How can Christians encourage one another in this way of life?
3. Explain the role of promises and obedience in Abraham's offering of Isaac. How did the promises serve him? Why was it important to obey, even though that seemed to conflict with the promises?

Next steps – Transformation: God commands us to be His witnesses and make disciples (Acts 1.8; Matthew 28.18-20). What fears or other obstacles are keeping you from carrying out this clear mandate from the Lord? Make a list of the promises of God that relate to this mandate, and of the daily steps you can take in fulfilling it. Ask a Christian friend for support in prayer.

6 Courage and Witness

...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. Ephesians 6.18-20

Witnesses all

Let's note three things about this passage.

First, Paul understood that he was called to bear witness for Christ. Jesus had said that all those in whom the Holy Spirit came to dwell, all who believed in Him, would receive power to be His witnesses (Acts 1.8). Paul understood that to mean him. And if Paul was called to that mission, so are we, because he commands all who read his letters to imitate him as he imitates Jesus (1 Cor. 11.1). So, like Paul, we're called to bear witness to Jesus Christ. This means being always ready to give a reason for the hope that others observe in us, as we live in gratitude to God and love for our neighbors.

Second, notice that Paul understood that even this, even his bearing witness, was a work of God through him. God would have to give him the words he needed in any situation, words appropriate to the people and their situation, so that the reason he gave for his hope would make sense to them.

Paul didn't memorize simplistic Gospel outlines or pat answers to common objections. He understood that every witnessing situation is unique and requires different words for different people. And he knew that, as Jesus had promised (Lk. 12.8-12), God would supply the words he needed in each situation. Certainly he had to prepare himself, through study and prayer, and daily walking with the Lord. But he understood that, like the *courage* to bear witness, the actual *work* of bearing witness is a work of God.

Finally, note that the prospect of bearing witness for Christ was a bit scary to Paul. After all, he was sitting in prison writing this letter because he had been faithful in his witness for Christ. It cost Paul dearly, on several occasions, to stand his ground and proclaim the Gospel when people were pressing near, shouting him down, and threatening harm. Bearing witness for Christ can entail a certain amount of risk. Paul knew that he would need courage to continue bearing witness for Christ, and the courage to bear witness comes from God, as a result of our prayers.

Defeated witnesses

Many Christians are defeated when presented with opportunities for bearing witnessing, and that for one of three reasons.

First, they don't recognize the situations as they arise. They don't hear the longing in the heart of a co-worker for some relief from guilt or fear, or some measure of peace. They don't think about Jesus and the promises of God when others are prattling on about their plans and dreams. They're just not paying attention to the open doors of opportunity God presents to them. If they spent more time focusing on the promises of God and getting to know Him, they would be able to feel His nudges when doors of opportunity begin to crack open, and they would be ready with a timely word and an answer explaining the hope that is within them.

Second, some Christians don't bear witness, even when they see the opportunity, because they're afraid they won't "get it right." This is nothing less than presuming to do the Spirit's work for Him. His job is to supply the words; ours is to open our mouths and start talking.

If you're growing in your relationship with the Lord and always moving toward His promises, you won't lack

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for things to say whenever a witnessing opportunity arises. But you must take the step of obedient faith and begin speaking about your hope. The Holy Spirit will meet you there, and give you the words to go forward.

Finally, some Christians don't witness because they're afraid of what others will think or say. Or perhaps, what they might do. But that is simply to fear men rather than God, to love your comfort rather than to walk the risky path of obedience. It is to look the plain words of Scripture in the face and, rather than obey with a brave heart, to shrink back, talk yourself out of it, and give in to the fear of men.

Do the thing you fear!

The key to knowing courage in the face of witnessing opportunities is simple. As Jim Kennedy used to say, when given an opportunity to share the Gospel, "Do the thing you fear."

Afraid to bear witness? Start a conversation with a view to bearing witness, and watch how the Lord shows up to provide the words, fill your heart with love and courage, and enable you to do something beyond what you've ever believed or done before. God promises we will be able to bless and influence others, and He's given us the Gospel to that end. He commands us to be witnesses and make disciples. All that's remaining for Christian courage to flow in a witnessing situation is to do the thing you fear.

Start the conversation, and you'll be surprised at the courage, clarity, conviction, and persuasiveness you are able to show, as the Spirit of God, cued by your courage, gives you the power to be a witness for Jesus Christ.

For reflection

1. A co-worker asks you to explain your faith in Jesus Christ. What do you say?
2. List the three reasons why Christians are not bolder in their witness. Can you think of others? Do any of these seem to characterize your own life? How can believers help one another to be bolder in their witness for the Lord?
3. Meditate on Acts 1.8. Why did Jesus promise that we would "be" witnesses, rather than "go witnessing"? How does this relate to the matter of promises and commands, and the hope others see within us?

Next steps: This week, make a point to initiate a conversation with someone in your sphere of influence – your Personal Mission Field – for the express purpose of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Will you do this? What can you do to prepare for this opportunity? How will you trust in the Lord to begin, and to keep going?

7 Courage and Christian Life

And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. Matthew 14.28, 29

Lights in the darkness

Living as a Christian requires courage in every situation of our lives. It's easy just to remain comfortable and not at all inconvenienced in the life of faith; however, living this way is not what God intends for His people. God intends for us to stand out like lights in the dark world of sin. He has called us to be holy, and has put His Gospel into our mouths. He has sent His Spirit to live within us, and that Spirit leads us into the hope of glory which makes all things new in our lives. He has called us to be witnesses and do good works like Jesus did. We are to seek His Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit; and He commands us to build His Church, so that Jesus may be exalted among the people of the world.

If we're focusing on the promises of God, living obediently in the power of His Spirit, and bearing witness in all our words and deeds, we're going to stand out from the rest of the world. And we'll need real Christian courage, every day, to live like this for the Lord.

Living as a Christian is a lot like Peter, wanting to walk on the water. He'd never done that before, and it didn't seem likely that he could do so now. Indeed, it might be risky and even dangerous to try it. He had never known anyone who'd walked on water, and never dared to ask or think of it for himself.

Nevertheless, focused on Jesus and obedient to His command, he stepped out of that little boat and began walking on the water to Jesus. Now *that* took real Christian courage.

Consider Peter

Let's examine the process of living in Christian courage. Think of Peter: First, you *imagine* yourself doing something, or being something, that you've never dared to ask or think before. I doubt Peter had ever even wondered what it might be like to walk on the water. But he saw Jesus on the water. He saw Jesus doing something, being something, that he dared to believe could be true of himself as well. Jesus is the culmination of all the promises of God (2 Cor. 1.20). The more we look to Jesus, the more clearly we see Jesus and envision ourselves with Him, doing what He does, the more we, too, will begin to dream of things we've never done before, things that will make us more like Jesus. Indeed, Jesus promised us that the works we should expect to do will be the works He Himself did, and even greater, because of the great numbers of those who believe (Jn. 14.12).

Let your mind expand into regions of belief and obedience where you only dare go if the Lord gives you courage to do so. This is how your heart begins to be brave in the Lord.

Second, Peter *cleared his plan* with the Lord: "Lord, if it is You, command me..." Whatever it is you feel the Lord is leading or calling you to do, or whatever you envision yourself doing, even if it's exceedingly abundantly beyond anything you've ever dared to ask or think before, check it out with the Scriptures and compare it with the promises of God. Is this bold step I'm envisioning, for which I will need real Christian courage, consistent with the promises and commands of the Lord? Is this what Jesus did? Is it in line with the righteousness, peace, and joy that characterize His reign? Wait on the Lord and pray, until you are assured that what you are envisioning is something He is likely to condone.

Then, *determine the next steps* you need to take to begin moving *toward* the promises – toward *Jesus* – and *in obedience* to what the Lord has commanded you. Think small: Get up, put my hands on the side of the boat, first leg over, second leg over, stand up straight, take a step... Keep your eyes on Jesus, exalted in glory and

Brave Heart

advancing His Kingdom, and make plans to take real steps which mark out a path of obedience toward becoming more like Him. You can be bold taking small steps, and, as you do, your courage will grow and prepare you for the later steps to come.

If, that is, you can keep your eyes on Jesus. Don't let the situation make you afraid. Don't let the doubts and discouragement of your timid friends keep you from going forward. Don't be shackled by your previous experience or lack thereof. Get out of the boat! Get moving toward Jesus! And watch what the Spirit of God will do to embolden and encourage you for a life of daily obedience to the Lord.

Living courageously

Yes, living courageously can be risky, and sometimes even costly. But who wants to live timid lives of small faith? Not me! And hopefully, not you, either.

The waves and storms of this world are no match for the courageous Christian – eyes squarely focused on Jesus and His promises, clear in his understanding of what the Lord commands, and determined to take the daily small steps of obedience from which Christian courage flows for the exceedingly abundantly more and more that Jesus can do in and through us.

Brave hearts lead to bold and faithful deeds in the name of the Lord, and combine with fear of God, love for God and neighbors, giving thanks in every situation, and hoping in God's glory to create an expansive and adventurous life of following Jesus.

For reflection

1. Are there any situations in your life in which you wish you could “walk on water” a little more consistently?
2. Take one of those situations and apply Peter's approach to walking on water with what you might do to exercise Christian courage in this situation. Outline how you might approach this effort.
3. What are the greatest obstacles to your learning to live more courageously as a Christian?

Next steps – Conversation: What is your vision of what Christ wants to do with your life? Get together with some Christian friends and talk about this story of Peter walking on the water. How does this story challenge you? Where will you need real Christian courage to follow Jesus? How can you help one another to “be strong and courageous” in doing the Lord's will (Josh. 1.9)?

Brave Heart

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What is courage? How does it work in our hearts?
2. Explain the difference between *mere* courage and *Christian* courage? How can we nurture *Christian* courage in our hearts?
3. How can you engage the affection of courage at the moment it's needed – say, in a situation where you have an opportunity to witness for the Lord?
4. Explain the relationship between courage and the fear of God, love for God and neighbors, thanksgiving, and hope.
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned about courage from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.