

RESOLVED: Courage

1. **Under Pressure**

- Psalm 46:1-3, 27:3; Isaiah 12:2; Matthew 14:27;
1 Corinthians 16:13

2. **While Witnessing**

- Mark 13:9-11; Acts 23:11, 4:18-20

3. **Live Generously**

- Isaiah 58:10; 1 Timothy 6:18-19; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

4. Through **Faithful Obedience**

- 1 Chronicles 28:20; Mark 14:35-36; Acts 4:13



West Valley Church
1/26/20
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Resolved: Courage

“What are you afraid of?” Psychiatrists say that we all have fears, and for over 30% of us, those fears are actual phobias – fears that cause genuine anxiety in us. So let’s take a little interactive quiz. I’m going to put a quiz up on the screen that lists different fears. These are some of the most common ones, and I’ve grouped them into categories. For those of you who have smartphones, go to a website called menti.com, and type in the code, 52 10 92, and you’ll see that you can select which of these choices is the one you fear the most. You can only select one, so choose which one best applies to you. As you go onto your phones and enter your choice, it will show up on the screen and we’ll see where we are in these. Your biggest fear might not be on this list, so choose the one that is the *most* for you, even if it’s not your biggest. Don’t worry – there is no way of knowing which one you chose. Okay? Everybody have that information? If so, I’ll put up the slide. Ready? Here is the quiz. The first one you can choose is fear of flying and/or heights. If you have either one of those, pick that one. The second choice is public speaking. The third one is either failure and/or rejection. The fourth one is failure of intimacy and/or commitment. I guess I could have also just put, “If you are a man, choose this one.” The next one is spiders, bugs, or snakes. If one of those is a fear for you, pick that. Finally, the last one is confined spaces. These are from a list of the top biggest fears or phobias that people in the US have. We typically think that courage is facing and overcoming our fears, right? John Wayne is quoted as having said, “Courage is being scared and saddling up anyway.” General George Patton was a little bit more spiritual when he once said, “Courage is fear that has said its prayers.” Today we want to talk about courage, but the Bible defines it much, much differently than simply facing your fears.

We are in the third part of our sermon series called “Resolved,” because to be resolved the way God expects us to is going to take real courage.

The word “resolved” means two things: one meaning is to make up one’s mind; to have a firm determination or be *resolved* about something. The other meaning is when the solution for a question or dilemma has been arrived at or determined – then that question or problem has been solved, or *resolved*. This series is not about making decisions that you may or may not keep; unlike New Year’s resolutions, we’re *not* talking about decisions we *hope* to keep; we are talking about decisions that have *already* been made when it comes to being a Christian.

This is about *living in what has already been resolved* in your life. If Christ is in your life, you have everything you need to succeed in your Christian life – *if* you have the courage to do whatever God asks of you.

You are going to need to be ready in the coming year. There are struggles you will face, there will be temptations you'll need to overcome, there will be doubts and attitudes that you will want to avoid, *especially* with everything that is going on in the world today! Your family, your neighbors, your co-workers and classmates all need to see Jesus in you; *God has resolved for you, Christian, to be the presence of Christ in this world.* He's given you his Holy Spirit so that you can do that.

And it's more than just *your* life, God has a vision for our church and this community in which we live, and that vision is exciting, it's bold, and it's clear. As a church, we see it and are moving toward it.

This series, by the way, aligns with the ways we asked you to begin praying back in November, so hopefully it will resonate with you. This series is also preparing us for the *next* sermon series that begins February 9, because we want to have the spiritual sight, readiness, and courage for some incredibly exciting things that our church is about to engage in. I want to make sure you are aware that on February 9th we will embark on something together unlike anything we've ever done before, and it will take all of us being resolved to see it through as God will work miraculously through all of us together. I'm asking you now – please plan to be with us for all five Sundays from February 9 to March 8. Also, this is *so* important that we are asking you to consider joining a small group, even if it's just for the six weeks. We have groups ready for you that will be only six weeks long, so even if your schedule doesn't normally have room for a small group, please consider being in one for just those six weeks. Please. You can sign up at Starting Point in the middle of the foyer. Because these are adventurous days; this year we will launch a major initiative that will propel us forward in the mission statement that we have faithfully followed all these ten years that I've been here: *to introduce people to Jesus Christ, to equip people with a faith that works, and to live as people with purpose.*

We started out in this series talking about the importance of *resolved sight*, having spiritually opened eyes, focused on Jesus. Last week we talked about readiness – about faith, anticipation, and preparedness. Both sight and readiness will lead us to action, but it's going to require courage on our part to do the daring things that God asks us to – things that will take us out of our comfort zone and demand that we exercise great faith. Remember our definition of faith from last week? Faith is an “active trust and belief displayed through obedience...(In the Bible,) faith is typically understood as involving the whole self—mind, heart, and body—in a relationship with God that expresses trust and a grateful response to His loving initiative.”¹ In other words, faith is an all-in relational response of obedience to what God has already said, or established, or resolved out of his love for you. If you and I are going to have the courage we need, it's going to come from *that* kind of faith. We will have the courage to step out in great and risky ways for God because we trust him to take care of us.

So from that kind of faith, we can have courage. **Courage is “the quality of being able to act bravely under difficulties or in the face of opposition; being prepared to do**

¹ Kyle A. Roberts, “Faith,” in *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016).

dangerous or risky things in obedience to God, in the belief that he will strengthen, guard and protect his people.”²

In Jewish sacred literature, courage is listed among the four cardinal virtues (Wisdom 8:7). They are: self-control, prudence, justice, and courage. In contrast, the opposite of courage is cowardice, which is found among the mortal sins (Ecclus. 2:12–13).³ This is important because the opposite of faith is *not* unbelief. Hear me? The opposite of faith is *not* unbelief. **The opposite of acting on faith is acting on fear.** Notice I said “acting” on it. We all have fear, but what we don’t want to do is *act* on it. Because if you act from the basis of fear, that means that you really don’t believe that God will protect you. If you are afraid you are not going to get a job, you don’t have faith that God will provide for you. If you are afraid that your friends will reject you, you don’t have the faith that God will be there for you and will never leave you. If you are afraid you are going to be hurt, you don’t have faith that God will protect you. If you are afraid you are going to die, you are struggling with faith to believe that your life is in God’s hands.

Everybody is afraid at times; we all wrestle with fear. But courage means we don’t *act* on fear; we act on faith *despite* our fear. So maybe General Patton and John Wayne were on to something; maybe courage is saying our prayers and saddling up anyway – but not because we are somehow strong; it’s because we know *God* is strong.

God gives strength to his people. He enables them to be courageous through his gift of faith. God proves himself faithful to his promises and enables his people to trust him in everyday life.⁴ Courage means confidence in God! It means we will live out the Kingdom of God here and now, even when no one else around us is doing it. Even when others don’t like us because we do. Even if doing so causes us to suffer in some way. My goodness, if believers in Jesus in Iran are getting decapitated because they won’t renounce Christ, if believers in China are being monitored, arrested, and tortured because they won’t renounce Christ, then I think you and I can have the courage live out the Kingdom of God here in West Valley. By the way, even as we speak, those things are happening to Christians by the hundreds and thousands, just in China and Iran alone.

So as we courageously live out our faith here, there are some specific circumstances when we will see courage on display. For sure, it means we will show courage...

1. under pressure

Christians, of all people, should be able to face pressure with courage and continue to live out the Kingdom of God in this world. Listen to these words from the Psalms and see if they don’t encourage your faith:

² Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

³ H. D. McDonald, “Courage,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 234.

⁴ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.”
(Psalm 46:1-3, niv)

If you are ever under any kind of pressure, that ought to be a Psalm you could memorize. No matter how bad things get, we will not be afraid because God is always present and always ready to help us. That’s why King David could say:

“Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.” (Psalm 27:3, niv)

And David faced more than his fair share of enemy armies and war. Isaiah was a prophet that faced his fears when he had to speak to kings in ways that kings don’t like to hear, and yet he did it with courage:

“Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.”
(Isaiah 12:2, niv)

You and I are not facing wars or persecution. But we still face stress every day. We are still challenged to obey God in ways that go against our lesser natures and our desire for self-preservation.

Do me a favor, would you take a minute and close your eyes. Think about whatever fear you might have – whether it’s one we talked about already, or maybe it’s the stress of your life right now. Maybe you or someone in your family are facing a medical diagnosis. Maybe you have lost someone you love and you are afraid of being alone. Maybe you are unmarried and afraid of being alone. Maybe you are unemployed. Or maybe you are employed and not making ends meet. Maybe for whatever reason you are so deep in debt that you don’t know how you are going to climb out of it. Maybe you know that under the surface there is no depth to your marriage relationship, or your relationship with your kids or parents is strained. Maybe expectations and stress at work or school are so hard that you feel like you are going to snap. Maybe God is asking you to do something hard. Maybe you need to confess something to someone. Or to ask forgiveness from someone. Or maybe to grant forgiveness. Maybe God is asking you to begin trusting someone again. Maybe God is asking you to speak into your friend’s life in some hard but loving ways. Maybe he’s asking you to love someone who is very difficult. Maybe God is asking you to step out in faith in some way. Ask God for courage. Now, whatever that fear is, imagine that thing is like a stormy sea. Now, imagine that on top of those storm-tossed waters, you start to see someone walking. It’s Jesus! And Jesus walks right up to you and says, (Jesus immediately said to them,)

“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” (Matthew 14:27, niv)

Okay you can open your eyes. Jesus wants to literally *hand* courage to you; He says, “take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” You just need to take courage from his hand. It’s him! You don’t have to be afraid.

Living this Christian life is not going to be easy. There will be difficult times. There will be times that God will ask us to step out and it will be very risky. But take courage!

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.”
(1 Corinthians 16:13, niv)

Do you see how faith and courage go together? You can do this!

One of the areas that Christians especially struggle with courage in is...

2. *while witnessing*

For some reason, we find it hard to introduce other people to Jesus. We are afraid they’ll reject us, I guess. Or maybe we’re afraid they will laugh at us or label us as fanatics. I don’t know.

But listen: whatever you might think witnessing is, it’s really like this:

I don’t have any trouble telling you about my wife, Shelly. She is an amazing person – she’s very empathetic, she cares about people. She has a way with folks of all ages that puts them at ease. She’s so smart. (She was always a straight A student) She’s doing amazing things at West Valley High School. She helps students figure out what they want to pursue after graduation, and then helps them and their families find the resources they need to get there. She has helped create some innovative structures and programs for students to get a jump start on their career path with apprenticeships in all kinds of fields. She was able to revitalize the college and career fairs for West Valley and included several high schools in the Valley in ways that get employers and colleges and universities to come meet kids, at a level that’s never been done here before. The governor’s office and senators’ offices and the state superintendent of schools call *her* office to find out what we’re doing here in West Valley so it can be done at other schools in the state, too.

It’s not hard at all for me to tell you about her, because she’s amazing, I love her, and she loves me, and it would be awesome if you knew her!

Listen – Jesus is even *more* amazing than that! If you know him, it shouldn’t be hard at all to tell others about him. Even *if* people were to give us difficulty for telling them about Jesus, *so what?* You don’t have to like my wife if you don’t want to. Personally I think it’s your loss if you don’t. People don’t have to like Jesus – that’s their choice. But even if they were mean to you about it, think about what Jesus told the disciples:

“You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 13:9-11, niv)

Just take courage! When the Apostle Paul was in prison for telling people about Jesus, he found that Jesus was right there with him, ready to hand him courage. The book of Acts tells us:

“The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”” (Acts 23:11, niv)

Jesus is right there with you. He is handing you courage – take it! The Holy Spirit will help you; you must witness about Jesus whenever you have the opportunity!

That’s how the disciples had courage in the face of being arrested and being punished. When Peter and John were telling people about Jesus, they were threatened with arrest. The Bible tells us:

“Then they (the Jewish authorities) called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:18-20, niv)

We ought to have the courage to be able to say, “we can’t help speaking about Jesus!” Listen, it’s not your job to convict anyone – that’s God’s job. Don’t you try to talk someone into accepting Jesus. Also, it’s not your job to judge anyone – that’s God’s job. You don’t have to point out people’s sin. They are well aware of it, and if not, God will point it out to them when they are ready. It’s not your job to convert anyone – that’s God’s job. Maybe you’ll be fortunate to be there when it happens, but God saves people; you don’t. All you need is courage to introduce people to Jesus. Invite them to the places where Jesus is – including our church! Don’t worry about whether or not you succeed or fail – just take courage. Winston Churchill once said, “Success is never final; failure is never fatal; it is courage that counts.”⁵ That’s all you need to be concerned with is courage. Let God be concerned about success or failure.

That means we need to be courageous enough to...

⁵ *Winston Churchill, English Prime Minister during World War II. Men of Integrity, Vol. 1, no. 1.*

3. *live generously*

This is one of the ways that it is difficult for us in our culture to courageously live out our faith – by being generous with ourselves, our time, our resources, and our money. Now, there’s a reason that we struggle with this here in the US. Our entire society runs on capitalism. Think about it: our entire economic system is built on **the myth of scarcity**. The myth of scarcity is that whatever you have is not enough. Or that you might run out of something. Or that whatever everyone else has, you need it, too. That’s the premise that probably 90% of *all* advertising works on. If you stop buying, the economy stops growing. Those who are selling won’t make money if they can’t convince you that you *must* have their product or service. If you stop buying, our economy stops. But think how this is *so* opposite to faith. When God created us, we lived in the Garden of Eden where we had everything we needed. God supplied every need. Then we believed he was holding out on us, so we sinned, and suddenly the Garden of Eden wasn’t enough. Think about the things that the Bible calls sin: things like greed, avarice, gluttony, stealing; they are all built on fear that we won’t have enough - the myth of scarcity.

If you and I are going to live in Kingdom of God ways, it means we are going to have to be *countercultural*. We are going to have to live in generous ways and not be afraid that we won’t have enough. I’m not saying you stop buying things. But Christians cannot buy into the myth of scarcity! The Bible very clearly tells us:

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”
(2 Corinthians 9:6-8, niv)

We don’t live by the myth of scarcity; we live by the faith of generosity. We can afford to be generous with others who are not as fortunate as we are – and there is always someone less fortunate than you. Isaiah reminds us:

“...and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.” (Isaiah 58:10, niv)

In other words, one of the ways you can courageously witness to people is to be generous! And it’s not just with money; it is in doing good things for other people. That’s what we’re here for – to do good for others so they can see what it’s like to live in the Kingdom of God. In fact, listen to me: I “command” you to do good and be generous! Don’t worry, I’m not on some sort of Messiah complex. I’m doing what the Apostle Paul told Pastor Timothy to tell his church:

“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” (1 Timothy 6:18-19, niv)

Doesn't that seem countercultural? Instead of the myth of scarcity that says “buy everything you want and hold onto everything you have so you can have what you want,” courageous faith says “be generous in giving money and things away and doing good so you can grab hold of real life!”

If are going to be resolved in this coming year, if we are going to live the Kingdom of God life that Christ has for us, we need to live courageously under pressure, while witnessing about Jesus, in living generously, and finally...

4. Through *faithful obedience*

It only stands to reason that if we keep our sight on Jesus, if we live in readiness and we have courage, the only thing left for us to do is obey him! The words that King David spoke to his son Solomon ought to be ringing in our ears, too:

“Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished.” (1 Chronicles 28:20, niv)

We need to be strong and courageous, being all-in and living all-out for Jesus, and do the work. Jesus won't fail us or forsake us until all our work for his Kingdom is done! There should be nothing that stops us from living courageously for our King. Jesus is our ultimate example. Remember when he was praying in the garden on the night he was arrested? Jesus knew he was about to be arrested, tortured, crucified, and killed, and he prayed and asked God if there were any other way. He said:

“*Abba*, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:35-36, niv)

And of course, we are saved because Jesus obeyed the Father. It's not easy to have this kind of courageous faith. But I would suggest that the only real faith is courageous faith. If we don't have faith that is willing to obey Jesus, even to death, then we don't have what the Bible calls faith. I'm not speaking in hyperbole or exaggeration. I believe that. I believe that is what the Bible says. I believe that is what Jesus calls us to.

G.K. Chesterton was a great theologian in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and he once said this: “Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die.” We admire our military because they are willing to give their lives for their country. It takes incredible courage. They set the example for us. Actually,

every Christian ought to be setting the example for *them*. We ought to have such resolved, courageous faith that we are willing to be obedient even to death.

To live resolved results in radical obedience! Think about what happened with Peter and John. They had been arrested for telling people about Jesus. The authorities threatened them with death. But they refused to be disobedient. As a result, even their enemies were amazed.

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13, niv)

Don't you want people to say that about you? I want them to say that about me. And I want them to say that about you, too. I want them to say that about West Valley Church. Let's be resolved to keep our sights on Jesus in readiness, having the courage to live in radical obedience.

Pray