

All of us desire to be successful, to find peace and joy, to enter the “promised land”. Unfortunately, we have a tendency to think this is a matter of time and chance more than a matter of change and transformation. We must all face the fact that pursuing the kingdom of God, entering the promised land, is a matter of the transformation of our hearts, the rooting out of all that does not resemble God and the manifestation of qualities that do image Him. This transformation requires us to have our eyes opened, to see the parts of our lives that need to be re-formed, and the determination and patience to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as he works in our lives to sanctify us. All of this leads to the necessity of courage. Looking at and dealing with our faults and sins will always require courage, so let's spend some time this week pursuing it.

## Day 1

### Confront Fear

The first step this week in developing courage is to be honest about our fear. Deception, even self-deception, is always the result of fear, and it breeds more fear. It seems odd that admitting our fear can be a step toward courage, but anytime we face reality head on we are moving in the direction of courage. Courage is not the absence of fear but is doing the right thing despite our fear. Even though this observation is common, we often think pretending not to fear somehow makes us courageous. Confront your fears, really meditate on them. What is the worst that could happen? Is God in control of what happens? Does he desire good for you or evil? If this is part of his will to sanctify you, why not invite the consequences? I recently re-watched a movie where a character with a conflict with God is on a boat in a storm inviting the storm to be worse, encouraging the wind and the waves. He was certain God existed, certain the storm was from God, and certain God did not like him. How much more should we as Christians, who say we are certain God exists, certain He has control over creation, and certain He loves us, invite everything God has for us in the certainty of His good will in all things? You prayed for God's blessing; how can you be sure this experience of fear wasn't part of His answer? If you desire to be free from fear, how do you know that getting used to it isn't the pathway to freedom? When you've encountered people who are fearless like you want to be, are they people who have never been in situations that are terrifying, or are they people who have become hardened to the fear? Admit the fear, welcome it, make it your servant through faith in God.

Verses: Isaiah 41:10; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 John 4:18; Joshua 1:9

Prayer Topics: Freedom from fear, Courage, Presence of God, Trust in God, Joy

## Day 2

### Pray Truthfully

When confronting the chaos of our lives, we can be tempted to ignore it because it is usually confusing and frustrating. I am, as I write this, aware of a problem in my house. This problem will not go away on its own, and eventually I will need to deal with it. If I wait to deal with it, it will only get more difficult but since I am not sure how to deal with it, I am tempted to put it off. This situation is a perfect example of the chaos that comes into our lives, and how we talk to ourselves about it largely determines how we deal with it. It is easy to tell ourselves the job is too big for us or that it is trivial and doesn't need to be dealt with at all, at least not now. In understanding how we talk to ourselves, it is important to look at scriptures admonition to pray continually. When we become Christians, we become the temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Paul even states that to involve yourself in sin is to involve the members of Christ in that sin. Given this, I do not think it is a stretch to consider that our self-talk may have God as an audience, and should therefore be engaged in more carefully and truthfully. Our

thoughts and self-talk should take on the quality of prayer, realizing that being united to God means addressing Him respectfully and truthfully in every circumstance. Our self-talk should not be prone to exaggeration or deception, and we should address ourselves as if God is there listening and potentially participating in the conversation. What would I say to God about my circumstances? How would I address Him about the way I should handle the challenges before me that He has been instrumental in creating? Should I whine, complain, or exaggerate? Should I be dismissive and evasive? Maybe, instead of self-talk I should engage in more direct prayer about my circumstances, challenges, fears, and questions, addressing them with truth and sober-mindedness, forthrightly facing the challenges as they come my way. In any case, it will be difficult to face life courageously without carefully considering how I talk to myself, and how I talk to God.

Verses: 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Romans 8:26; Matthew 6:7; Jeremiah 33:3

Prayer Topics: Discipline in prayer, Joy in prayer, Truth in prayer, Perseverance in prayer

Day 3

Go Out on a Limb

It is very difficult to be more courageous without being more courageous. What I mean is, we must do more things we are afraid of if we are to become less afraid. Spend some time today making a list of things that make you afraid that you could conceivably do in the next month. It doesn't have to be something like skydiving or lion taming. Just pick a few things that give you some anxiety, maybe some things you have been putting off or avoiding. God does not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, so start living like it. If you are a very fearful person, start with things that are just mildly anxiety producing and work your way up to the really scary stuff. Psychological experiments have shown that if you wait until you must do them, these things remain frightening and even become scarier over time. If you go out and do them voluntarily instead, they become less frightening over time. Well, they don't actually become less frightening but you become more courageous. You become stronger, more resilient; you grow. This has great and far-reaching benefits for us. Because you are more courageous, your eyes will be open more and you will see things that need to be addressed that you ignored before. Because you now have the courage to address those things, you will, and you will grow in many unexpected ways. The alternative is to become more fearful over time, to give more of yourself to that fear, to have it expand and eat up more of your existence, missing the blessings that come from being courageous. So go out on a limb this month.

Verses: Deuteronomy 31:6; Psalm 27:14; John 16:33; Mark 5:36

Prayer Topics: Courage, Faith, Discipline, Self-Control, Perseverance, Love

Day 4

Meditate Courageously

What scares you? Is it realistic? Is it likely? Are you blowing it out of proportion as a way of ignoring other, real problems? Many times, the things we meditate on are not the things that should really concern us, but things we prefer to think about to avoid the things that could really do us harm. As a pastor, I have lost count of the number of times I have witnessed people obsessing over very unlikely events while certainties stalk them. The bible has much to say about our lives, and many warnings about dangers that are real. The bible addresses important issues like greed, fear, faithlessness, lies, and many other dangerous threats to our lives. The bible does not address many of the things we worry about and obsess over. The bible may not be as worried about your retirement as you are, for example. It may not

be as worried about certain stock prices, or whether you will get that black Friday deal on the television you want. It's probably not as concerned as you are over how you looked in the last selfie you posted, or in whether the latest fad diet will work. Most of the things we worry about or are afraid of are not nearly as dangerous as the things we are ignoring, things that the bible is trying to draw your attention to. The bible is not just a book to read, but the word of God to meditate over and apply to our lives. There is a lot lurking in the corners of our lives that is really, significantly, eternally dangerous. God's word wants to shine a light in that dark corner, and it requires meditation to do it. Reading God's word and really ruminating over time how it applies to your life and what you need to do about it is vital to our sanctification. Courage is indispensable to this endeavor.

Verses: Daniel 7:13-14; 1 John 4:1; Ephesians 5:8; Matthew 13:13-16

Prayer Topics: Vision, Spiritual blindness, Courage, Faith, Forthrightness, Joy, Transformation

Day 5

Follow A Leader

What do you do if you struggle with courage? It can be very difficult to bring ourselves to face our fears and take on the challenges that we have been ignoring. One thing we can do is to follow a leader. Paul tells us in scripture to follow him as he follows Christ. Who do you know that has courage? What do they do? Do that. If you know them well and they are generous of heart, ask them to help you. Ask their advice about how they got to be courageous and what they think you should do. If they are exceptionally generous, ask if they will do things with you. It is a lot easier to do courageous things when we are doing them with someone else, which is why your mom didn't want you hanging out with certain people. Even if the only benefit to the activity is that it requires courage, consider doing it with someone. Courage is contagious, from person to person and from one area of our life to another.

Verses: John 8:12; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:5

Prayer Topics: Submission, Trust, Following, Discipleship, Humility, Love