

Winston Churchill offered these words: “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”

Video: Here is an example of a kid with courage. First of all it took courage to sing this dumb little song about the books of the Bible but I admire him most for doing what he did at the end.

Might as well take advantage of the microphone to promote your country singing career.

Courage does not always come naturally in most people. The notion and urge for self-preservation pushes most of us into the flow of the mainstream where we can be carried along with the maximum acceptance and minimum risk. You may not even like where the mainstream is headed but you lack the motivation and courage to reach for something better.

When it comes to being a Christian, this lack of courage is known as nominalism. I would describe nominalism as being people who like the whole idea of being a Christian and may even like going to church occasionally, but they draw back from making any personal sacrifices on behalf of God’s Kingdom. Jesus never cut anyone any slack that didn’t have the courage to stand up for Him when it wasn’t popular.

“Knowing the correct password—saying ‘Master, Master,’ for instance—isn’t going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience—doing what my Father wills. I can see it now—at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, ‘Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our God-sponsored projects had everyone talking.’ And do you know what I am going to say? ‘You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don’t impress me one bit. You’re out of here. Matthew 7:21-23 The Message

Demonstrating courage has several components to it. You must be willing to oppose. You must be willing to be opposed. You must be willing to wait on God and you must never give up.

Let’s take them one at a time so that we can grow our courage and our spiritual lives.

1. Willingness to oppose: Establish principles in your life

What does God call you to oppose in this world and the culture in which we live? He has always called on His body to stand up and stand against the tide of worldliness and trends of ungodliness. Men and women of courage will face very real fears, threats and risks in order to contend against evil in the world. Remember this God does not call us to oppose people.

The apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:12-14: *For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*

¹³ Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. ¹⁴ Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness.

Christians will be called on to establish principles in their lives that are Biblical and more often than not they will run counter to the culture. It is critical that you develop your convictions and principles founded on the Word of God and then stick to them. It is critical that we train our children to develop and establish principles they are willing to live or die for. That may make us uncomfortable but we live and die as families and we stand alone on the Word of God as our foundation.

I don't think I need to spend a lot of time pointing out the fallacies of our Country and the world at large. All you need to do is step back from the current and popular entertainment options and view them through the lens of God's Word and ask Him to build some principles inside of you that will not just swallow everything that is offered. I shudder when I think of what some of you allow your kids to consume and the lack of morals they are being taught in the name of entertainment.

Christians will develop convictions about some things and they won't change if they are truly based on God's Word. How many of you know that we don't judge ourselves by other people, even people within the church. Our lives must be evaluated by the Word of God and what God wants us to do not what everybody else is doing.

In a Country and church world gone crazy politically, it will take a lot of grace to stand up and be for something that everyone else seems to be against. This I can assure you from personal experience.

In a recent NCAA cross-country championship held in Riverside, California, 123 of the 128 runners missed a turn. One competitor, Mike Delcavo, stayed on the 10,000 meter course and began waving for fellow runners to follow him. Delcavo was able to convince only four other runners to go with him. Asked what his competitors thought of his mid-race decision not to follow the crowd, Delcavo responded, "They thought it was funny that I went the right way." Delcavo was one who ran correctly. In the same way, our goal is to run correctly; to finish the race marked out for us by Christ. We can rejoice over those who have courage to follow, ignoring the laughter of the crowd. As the Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:7-8 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness."

There will be times when Christians have to be willing to oppose things. (Est. principles in your life)

2. Willingness to be opposed: Endure persecution in your life

The more we confront the status quo or the "normal" American lifestyle the more people may criticize you, marginalize you and even vilify you. Jesus taught this to His disciples from the very beginning in His Sermon on the Mount teaching found in Matthew 5. He said:

“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. ¹² Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.”

Authentic Christianity is made up of men and women who won't back down when it comes to righteousness, who will not conform mindlessly to generational currents. Courage is not blind but is directed very purposefully by God. Courage is not reckless but walks in total obedience to the Holy Spirit's guiding in our lives. Courage endures persecution as though it is normal and not as though it were something strange that were happening to us.

Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. ¹³ Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in His suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing His glory when it is revealed to all the world. 1 Peter 4:12 NLT

Persecution of Christians still exists and there is evidence that it is growing around the world. I am not trying to be an alarmist but I think the church in America at least the church that stands up for moral truth, that stands for the sanctity of life and the sanctity of marriage will become increasingly viewed as intolerant and as a threat to society. I think Christians that hold to the Word of God as the unchanging word and unchallenged word will be less and less tolerated in the years that lie ahead.

Two California chaplains filed suit against the secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), alleging that they had been forced out of a training and placement program because of their Christian faith.

Chaplains Major Steven Firtko and Lieutenant Commander Dan Klender state that they were repeatedly harassed and threatened while enrolled in the San Diego Clinical Pastoral Education Center program last fall and winter. The men claim that their instructor/supervisor, Nancy Dietsch, hassled them throughout their time at the center over their Biblical beliefs.

Firtko and Klender outline that they were informed during the classroom instruction period that both Dietsch and the VA “do not allow chaplains to pray in Jesus’ name in public ceremonies.” When they attempted to quote Scripture during class discussions, they were personally reprimanded. “Ms. Dietsch informed the class she believes God could be a man or woman.” Chaplain Firtko [then] recited the Lord’s Prayer, stating, ‘Our Father, who art in Heaven,’ the [lawsuit](#) states. “In response, Ms. Dietsch angrily pounded her fist on the table and shouted, ‘Do not quote Scripture in this class!’”

It's not just the ACLU anymore; Our U.S. government is proactively pushing Christian influence out the door.

Liberty Institute Founder Kelly Shackelford, of the recent hike in reported incidents of persecution. “I have been doing these types of cases for almost 25 years now. I have never seen the levels of attacks like these and how quickly they are now proliferating.”

Shackelford says government, from schools to social programs, is the ringleader.

“There are children being prohibited from writing Merry Christmas to the soldiers, senior citizens being banned from praying over their meals in the Senior Center, the VA banning the mention of God in military funerals, numerous attempts to have veterans memorials torn down if they have any religious symbols such as a cross, and I could go on and on,” Shackelford said.

Just how committed to Christ are you? I’ve got to tell you there are times when I want to walk away from the church and where it seems to be headed and find a body of people completely sold out to God and determined to go His way no matter what it might cost. A people that will rise above being schooled by this world and believing the lies of society and even the church in some cases that tell us that the how we live doesn’t matter. That God is not a jealous and demanding God; that there is no such thing as eternal punishment. That all roads lead to God.

John Wesley said it best: *“Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on Earth.”*

An early Christian leader named Tertullian (164-200AD) declared: “Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust. The more you mow us down, the more we grow, for the seed of the church is the blood of the Christians. Every single drop of our blood springs up, in some thirty, in some sixty and in some and hundred-fold.”

There are times in our lives when we must make a stand. There is no room to give in to the urge to cut and run in cowardly retreat!

3. Willingness to wait: Embrace patience in your life

There is a fascinating story in the Old Testament book of Zechariah. It’s the story of a man named Joshua. Not the one you may be thinking of. Not the one that marched around the walls of Jericho but another Joshua that lived many years later. This Joshua was a guy that helped Ezra and Nehemiah lead fifty thousand Jews out of exile in Persia. That effort took an amazing amount of courage. For most of these fifty thousand Jews it meant uprooting them from the only life most of them had ever known. They were to face uncertain dangers and no real promise once they got back home. Many even weighed the risks and decided to stay behind and remain in exile!

Not Joshua. He was prepared for the adventure and he was passionate about taking on the role of high priest in the temple. There was only one problem. There was no temple. The temple would have to be built and it would be costly, it would be a feat that many doubted would ever happen.

For Joshua and the courageous ones their vision burned brightly and they tackled the temple foundations with great enthusiasm. The foundation had just been completed when a new King came to power, and their work was stopped by force and threats.

If you look into the context of this story you will find out that the people were not discouraged at first. God had brought them this far and they were sure He would help them immediately overcome this obstacle even if he was the King. But that's not what happened.

A year went by and then five . . . and then ten. Fifteen years later Joshua was starting to lose hope that he would ever see this temple he dreamed of and had led people to anticipate. He had faced enemies but this incredible waiting was testing him to the breaking point. He was a victim of Satan's derision. He was a failure in many people's eyes. He hadn't been able to deliver what he thought was a sure thing.

And then God gave a prophetic vision to Zechariah. In the vision Joshua is seen standing before the throne of God. Well let's read it together:

Then the angel showed me Jeshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD. The Accuser, Satan, was there at the angel's right hand, making accusations against Jeshua. ² And the LORD said to Satan, "I, the LORD, reject your accusations, Satan. Yes, the LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebukes you. This man is like a burning stick that has been snatched from the fire." Zechariah 3:1-2 NLT

Satan is the father of lies. He loves to drag us down. I am sure he did his best to convince Joshua that he was a joke. But God stood up for him. Did God allow him to go for 15 years without success? Yes He did but when Joshua was at the end of his resources and at the end of himself God faithfulness kicked in and He stood up on Joshua's behalf. We must embrace patience when all around us we are faced with the possibility of defeat. Courage demands that we trust God with everything we are and in every situation.

Willingness to wait: embrace patience in your life.

(Ezra 5:2 reference to Jeshua or Joshua)

4. Willingness to not give up: Exercise perseverance with your life

Joshua's story doesn't end quite there. When you don't give up, God will eventually step and step in. God's clocks do indeed keep perfect time. He is never early and He is never late. He knows where you are and what you have been going through. You may not feel very courageous at the moment but hold on and hang in there.

Look at the rest of Zechariah's vision:

Jeshua's clothing was filthy as he stood there before the angel. ⁴ So the angel said to the others standing there, "Take off his filthy clothes." And turning to Jeshua he said, "See, I have taken away your sins, and now I am giving you these fine new clothes."

⁵ Then I said, "They should also place a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean priestly turban on his head and dressed him in new clothes while the angel of the LORD stood by.
Zechariah 3:3-5 NLT

He was used up. He was beaten down. He stands before God as an out of work High Priest covered over with the sins of a backslidden Israel; a priesthood that had taken wives outside of the faith and years of inactivity and even disobedience. But God stepped in. He takes away the stains of sin and the debris of life that had stained his clothing.

It's a powerful passage that describes Zechariah the prophet speaking up and suggesting that they put a priestly turban on his head. What a picture of staying true to God paying off. We have no indication that Joshua had ever turned his back on God but he represented a sinful and wayward people. It had nearly destroyed him "but God" came to his rescue because even though it looked impossible and hopeless he exercised perseverance and never gave up.

"When a train goes through the tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer." Corrie ten Boom

Missionary Robert Porteous and his wife were taken prisoners by Chinese communist bandits in 1931. This missionary couple was led to a lonely spot on top of a hill where they were to be executed. The Chinese leader said, "This is the place." and the executioner took a long knife from its holder and raised it above the necks of the courageous couple.

Certain death seemed imminent. What would you do in such a situation? This couple sang a hymn! Instead of crying and begging for mercy, the couple began to sing song of praise. The communist bandits stared open-mouthed as they heard Porteous and his wife sing:

"Face to face with Christ, my Savior, Face to face-what will it be? When with rapture I behold him, Jesus Christ who died for me."

These two missionaries were ready for death and did not take their lead from the men who held their lives in their hands. Instead they followed the leading of the Holy Spirit and worshiped their Savior whom they expected to see when their lives were taken from them. It appeared that this would be their last song. But, no order was given for their execution. The executioner returned the knife to its place, and the couple was released.

So what is it that you are being called to be courageous about?

⁶ Then the angel of the LORD spoke very solemnly to Jeshua and said, ⁷ "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: If you follow my ways and carefully serve me, then you will be given authority over my Temple and its courtyards. I will let you walk among these others standing here."⁸ "Listen to me, O Jeshua the high priest, and all you other priests. You are symbols of things to come. Soon I am going to bring my servant, the Branch.

God will always be with those of us that remain faithful to Him.