

Living Courageously

By Dana Chau

We need courage to face challenges and to benefit from opportunities. To recover from mistakes and failures. To accept loss and to rebuild. To obey God rather than to cave into pressure.

Courage as the absence of fear is a myth. Courage is often required only in the context of fear. ***A courageous person is one who does what is right in the face of fear.***

Matthew 26:36-68

This text records the night before Jesus was arrested and crucified. He wrestles with his life purpose: To die on the cross as payment for sin in order to restore mankind to God.

Jesus could have chosen not to die on the cross. But he obeyed God the Father. And obedience took courage. Here's what helped Christ respond with courage.

1st, Prayer.

For some people, prayer is a natural response to fear. We cry out to God, our ever-present help.

We read that Jesus was sad and troubled. Jesus was honest with God the Father. Jesus prayed, "If there is another way to restore sinful humanity to God, besides my death on the cross, I'm in favor of it." That's honesty in prayer.

Prayer that leads to courage does not ignore the reality of our emotions: Anger, disappointment, embarrassment, sadness and fear.

In Loving Your Child Too Much, the authors wrote:

"A good portion of the sin [disobedience to God] we commit comes from the choices we make as we attempt to soothe our discomfort.... People who are sexually impure are often trying to fulfill unmet emotional needs. If we hope to minimize our sin [obey God], we must see God as our ultimate source of emotional comfort...."

When we are honest to God with our feelings, we can more readily receive God's comfort. With our emotional needs met, we can focus on doing the right thing. To obey God.

2nd, Preparation.

Jesus prepared by exploring his options. He trusted God for what was not in his control. And He did what was within his control.

When we are afraid to do what is right, it may be helpful to make three columns on a paper and write on top of each column: What are my options? What is *not* in my control? What is in my control?

"My options?"

Prayerfully write down options. Consider possible scenarios for each option. This un-clutters and un-confuses the mind. Clarity fosters courage.

"Not in my control?"

I cannot control what has already happened. I cannot control how another adult will respond. I cannot control the weather.

I'm not fatalistic or passive. But I also don't waste my time, energy or emotion trying to undo or change what I cannot. These matters I pray for.

"Within my control?"

I'm in control of my thoughts, my words and my actions. I'm in control of the present.

Sometime ago, I was called to appear in a hearing as a witness of a crime. I knew that was my civic and moral duty, but I also didn't want to incur retaliation. So I called up a judge to ask how he minimizes the chance of retaliation from criminals.

He told me not to make matters personal. Simply answer the D.A.'s questions. Let the evidence speak for itself. And wish the best for the criminal.

Of course, there was no guarantee the criminal would not retaliate. But by trusting God with what is not in my control and doing what is in my control, I gained the courage to do right.

3rd, Purpose.

Jesus knew his purpose for life. His purpose was to take sinful mankind's place on the cross, as payment to restore people to God. Purpose focused courage on the right action.

A mom, whose son was deployed to Iraq, called Dr. Laura Schlessinger to ask how to cope with fear for her son's safety. Dr. Laura replied: "Everyone will die. Some will die of a car accident. Others will die of a heart attack. There is no nobility in their death. If our military men die in order to protect others, they die for a noble purpose."

The student who knows that his purpose is to learn, will have courage to say 'no' to cheating. The Christian who knows that his purpose is to make disciples, will witness for Jesus despite rejection.

The "Serenity Prayer" is a good summary:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

Courage to change the things I can,

And wisdom to know the difference.