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The DNA of Courage: Standing Tall for Kingdom Values

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COURAGEOUS

The DNA of Courage

Standing tall for
kingdom values

We all recognize key moments when time seems to stand still and destinies are decided.

The man God had chosen to lead His people into *the* land had just experienced such a moment of heart-thumping quality and fear-producing intensity. Joshua was restless. Israel had made camp at Gilgal, about three kilometers (two miles) northeast of Jericho, after miraculously crossing the Jordan River and entering the Promised Land. Following the circumcision of all the males of a new generation, they were about ready to conquer the land. At least that's what they thought. Joshua must have felt less sure, for he was scouting out the territory around Jericho. He hadn't yet received his marching order from the Lord (Joshua 6:1-5), so he looked for the weak points in Jericho's defenses.

There were none!

Suddenly, his worst nightmares become reality. A man stands opposite him with a drawn sword, ready to strike (Joshua 5:13). There is no time to draw his own sword. Joshua decides to confront the stranger: “Are you for us or for our enemies?” (verse 13, NIV).

That’s a good question. When we face challenging situations, we need to know who is for us and who is against us. We watch judiciously. We listen carefully. We anticipate cautiously.

“Neither,” the man replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come” (verse 14, NIV). Joshua doesn’t need to hear more. He falls facedown to the ground and worships. He recognizes God when he meets Him.

FOR OR AGAINST?

Sometimes it’s easy to distinguish who is for us and who is against us. At other times this task becomes increasingly difficult. Issues are thorny; situations are complex; we suddenly find ourselves in one of life’s gray zones struggling to clearly recognize the line dividing right from wrong.

That’s when we need to meet our Commander in chief and pay attention to His marching orders. The first thing Joshua had to do on that fateful day was to take off his sandals. No intricate discussion of military strategies. No specifics of the upcoming battle. “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy” (verse 15).

Here is something we can learn. When we encounter our Creator, our Saviour, and our Commander in chief we stop everything—and worship. We rest in Him instead of pacing around restlessly, wondering what to do next. We pay attention to the Word (revealed in Scripture and communicated through the

ministry of the Spirit)—then we begin to understand God’s values and discern the moments we need to stand courageous.

WHY US?

“Why us and why now?” was a relevant question in sixth century B.C. Jerusalem. The world was changing profoundly, and it felt as if Jerusalem was right in the crosshairs of disaster. Daniel and his three friends, all of them teenagers, were on their way to Babylon, swept away from family, home, and nation. They had been selected for reeducation and training. Babylon’s new king, Nebuchadnezzar II, wanted to build his own administrative elite. They must have gawked incredulously when they finally marched through the monumental Ishtar Gate in Babylon, a huge city compared to provincial Jerusalem. Everything was bigger and stronger and better, it seemed. They were warmly welcomed at the court-connected academy of sciences. They would be well taken care of and eat from the king’s table.

That’s when Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had to make a decision. Should they eat from the rich and bountiful king’s table food dedicated to Nebuchadnezzar’s gods and risk defilement, or should they stand out like a sore thumb and risk losing their heads (Dan. 1:3-10)? How do we make these decisions when we face life-threatening consequences?

The four Hebrew teenagers began with prayer. Then they approached their supervisor with a strange request: “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink” (verse 12, NIV). Ten days to make a point. Ten days to wait for God to do the improbable—how can 10 days of eating differently make a difference?

They did. God honored their

stand. Their faith was strengthened. They prepared for other moments where even more courage was needed. The next time things would get even rougher.

HAPPY ENDINGS

Daniel 3 describes one of these moments. King Nebuchadnezzar had made a huge image that must have been inspired by the image he had seen in his prophetic dream (Dan. 2). Except that this image was completely covered in gold. *Babylon would never fade* was Nebuchadnezzar’s message to the world. It was a clear challenge to God’s revealed future—and it also represented a challenge to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who had been promoted to provincial leadership roles. Together with most of the leadership of the empire they were told to fall down and worship the image at the sound of an overpowering orchestra. Nearly 28 meters (about 90 feet) high and 2.8 meters (about six feet) wide—defiance against God could be seen from far off.

The music sounds, the crowd bows—but there are three young men who don’t join the crowd.

Nebuchadnezzar is furious (Dan. 3:13). How can these three Hebrews challenge the absolute ruler of the universe?

They can—and they do. They recognize that worship belongs only to God. Faced with a furious King Nebuchadnezzar threatening them with immediate death in the fiery furnace, they utter these timeless words: “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold

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you have set up” (verses 16-18, NIV).

We hear these words from the viewpoint of those who know the end of the story. We know that a fiery furnace did not kill the three young Hebrews. Happy endings are somehow built into our cultural makeup. Yet happy endings are not only found in fiery furnaces. Happy endings, when we are called to stand courageous, are not only measured in life and death, but are characterized by faithfulness, authenticity, truthfulness, and unwavering commitment. In the midst of concentration camps and senseless deaths, courage inspired by God’s values stands tall—even if there is pain and loss. While foolishness can sometimes camouflage as courage, that’s not God’s way.

THE JESUS WAY

We associate faithfulness, truthfulness, power, and grace with the ministry of Jesus. But did He also reflect courage?

Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer offers a potential answer to this crucial question: “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39, NIV). In the face of imminent pain and separation Jesus is willing to submit His will to the Father’s will. That requires courage—and trust.

There are other moments in which we can see courage at work in Jesus’ ministry. The core values of His kingdom include forgiveness, long-suffering, and patience—all elements that mark true courage.

When somebody compels you to walk one mile with him, He taught His followers, go the second mile with them (Matt. 5:41). He spoke about the countercultural power of forgiveness—innumerable times, again and again (Matt. 18:21, 22). He lived and encouraged loving one’s enemies (Matt. 5:43-47). When He spoke judgment on the Jewish leadership of His time (Matt. 23:13-39), He had tears in His eyes.² While He never wavered under their unrelenting criticism, His heart yearned for their transformation. Godly courage does that.

Jesus also showed courage when He engaged outsiders and those considered less important. Women and little children felt at ease in His presence. He touched (and healed) lepers (Matt. 8:1-4) and visited the homes of much-hated publicans (Luke 19:1-10). He illustrated God’s special concern for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. Even when He told stories that illustrated God’s kingdom, it wasn’t the priest or the Levite who embodied kingdom values—it was the much-hated Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). While Jesus did not covet conflict or thrive on controversy, He did not shy away from putting His finger where it hurt. When He engaged His opposition, He did so with kindness and compassion. The punchline describing Jesus’ conversation with the rich young man who had many possessions opens with “Jesus looked at him and loved him” (Mark 10:21, NIV). Ultimately, the young man turned away saddened. His choice, at that moment, must have hurt Jesus. We all hurt when those we love make bad decisions.

Courage means to keep on loving them. I wish we knew the rest of the story. What choices did the young man make following the Resurrection morning and Pentecost?

THE COURAGE WE NEED

In an age of political correctness and hate speech, God needs people who can emulate courage in the midst of persecution, indifference, and irrelevance. Like Daniel and his friends, we need to know *when* it’s time to be countercultural. In line with Joshua’s encounter with the heavenly Commander in chief, this courage will bring us to worship and move forward in obedience—even if things don’t make that much sense.

After that encounter with God on the plains of Jericho, Joshua’s courage grew as he experienced God. Sometimes there were setbacks and challenges—moments his courage was about as thin and worn out as the deceptive Gibeonites’ frayed clothes (Joshua 9:4). But there was no turning back for Joshua. As he followed the Commander of the Lord’s army, he could even command the sun and moon to stand still (Joshua 10:12-14) and the impossible became possible. Living courageously and practicing godly courage as we expound on kingdom values that are countercultural isn’t always easy. What we say and what we do may not always be well received or highly praised, but as we follow our courageous Leader we can enjoy the sweetness of finding ourselves in the center of God’s will and love. ©

* See Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 620.

Gerald A. Klingbeil is an associate editor of *Adventist World* who takes courage seeing God’s enduring grace in this world.