

## **“Character Tour--Courage”**

We're in a series called “Character Tour.” What we're doing is looking at characters in the Bible and seeing their character. I become a better man, a better husband, a better father, a better pastor by looking at and emulating people of great character. And that's what this series is about.

Now we've defined character **“Character is an outward reflection of an inward connection.”** as an outward reflection of an inward connection. That means that what shows on the outside of our lives is directly linked to what is going on on the inside. What happens on the outside of our lives is a reflection of **who** is on the inside—our connection to Jesus Christ.

So far we've looked at discipline and endurance by looking at Daniel and Nehemiah, today we look at David and the character quality of courage. David had huge successes in life and huge failures. And in the face of both success and failure he showed courage. So take out your outlines and let's move through this together.

No one ever wants to be called a coward. It's one of the most despised of all human qualities. We will do almost anything to avoid being called a coward. Remember when you were a kid and somebody would dare you to do different things? You would do dumb things, stupid things, dangerous things, life-threatening things, all to avoid that dreaded word – chicken. You didn't want to be a chicken. We love courageous people. We despise the cowardly. In every movie, the bad guys are always cowards. The good guys are always courageous.

Usually when we think of courage we think of death-defying acts, heroic sacrifices. Firemen going into burning buildings and bringing out little children. We think of soldiers falling on a grenade to save their buddies. We think of policemen in the line of fire taking a bullet to save somebody else's life. We think of Holocaust survivors, Congressional Medal of Honor winners. Things like this.

But the truth is, it takes an enormous amount, a great deal of courage, just to face the ordinary challenges of daily life. It takes a lot to live and do the right thing without wimping out. Jesus said in John 16 **“In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous...I have conquered the world” (John 16:33, NJB)**. Notice that hardship is not an option. It's going to happen so don't be surprised. But notice even more that God can give us the power to be ordinary people of extraordinary courage.

Today, I want us to get real practical and look at the question: How can I live more courageously? I want to suggest to you three practical ways that you can develop courage in your life on a daily basis. Without running into fiery buildings, without jumping on grenades – how you can develop courage in your life in every single 24-hour period. The Bible tells us we can be courageous by owning up, standing up, and speaking up.

First, **“How can I live courageously? By owning up to my sin.** “Sin” sure is a word we love to avoid. We like to call it everything else – blooper, blunder, character defect, flaw, temperament, oversight, lack of good judgment. But the Bible calls it sin.

We're told in scripture that all of us have sinned and fallen short. And David was no exception. To get at David's story it's helpful to start near the end and go backward. You see, David, the great King David, was known by this title, “A man after God's own heart.” A man who loved God and served God, was totally committed to God. But to read his whole story you see a guy who really blew it, and I mean blew it, yet was **still** a man after God's own heart. You see, it was David's courage in the face of his sin that can help us be courageous too.

When David was in the prime of his life, well established as a powerful and loved king of Israel, he got lazy in his faith. Some scholars say that David was one of the smartest men who ever lived. He was an amazing warrior, a successful general and commander of armies, he was a scholar and poet and wrote many of our Psalms. He was a man of deep faith and a very close connection to God, but even men like this can fall into temptation, and that's just what happened.

One spring while his troops are off fighting enemy armies, he stays back at his palace. And one day as he strolls on his palace porch that overlooks the city his eyes catch a glimpse of beautiful woman bathing. And

in that moment David makes a decision that would affect the lives of many people. Instead of turning away, he stops to enjoy the view. Instead of doing the right thing and turning away, he thinks, "I'm the king, she's my subject, and what a subject! I have the right to look. I deserve a look."

We've all been faced with something similar. A temptation of some sort. We say, "Nobody else is around, no body will know, no body will ever find out, I deserve this, if I take a few office supplies from work, or download that porn, or have a brief tryst. Or undermine my coworker, or cheat on a test. Nobody will know." We all face temptation, and like David, unfortunately, we've all given in.

David doesn't just look at that woman, he formulates a plan to get her. He sends his people to find out who she is. They tell David that her name is Bathsheba...and that she's married to a guy named Uriah who is fighting in David's army at the time. David is so blind by this point that he takes the next step, knowing that it's wrong, knowing that she's married, knowing better. He has Bathsheba brought to him and they sleep together. Later Bathsheba sends word back to David that she's pregnant. David tries to cover up his tracks but it doesn't work. So David fixes the situation by having Uriah killed in battle.

Like I said, David really blew it and he paid the price. There were grave consequences. His son died because of his sin. When confronted he broke down, he realized what he'd done, he faced the consequences of his sin. Psalm 51 is his cry of repentance. **"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge...Cleanse me...and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow...Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me...."** (Psalm 51, NIV). That's a courageous prayer in the face of his sin.

The Bible says we have all sinned. 1 John 1:8 **"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"** (1 John 1:8). You don't kid anybody else when you claim perfection, but you might kid yourself. The Bible says the truth is not in us if we say we don't sin. But we hate to admit our sin. And this inability to own up to personal sin and responsibility is the great destroyer of marriage, relationships, careers. The inability to say, "It's my fault. I was wrong. Would you forgive me?" that has ruined more marriages, friendship and careers than you can possibly imagine.

People come up to me all the time and tell me things they'd never tell anybody else. When they start to unload a burden, a shame, a guilt, I admire them. It's hard to do. Their voices quiver, sometimes they can't help but break down and cry. It takes courage to own up to faults in your life. Courage is owning up to my sin.

And **"How can I live courageously? By standing up for what's right.** This takes us back to David's childhood. You see, from the beginning David had closeness with God, even as a boy, and that closeness gave him huge amounts of courage, whether that was fending off bears and lions from the family's flock of sheep, or standing up for what was right. David had courage.

So one day when he was delivering supplies to his older brothers who were on the front lines of a battle fighting the dreaded Philistines, David couldn't believe what he saw and heard. Goliath, a nine-foot tall behemoth of a man, was stepping up to the Israelite army and talking trash about the Israelites, and even worse, talking trash about God himself! Goliath was throwing down the gauntlet every day saying, "Send out your best warrior and we'll go mono-a-mono. Winner-take-all. Or are you afraid? Has your God left you? Or maybe your God is even afraid of me?" Little David hears this and asks why nobody is doing anything! The plain truth is all these big strong warriors lacked the courage. Those big strong warriors, including his own brothers, made fun of David when he asked why nobody was doing anything about Goliath!

So David steps up. He's too small to wear any armor. He's not strong enough to swing a sword. So he walks out there to take on Goliath with his sling shot, a few smooth stones, oh yeah, and he walks out there with God himself. Courage is standing up for what is right. Goliath makes fun of David, takes a few final potshots at God, David runs at him, puts a stone in his sling fires it off, it's laser-guided by God right into Goliath's forehead, and it drops him. A courageous boy with a sling shot, and a deep connection to God, drops a 9 foot, trash-talking, giant. Courage is standing up for what is right. Even in the face of persecution!

1 Corinthians 16:13 **“Stay true to what you believe. Be courageous. Be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13, NLT).** Today, very few Christians are willing to stand up for what’s right. This past week, probably where you work, or maybe in your neighborhood, or in your own family, or somewhere in your life, you’ve seen something done that was wrong. You knew it was wrong and you said nothing about it. You didn’t speak up. Probably in your mind you were thinking this, “I know that’s wrong because the Bible says it’s wrong, but who am I to judge? I don’t want anybody to think I’m narrow-minded or old fashioned. It’s not my responsibility.” Are you sure about that?

If you’re a believer, this is God’s word to good people. Ezekiel 3:18 **“If you don’t speak out to warn the evil person to leave his evil ways, he will die in his sin. But I’ll hold you responsible for his death” (Ezekiel, 3:18, ICB).** That’s one of the most sobering verses in the Bible. It says that if I know the truth, if I know the difference between right and wrong and see somebody messing up their life, and I say nothing about it, God’s going to hold **me** responsible. Who was responsible for the Holocaust? Hitler? Yes, but also everybody else who kept their mouth shut while it was happening.

In a crowd this size, I’m sure every one of us knows somebody who’s involved in substance abuse – drugs or alcohol. Many of you here right now know somebody who’s in the middle of an affair. It’s destroying their marriage and destroying them. You may know somebody who’s cheating and they’re stealing from the company or they’re stealing from the government. You may know somebody who’s stuck in the addiction of pornography. And you’ve said nothing about it. And the excuse that you’ve given for your cowardice, the excuse you’ve given for your silence is, “Who am I to judge?”

If you claim to be a believer, if you claim to be a follower of Christ, there will be times in your life when out of love you must care enough to confront. Out of love. There must be times when you gently, but directly, say to that friend, to that family member, to that spouse, to that parent or somebody that you care about, “You’re blowing it. You’re making a major mistake in your life. You’re on the wrong path. Because I care about you, because I love you, I’m going to confront you and say this is wrong.” You’ve got to care enough to confront. Courage means you stand up for what is right.

Where do you get the courage to do that? Where do you get the courage to speak to that relative, that friend, that co-worker, who’s gone off the deep end or is heading that way, about to make the mistake of their life? Where do you get that courage? Psalm 119 **“Let your love, God, shape my life...Then I’ll be able to stand up to mockery [in other words what other people think] because I trust your word. And as I look for your truth and your wisdom, I’ll tell the world what I find and speak out boldly in public unembarrassed” (Psalm 119:41, 45-46, Msg).** Circle “love” and “truth”. Love for God, and love for truth, and love for people is the motivation behind courage.

Finally **“How can I live courageously? Speak up for Christ.”] 2 Timothy 1:7-8 “God doesn’t want us to be shy with his gifts but be bold and loving and sensible. So don’t be embarrassed to speak up for our master” (2 Timothy 1:7-8, Msg).** In the New Century Version it says *“Don’t be ashamed to tell people about our Lord Jesus.”*

1 Peter 3:15 says, **“Always be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks you why you’re living the way you are and always do it with the utmost courtesy” (1 Peter 3:15, Msg).** You don’t use truth to beat people over the head. It’s not a Gospel gun that you fire at people, it’s not a club of Christianity, it’s not a Holy hammer, it’s not a doctrinal dagger that you stick in people. You do it with courtesy.

Many of you are thinking, “I know I need to tell my friends and co-workers, family members about Christ, but I’m no expert. I’m a brand new believer. [Or a believer for many years] I don’t know the Bible. I’ve never been to seminary. I don’t know enough to tell people about Christ.

Do you know enough to say, “Jesus Christ loves you and God made you for a purpose.” This isn’t rocket science. You can say that. “Jesus Christ loves you. He died for you on the cross to show it and God has a purpose for your life.” Listen, you don’t argue anybody into a relationship with God. You love them into a relationship with God. You express love for people and you build a bridge of love from your heart to theirs and you let Jesus Christ walk across.

A few weeks ago David Sharp was baptized and joined the church. He asked me to read a statement before he was baptized and he simply wanted to thank the church for being so open and receptive to him and

his family. But mostly he wanted to thank Tom Owen for being there for him. For encouraging him, being a role model, inviting him to go deeper with God.

Tom didn't bash him, or threaten him with Jesus, or belittle him with the Gospel, or make him feel small. He did just the opposite. Tom showed him love, and made David feel important to God, and just extended invitations. And David's life is renewed.

As I said, it's not rocket science. You just have to love people. You have to care enough to say "I don't know everything, and I'm not perfect, but let me tell what I do know. Come and see."

Courage is about owning up, standing up, and speaking up.

Every once in a while I'll hear somebody say, "Religion is for weak people" or "God is a crutch for spineless wimps" or "Christianity is for cowards." Whenever I hear that I laugh. The fact is it takes enormous courage to just become a Christian. It takes courage just to follow Christ when it's unpopular, to follow Christ when it's inconvenient. It takes courage to obey Christ when it doesn't make sense and everybody's going the other way. It takes courage to be ethical in the market place. It takes courage to have honesty even when it costs you personally. It takes courage to share your faith with an unbeliever. It takes courage to tithe. It takes courage to remain sexually pure in this sex-obsessed society. It takes courage to own up to your sin, and stand up for what's right, and to speak up for Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you a very personal question. Have you been courageous enough to accept Jesus Christ and choose to follow him? Have you been courageous enough to let him forgive you? Have you been courageous enough to let him be the leader of your life, to become a willing warrior? If not, let today be the day where you step over the line. Where you courageously choose to follow him, to be about his purpose for your life. You just say, in your own words, "Jesus, I'm sorry for the wrong I've done. Thank you for taking my sins, my punishment and giving me forgiveness. Please come and take up residence in me." Make a courageous step today. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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