

Connecting

Connecting to deepened wisdom and deepened relationship

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Courage

Chalice Lighting

Words of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross: “The opposite of fear is love. There are only those two emotions: love and fear. All positive emotions come from love, all negative emotions from fear. When you don't choose love, you choose fear.”

Check In

How is it with you today? How has the last month been?

Courage in the Proposed U.U.A. Article II Bylaws

“We draw from our heritages of freedom, reason, hope, and courage...”

Defining Moment

courage: the ability to do something dangerous, or to face pain or opposition, without showing fear; the ability to do something that frightens one. (Oxford Dictionaries)

courage: from Latin *cor* "heart" (from PIE root *kerd-* "heart"). Meaning "valor, quality of mind which enables one to meet danger and trouble without fear" is from late 14c. Words for "heart" also commonly are metaphors for inner strength. In Middle English, the word was used broadly for "what is in one's mind or thoughts," hence "bravery," but also "wrath, pride, confidence, lustiness," or any sort of inclination, and it was used in various phrases, such as *bold corage* "brave heart," *careful corage* "sad heart," *fre corage* "free will," *wikked corage* "evil heart." (etymology online)

Plato on Courage

Adapted from Plato's dialog, "Laches"

SOCRATES: Tell me, if you can: what is courage?

LACHES: He is a man of courage who does not run away, but remains at his post and fights against the enemy.

SOCRATES: I meant to ask you not only about the courage of the heavy-armed soldiers, but about the courage of cavalry and every other style of soldier – and not only who are courageous in war, but who are courageous in perils by sea, and who in disease, or in poverty, or again in politics, are courageous, and not only who are courageous against pain or fear, but might to contend against desires and pleasures. What is that common quality, which is the same in all these cases, and which is called courage?

LACHES: I should say that courage is a sort of endurance of the soul.

SOCRATES: I cannot say that every kind of endurance is, in my opinion, to be deemed courage. What would you say of a foolish endurance? Is not that to be regarded as evil and hurtful? Should we not say that courage is wise endurance of the soul?

LACHES: Yes, I agree to that.

SOCRATES: Well, wise in what? If a person shows the quality of endurance in spending money wisely, knowing that by spending wisely they will acquire more in the end, do you call that person courageous?

LACHES: Assuredly not.

SOCRATES: Or if someone is a physician with a patient whose treatment requires fasting, and the patient begs to be allowed to eat, and the physician is inflexible and refuses, is that courage?

LACHES: Such a physician is enduring, and perhaps wisely, yet not courageously.

SOCRATES: Or take the case of one who endures in war and is willing to fight, and wisely calculates and knows that others will help him, and that there will be fewer and inferior men against him than there are with him, and suppose that he has also advantages in position. Would you say of such a one who endures with all his wisdom and preparation that he is courageous? Or would you rather say that a soldier in the opposing army who, despite all the disadvantages of his side, endures and remains at his post is the braver?

LACHES: The disadvantaged soldier was the more courageous – even though his side has been the more foolish in preparation.

SOCRATES: Then you would say that he who in an engagement of cavalry endures, having a knowledge of horsemanship, is not so courageous as he who endures, having no such knowledge? And he who endures, having a knowledge of the use of the sling, or the bow, or of any other art is not so courageous as he who endures, not having such a knowledge? And he who descends into a well, and dives, and holds out in this or any similar action, having no skill in diving or the like? Yet those who thus run risks and endure are foolish, Laches, in

comparison with those who do the same things, having the skill to do them. But foolish boldness and endurance appeared before to be base and hurtful.

LACHES: I fancy that I do know the nature of courage, but somehow or other, she has slipped away from me, and I cannot get hold of her and tell her nature.

SOCRATES: Let us ask Nicias. Nicias, come and do what you can to help your friends, who are tossing on the waves of argument, and at the last gasp.

NICIAS: I say that courage is a sort of wisdom. Specifically, courage is the knowledge of what is to be feared and what is to be ventured, in war or in any other situation. That is, courage involves discernment of danger and of safety.

LACHES: Nicias, you are talking nonsense. Physicians know the dangers of disease. Husbandmen know the dangers of husbandry, as other craftsmen, too, have a knowledge of that which inspires them with fear or confidence in their own arts. Yet none of these are a whit courageous for that.

NICIAS: Courage entails grasp of not merely superficial dangers, but of ultimate dangers. The physician knows the dangers that disease poses to life, but sometimes death is to be preferred to life. Courage involves understanding ultimate good and evil. There is a difference, to my way of thinking between fearlessness and courage. Thoughtful courage is a quality possessed by very few, but rashness and boldness, and fearlessness which has no forethought, are very common qualities possessed by many. Many people call actions “courageous” which I call rash. I say an action is only truly courageous if it is wise.

SOCRATES: And the fear which you say the courageous wisely discern is fear not of the present nor of the past, but is of future and expected evil?

NICIAS: That’s right.

SOCRATES: But areas of knowledge or science (e.g., medicine, husbandry, military arts) apply to past, present, and future. So courage must also be concerned not only with good and evil of the future, but of the present and past and of any time. Therefore, courage cannot be concerned only with the fearful and hopeful, for they are future only. But if courage includes nearly every good and evil without reference to time, then courage, instead of being only a part of virtue, is all of virtue. We have arrived at saying “courage” and “virtue” are synonyms. This is not a satisfactory conclusion since we were seeking to define the part of virtue that was courage – what distinguished courage from other virtues, such as justice, temperance, reverence and the like.

Aristotle on Courage

Notes from *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III

Courage is the mean between *fear and confidence*. We mostly put the emphasis on fear, and think of the opposite of courage as being cowardice, giving in to fear. But over-confidence, leading to rash and foolish risk-taking, is as much the opposite of courage as cowardice is.

Of all the evils we fear, courage is primarily concerned with the most awesome of evils, death, and in the noblest of circumstances, in battle. Courage comes from willingness to die when it is noble, in the demonstration of prowess. Thus, death from, say, sickness or shipwreck, while not feared, is disliked since such a death does not allow display of prowess.

Fear. We might fear what we shouldn't fear: a noble death, poverty, disease. To be controlled by such fears is *cowardice*. We might also fail to fear what we should fear: disgrace. Or we might fear too little or not at all. Someone "would be either a maniac or quite insensible to pain who should fear nothing, not even earthquakes and breakers, as they say is the case with the Celts."

Confidence. We might have *too little* confidence and be too ready to despair. This is *timidity*. We might also have too much confidence, and thus be *rash*.

Courage involves: risking the right things (e.g., wounds, death), for the right motive (a noble end, defense of country, or friends), in the right way and at the right time and place, and with confidence.

Five imposters of courage are:

- (1) The "courage" of the *citizen-soldier*, who faces danger only because *either* he is ashamed of the reproach of his peers and wants to win honor (which is close to true courage because it involves virtue in the form of the desire to avoid shame and to obtain honor) or because he's afraid of the sanctions of the law (which is farthest away from true courage because its motive is not the desire for what's noble).
- (2) The "courage" of the *professional*, e.g. a mercenary, who, knowing the dangers, e.g., of war, seems courageous to those who tend to overestimate them. However, when danger is great, professional soldiers turn cowards, fearing death more than disgrace. The mercenary acts *merely from prudential reasons*.
- (3) The "courage" of *one who acts in the grips of passion*, without deliberation, for the wrong reasons, without choosing the mean, and without seeing the dangers ahead, like an ass who is hungry; but he is merely *pugnacious, not brave*. For although brave men are passionate, nevertheless they choose courageous acts (in part) for honor's sake, knowing the perils which lie ahead. Merely passionate people don't act from rational principles.
- (4) The "courage" of *sanguine people* who seem brave only because of previous success or because in altered mental states (e.g., drunk) are overconfident. However, when things go badly, they run away, while the brave one stands.
- (5) The "courage" of people who are *just misinformed about the dangers*.

Step 1: Ensure Thy Cause Be Just. Courageous service to a bad cause is still bad.

The Cause Makes All

Ryan Holiday¹

In July 2015 Gawker published a story outing a gay media executive with two children who was being shaken down by a male escort. It was one of those mean but titillating stories they'd rushed to print so many times in the past, the kind everyone else was afraid to touch. But now something was different – the financial and public relations realities forced Gawker's owner to pull the story. He tried to explain to the staff just how far they had drifted from what the public would accept, and what he was willing to accept as a gay man himself.

Objecting to any interference from management, the site's two editors resigned in rebellion. They would *not* be second-guessed by corporate. They would *not* censor themselves. They would pay with their jobs to insist on it.

We can grant that it takes courage to quit on principle, to blow up your career over a story. It's also obvious to anyone with a moral compass that this was the wrong hill to die on. It was a hill they shouldn't even have been on in the first place.

[The Charge of the Light Brigade, made famous in a poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson, was a disastrous British cavalry charge against heavily defended Russian troops at the 1854 Battle of Balaklava during the Crimean War.] As a French general watching the Light Brigade march unthinkingly, needlessly toward death said, "*C'est magnifique. C'est de la folie.*" (It is magnificent. It is madness.) The whole thing was madness, in fact. Who even remembers what the Crimean War was about? Nobody then really knew either.

Editorial independence is important. But to do what? For what *reason*? The Gawker editors couldn't have told you.

There were many brave soldiers in the Confederacy. Same goes for the British army in its wars in India and Africa. Or Japan as it defended the islands it had taken in the Pacific. You read about some of these feats and your jaw drops. Yet intuitively you know that there is something empty about this courage. It's empty because of how craven and wrong what they fought for was.

"Tis the Cause makes all,
Degrades or hallows courage in its fall." (Lord Byron)

Courage is not an independent good. Heroes have a *reason*. What good is a deed if done for its own sake? What weight does bravery have as a parlor trick or as an exercise of vanity? Or of unquestioning obedience? What if it's done for the wrong thing?

John F. Kennedy in his book *Profiles in Courage* (1956) highlights the political stand of Edmund G. Ross [US Senator, 1866-1871], who bucked his party and voted against the impeachment of Andrew Johnson. Of all the chapters of that book, it has aged the worst. It's always difficult to stand alone, but in this case, Ross was standing for the preservation of

¹*Courage is Calling*, pp. 200-03.

literal white supremacy. Worse, by resisting a controversial change at the time – the first impeachment of a sitting president – Ross helped set a precedent that has since made it insanely difficult to remove bad presidents from office.

The CEO who stares down incredible odds to further an exploitative, toxic business. The anti-vaxxer risking opprobrium and illness, literally going against the herd. The dictator who seizes power in a dazzling, daring coup. The police who resign in solidarity when an officer is punished for pushing over an old man in Buffalo. The soldiers taken into custody for refusing to testify against Second Lieutenant William Calley after My Lai. Courage. Hollow Courage.

As an instructor at the US Naval Academy explained: Jumping on a grenade only matters if you jump on a grenade to *accomplish something*, to save someone. The difference between raw courage and the heroic lies in the *who*. Who was it for? Was it truly selfless? Was it for the greater good? There is a logic to heroism, even as illogical as it is to override your own self-preservation.

“The Stoics,” Cicero would write, “correctly define courage as the virtue which champions the cause of the right....No one has attained the true glory who has gained a reputation for courage by treachery and cunning.”

It’s good to be brave. But the why, the where, and the when of it counts. The cause makes all.



Step 2: Pursue the Difficult. Doing what is easy doesn’t take courage.

Don’t Be Deterred by Difficulty

Ryan Holiday²

“One cannot find a great exemplar except in misfortune.” (Seneca)

Don’t worry about whether things will be hard. *Because they will be.*

Instead, focus on the fact that these things will help you. Our bruises and scars become armor. Our struggles become experience. They make us better. They prepared us for this moment, just as this moment will prepare us for one that lies ahead. If it were easy, everyone would do it. If everyone did it, how valuable would it be? The whole point is that it’s hard. The risk is a feature, not a bug.

Be like the athlete, knowing what a hard workout gives you: stronger muscles. How could you possibly believe that you *might* be able to survive this if you had not survived other things before? Would you believe that many of the gladiators in the Coliseum were volunteers? They wanted to see if they had what it took. We all need adversaries and adversity.

“Plenty and peace breeds cowards: hardness ever of hardness is mother.”
(Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*)

²*Courage is Calling*, pp. 31-32.

It's not bad that hardship is happening to you. It's good training. Besides, not everyone would even have the strength to see it that way.

This moment is a test. They're called "trying times" for a reason. It's good that it's happening now, instead of later – because later, you'll be better for having gone through it today.

You think it'd be better if things were easy. You wish you didn't have to take this risk. If only the leap didn't look so damn dangerous. That's just the fear talking. It's good that it's hard. It deters the cowards and it intrigues the courageous. Right?



Step 3. Comprehend Fear. Courage doesn't mean fearlessness. It does require facing -- understanding and managing -- fear.

What Everyone Needs to Know About Fear

Noam Shpancer³

Fear is a feature of your hardware, not a bug in your software. The fear system is like the pain system. We don't enjoy the experience, but it often turns our attention to important issues. There are times when acting from fear is justified and useful. If you stand in the way of an oncoming train, the alarm bells of fear will compel you to move off the railway—and everybody wins.

But most of the time, the things that scare us most tend to have three unexpected qualities:

First, the things we fear most are not the most dangerous to us. We fear snakes and airplanes. We don't fear chairs and french fries. Yet a sedentary lifestyle and high-cholesterol foods are killing many more of us than snakes and airplane crashes. Scary, in other words, does not mean dangerous.

Second, what we think we fear is not usually what we actually fear. Example: People who are afraid of flying let their children fly. Most people love their children. If they believed flying was dangerous, they wouldn't send their kids into harm's way. In most cases, what we fear is actually the fear experience itself, its unpleasant bodily sensations and attendant troubling thoughts. Most fear is fear of fear.

Third, running away from—and avoiding—things that scare us will in fact increase, rather than decrease our fear over time. This is because avoidance works like an addiction. People begin using a substance not to add a problem to their lives, but to solve a problem—to run away from some distress or discomfort. This works in the short term, because using quickly leads to feeling better. But life is long-term, and in the long term, using metabolizes; you need to use more, and more often, to get the same effect. Before long, instead of the substance working for you, you're working for it. And your life falls apart. The same goes for running away from the discomfort of fear. It is a problem masquerading as a solution.

So, what is one to do to manage fear correctly?

³<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/insight-therapy/202304/the-truth-about-fear>

First, you want to base your assessment of risk not on how scared you are, but on the facts of the situation. Always check the facts. The facts are your friends in this world, even if they are not friendly facts.

Second, ditch the habit of avoidance. Avoidance teaches you nothing but how to avoid more. If your only solution for the discomfort of fear is avoidance, you will avoid more and more and end up in a prison of your own avoidance.

Instead, you must learn to face and accept your fears. Fear is like a fussy baby. To be pacified, it must be embraced. Accept the discomfort of fear and learn to tolerate it, because life is like a diamond: precious and beautiful, but also damn hard. Periodic discomfort is a part of being and of achieving anything meaningful in this world. Remember: Discomfort is not the end of the world. It is just the world.

Accept your feelings. But when deciding on a course of action, don't rely solely on your feelings. While your feelings are important, they are mind events, not world events. And they often provide partial or distorted information. If you feel like a great driver, that's good for you. But I'd like to know the facts about your driving skill before I hire you to drive the new Lamborghini I bought with my university salary.

Instead, before making a decision, enlist sources of information other than emotions. Ask yourself: What are the values I want my decision to represent? What are my goals in this situation? What are the facts? What does the voice of reason have to say?

Consulting these sources of information, you can then make a considered decision rather than an emotionally-driven one. Those tend to be better, in the long run.

Finally, when dealing with fear, you want to pay attention to your mindset, focusing particularly on The Three C's:

Courage. Just as all of us have fear, all of us also have courage. The question is: Which of these will you choose to follow? Fear is an important consultant, but a lousy boss. Courage is a wise leader. Get behind it.

Curiosity. We can learn from children, who have all the reasons to be scared and are yet much more curious than they are afraid. When you find yourself thinking, "I'm scared," tell yourself "I'm curious" instead.

Caring. Freud said, "How bold one gets when one is sure of being loved." Nurture your relationships. It's the best investment you can make toward a good life, by far. Surround yourself with people you care about, and who care about you. Attach yourself to a meaningful project. Viktor Frankl said: "Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how.'" When you have a "why" you care about, the discomfort of fear becomes mere background noise. With love as your compass and truth as your light, you will never be lost.

What Exactly is Courage?

Glenn Geher⁴

We studied two measures of courage.

The “Courage in Action” measure. Suppose you work for a company whose mission is to create products that put the environment first. You find out that one of the main products is harming local water resources and affecting populations of various local species of wildlife. These are the findings of internal research that is not being publicized. How likely are you to do each of the following:

- Speak with a supervisor or high-level administrator about this.
- Generally, ignore the situation.
- Talk with others outside your organization about this situation to make them aware.
- Talk with others outside your organization to solicit guidance on how to proceed.
- Do whatever it takes within your power to rectify this situation.

The scenario presented approximates at least what people believe they would be likely to do when faced with such a situation. Would they act courageously, in spite of the obvious risks that would go along with such behavior (such as possibly losing one’s job, etc.)? Or would they, rather, turn a blind eye and mind their own business (arguably displaying less courage in action)? Our "Courage in Action" measure included three scenarios in which participants were faced with moral work-related quandaries that allowed for variable degrees of courageous action. People vary quite a bit on this measure. Some admit readily that they would simply ignore the situation, while others are adamant that they would blow the whistle relentlessly.

The self-reported traits measure. For this measure we asked people to rate themselves on eight traits:

- reputation as a courageous individual
- moral courage (focusing on “doing the right thing”)
- self-efficacy in courage (or the tendency to think that you are capable of engaging in courageous behaviors)
- physical courage (or the tendency to actually take physical actions to effect courageous outcomes)
- everyday courage (or the tendency to be courageous simply in everyday life)
- reactive courage (characterized by taking courageous actions in response to external events)
- proactive courage (which exists when someone goes out of their way to take courageous actions to ward off future problems)
- consciousness regarding courage (or whether people tend to report having courage in mind as they navigate through life)

Our Study. We designed a study to see what attributes in people are likely to predict courageous acts—and which attributes seem to do quite the opposite. Based on an online

⁴<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/darwins-subterranean-world/202309/what-exactly-is-courage>. Adapted.

survey that was distributed internationally (with a sample size of over 1,000 adults from various walks of life), we were able to discern predictors of two basic kinds of courage.

What Traits Correlate with Courage? Our analyses suggested that the following personality attributes tend to go with courageous actions and traits: extraversion, conscientiousness, open-mindedness, agreeableness, emotional stability, and resilience. These traits, in fact positively predicted scores on both the Courage in Action indices as well as the trait indices of courage.

That said, there was a critical variable that, in fact, played out very differently between the Courage in Action measures and the trait measures of courage. That variable pertained to risk propensity, or the tendency to engage in risky behavior. Interestingly, we found that risk propensity seems to be negatively related to self-reported courage. People who see themselves as risky scored relatively low on our measures of trait courage. However, when it came to Courage in Action, risk propensity behaved quite differently. People who scored relatively high on risk propensity tended to score relatively high on our Courage in Action items.

Risky folks tend not to describe themselves as courageous. However, when it comes to situations that demand actual action (such as calling out a supervisor for an ethical breach), the risky folks among us are most likely to step up and take courageous actions that may well come along with adverse consequences.

Courage as Altruism. From an evolutionary perspective, perhaps courage evolved to motivate people to take measured risks in ways that benefit not only themselves but also their particular tribes or groups. Sometimes a courageous act may incur costs for an individual while, concurrently, leading to benefits for those close to the individual (such as kin members and long-standing allies, etc.). From this vantage point, courage evolved the same way altruism generally evolved.

Bottomline. We found that courage seems to go with a broad suite of positively valenced personality attributes, such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, and resilience.

Importantly, we also found that risk proclivity seems to be a critical factor when it comes to different kinds of courage. When it comes to simply self-reporting courage, riskiness seems to go with relatively low levels of courage. On the other hand, when it comes to actual courageous acts, it seems that courage and risk tendencies go hand-in-hand.

So if you want to harness your inner courageous hero, I'd say to nurture your outgoing, open-minded, and resilient self and don't be afraid to take risks. You're likely to benefit along with those around you. If it weren't for courageous risk-takers in our past, we might not even be here at all.

Questions

1. Responding to Laches' definition of courage ("a sort of endurance of the soul"), Socrates first suggests that a foolish endurance shouldn't count, but then recounts examples where the more foolish person is the more courageous. What do you make of this? Socrates might have responded to the Oxford Dictionary definition (p. 1) the same way he responded to Laches' definition. When is doing something dangerous, or that frightens one, or facing pain or opposition, "foolish"? When should "foolish courage" not to be considered courage – and when should it be?
2. When Socrates engages Nicias, the issue is the relationship of courage to other virtues – for instance, justice (treating others fairly), temperance (moderation; self-restraint), prudence (wise care in providing for the future), reverence (respectful regard, tinged with awe, directed to what is worthy of it). How do you see these other virtues relating to courage?
3. Aristotle mentions disgrace as something we should fear. Is he right about that? How is lack of fear of disgrace a kind of failing?
4. Courage, says Aristotle, involves risking the right things for the right motive. Who are your exemplars of courage? What did they risk, and why?
5. How can you be sure that the cause for which you screw up your courage is truly a good cause? Can waffling uncertainty about the goodness of a cause lead us to fail to act courageously? How do we balance the need, sometimes, for urgent, immediate courageous action and the need for more information and reflection to discern the goodness of the cause?

Spiritual Practice

1. (a) Think of a time when you would assess yourself as having acted with more cowardice than you wish you had (that is, fear controlled you more than you'd have liked).
OR
(b) Think of a time when you would assess yourself as having acted rashly or with too much confidence (that is, you would have benefitted from a touch more fearfulness).
2. Write about the one you choose in your journal. Reflect: what would you now say to yourself to steer yourself away from that cowardice/rashness?
3. Share your story and reflection with your group.

For Families

Birch Spick, Faith Formation & Congregational Life Coordinator

There are so many things I am afraid of right now. Some of them are big and overwhelming, others are small and uncomfortable. All of them are things I wish I could get around rather than deal with them head-on. I am afraid of the future of our world. I am afraid of hurting friends and loved ones with the wrong words, or the wrong choices. I am afraid of moving

half-way across the country to a new place, where I will know very few people, and leave behind most everyone I have known and loved here. At least a couple of these things might be things you are afraid of as well. I know we can both think of so many others as well.

As I sit with these feelings while I write this, I am thinking of a sage saying of the Internet that has taken on meme-like qualities: “Do it scared”. It surprises me how much these three little words are actually helping me. “Do it scared” asks me to remember that there is more to life than whatever I am afraid of. That there are things and principles I value. That the world is bigger than even my greatest fear. That the world, and so many ways I am connected to it, is filled with Love. “Do it scared” reminds me that however great my fears are, the people, principles, and practices that I love and cherish are greater. They hold me, they have my back, and they strengthen me to trust beyond fear.

They also tell me that we must not, and need not, be brave for bravery’s own sake. Other lessons in this packet explain this. Hollow, posturing bravery will not give us the strength to face and endure the things we are afraid of. Only what we value and cherish, with Love at the center, will give us that. So I leave you with this question: “What is giving you the strength to be courageous?”

This month, we will read these stories in our Sunday services. Our children will explore them and their lessons more through games and crafts during class. Consider exploring these stories and their lessons at home with these accompanying questions.

Kobi Yamada, *What Do You Do With A Problem?* A child tries to run away from a problem but finds the courage to face it in the end. What helps you face your fears?

Carin Berger, *The Little Yellow Leaf*. A little leaf afraid of the unknown lets go of their fear. How can we find courage when we’re afraid of change?

Susan Verde, *I Am Courage*. A child finds the strength to face their fears, and help others face their own fears. How can we help each other be brave?

Janeen K. Grohsmeyer, *A Plain and Simple Beauty*. How the first Unitarian Flower Communion came about. What helps you appreciate what makes other people unique?

Check Out. What overall message stands out for you?

Chalice Extinguishing. Words of John Wooden: “Your Success is never final, failure is never fatal. It’s courage that counts.”

Connecting is produced by the First Unitarian Church of Des Moines for use in small groups. Each month (ten months a year) explores a different theological or spiritual theme.

Next issue: 2024 Jun: Hope