

Courage and Belief

“Courage!” The word itself inspires visions of history’s heroes. From battlefield generals to soldiers on the front lines, from firemen and policemen at work to astronauts in space, courage defines who we are and what we can become. The courage of others builds courage in ourselves. The events that call for courage and acts of the courageous that meet those challenges work in symphony with each other to call forth the best in us.

But some are courageous and some are not. Some answer the call and some just let the phone ring when the caller ID says, “Courage Calling.” Where does courage actually come from? Are some just born with courage and others not? Is there some DNA component that spurs some to courage while others rock back in the recliner? I’m convinced that courage has many sources, but most of them come from our family of origin and company we choose to keep as we mature.

But one of the roots of courage is often unrecognized and/or overlooked, even as we search for sources. As we realize that courage grows exponentially when we are with the right people, we must recognize that deep and abiding courage becomes profound when the one we are with is Jesus!

When Peter was literally with Jesus, he courageously drew his sword to fight a band of Roman soldiers (Matt 26:47-55). A few hours later, Peter was still with some of the disciples, but he was not with Jesus. His courage evaporated like a mist. He denied Jesus three times before morning! A few weeks later, Peter stood courageously for Jesus.

What made the difference? One thing: the presence of Jesus with Peter. In the Garden of Gethsemene, Jesus was there with him. When he denied he even knew Jesus, he was alone. When he preached the first gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) the presence of Jesus was with him.

WHAT? How could Jesus be with Peter in Acts 2? Jesus ascended back to heaven in Acts 1! But Peter remembered, and lived by, the reality of Matthew 28:19-20.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Peter knew Jesus was with him, “even to the end of the age.” Peter’s realization of the presence of Jesus gave him the power. Peter’s realization of that current reality gave him courage! Jesus was with him, even after His ascension but to put the power to work, Peter had to believe that reality.

We are reminded of Acts 27:25, “Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.” Paul inspired his shipmates to keep up their courage because he believed the promises of God!

Where is your courage? How deeply do you connect the realization of the presence of God with you to your ability to “be strong and very courageous” (Joshua 1:7) just as Joshua was, when he knew that God was with him (1:9)?

-Ray Wallace