

NO FEAR (PART THREE) BRENTVIEW

Back in August I was able to share with you two messages with regards to fear, and it was back then I asked you the question, *“What do you think is the most common command found in Scripture?”* In other words what is it that God asks or expects most from us? I told you then, that the most common command given in all of Scripture is summed up in two words: **“Fear Not”** with countless related commands like, **“Don’t be afraid”**, **“Be strong and courageous”** and **“You can trust Me”**.

Well this morning I would like to continue that thought with another question, and the question is this, *“Where do you see courage in its greatest, purest, most admirable form?”* Let me phrase this another way...where would you say you’re most likely to see courage that brings a smile to God’s face when he sees it? Would it be with the 12 to 15 people over the last century who have gone over Niagara Falls in a barrel? Is that courage at its greatest? Was it Evil Knievel, when he tried to jump over Snake River Canyon on a motorcycle, or the countless other stunts that have apparently left every bone in his body broken. Is that courage at its greatest?

How about a man by the name of Sergei who regularly consumed small quantities of toxic mushrooms, arsenic, and cyanide salts, and urged others to join him. Who during daring night-time excursions, would often be heard saying, *“I shall not die. I have swallowed poison for years, and today, nothing can kill me.”*

But one time after swallowing cyanide, he began to feel ill, and asked his classmates to fetch some water. But instead of drinking plain water, he dissolved the rest of the cyanide powder in it, and consumed the solution. Sergei was an intelligent student, interested in chemistry and anatomy. He earned a gold medal, and was accepted into two universities, but after this stunt he simply went into convulsions, slipped into a coma, and died without regaining consciousness. Was Sergei a man of courage?

Personally I think a little fear would have been good for Sergei. I think Mr. Fear would have been his friend.

You see I think too often when we think about courage, we think just in terms of dramatic risks taken for risk's sake. We think of skydiving, bungee jumping, tight rope walking, but the problem is that most of us are rarely in those kinds of high stakes, very dramatic do-or-die scenarios, and that's why I think too often, in our culture, we confuse courage with recklessness or being a daredevil, not what I read the Bible calling us to.

So in this message, I want to talk about courage for ordinary people, not simply the courage involved in going over Niagara Falls or off a cliff. Now...not that I'm against courage on those rare occasions where somebody boldly charges into a burning building to pull someone out, especially if I'm the one needing to be pulled out, but for this morning I'm talking about a courage that I believe God longs to see exhibited in the lives of ordinary people like you and I, which I might add when exemplified will probably never make headlines in the Calgary Herald, but more importantly I believe will bring a smile to God's face.

It's in the times when somebody is in a situation where to tell the truth would get them in trouble, and being dishonest would evade being caught...yet they tell the truth. It's the woman who is blind and ill, and lived mostly alone in a nursing home for 25 years, and chose to love others around her, giving away candy and flowers and spending hours singing rather than giving in to bitterness and despair. It's the individual who chooses to hold fast to an honest conviction even though it means standing alone; even though it means they will face criticism and misunderstanding even from people who know and love them.

For you see it's in the unpublicized moments, in the midst of routine days, in the lives of ordinary people, where the most important battle over courage gets waged. It's about your life and how you choose to live it on a personal level. And if you're anything like me, this is an area I would love to grow in. If I could get to the end of my days and have God look back on my life and say to me, "*You showed courage.*" If God would say to me on that day, "*Instead of following the path of least resistance, at least sometimes Glenn you demonstrated enough grit to speak the truth and do the right things and in the process risked being hurt...but you maintained focus, and you followed me with courage.*"

The Apostle Paul once wrote to a young man named Timothy giving him one of the great claims found in the Bible. He said, "**God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power.**" This is crucial...this is very important. When you find yourself experiencing the spirit of timidity, when you find yourself gripped with fear, and anxiety is like a cancer making its way through your body, eating at you, than guess what...that's not God at work in you, its not what God intended for your life.

God wants you to live in a spirit of power, to live with courage, because He gives a spirit of power, He never gives a spirit of timidity. So this morning we're going to talk about the kind of courage God delights in, a courage that can be found in the lives of ordinary people like you and me.

It's a courage I might add that doesn't simply come because you prayed for it the night before; no you can't read the Scriptures without recognizing that God may make the promises, but theirs always an expectation from God for our part of the deal. For example courage grows when we face what we fear and take some action step toward that fear in faith! God is always watching to see if we will step out in fear or faith?

So this morning we need to discover that action step, what it is that I need to do to move forward in faith, in courage, versus fear, thus were going to look at five areas where God wants courage for the ordinary person, and in the process of reviewing these I want you to leave here this morning picking at least one of these where you have the highest need to grow, and take a risk in this area this week.

The first one is Relational courage. God wants for us to experience relational courage. I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but I believe one of the primary reasons that people get stuck in superficial relationships is because of a lack of courage, because one of the main components needed to create deep community and intimacy is courage. I have experienced this time after time in my life. You know an individual that you need to talk to, understanding that things need to be said that will not be easy, difficult words, hard words, and chances are emotions will get tested.

And yet it becomes one of those moments you dread, that you fear, thus leaving one to procrastinate, to put off hoping that it will just go away. Yet time after time, when I have built up the courage to follow through on such a meeting, almost always it has created an incredible sense of peace and a stronger relationship that existed prior to that meeting. And the greatest part is, I always walk away knowing something deeper about myself, some of my own flaws and vulnerable areas in my life, and I have come out better for it!

I remember in one of my staff meeting I was having in my last church, I was going toe to toe with not only another staff member, but my best friend as well...the heated issue ...worship. For whatever reason, pride, stubbornness, well lets just call it being plain sinful, the tension rose to the point decibel levels were at a breaking point. I remember being so mad I was about to storm out of the room and show them by leaving...I find that technique quite...useless!

But low and behold before I made the first move my best friend quickly bolts upwards, (rats he beat me to it) but instead of heading for the door, he walks straight towards me...great I'm ready...bring it on dude...he grabs my face with both hands, and than of all things kisses me on the forehead! Talk about diffusing the moment...talk about humility...talk about courage! Here I was ready to deck him, out of love of course...and he pulls this off!

People, that only happens when someone's willing to take a risk in a relationship. That's relational courage. I don't believe most of us realize the need for courage when it comes to giving someone biblical love in a relationship as God intended it. Maybe you know someone who's drifting in an important area in his or her life.

Maybe they're drifting in their marriage, maybe they're focusing too much on themselves or they're having a problem with anger or some type of addiction. True love is love that is courageous enough to say, *"I'll risk the pain of speaking truth to you more than I want comfort with you...because I want you to grow and flourish as a fellow human being."* That is relational courage.

Now just a quick side note, I didn't just give you permission to blast people here. Some of you have to work real hard to speak truth, because tact is something you do not possess. Some of you, when it comes to this area of life, would be considered a bull in a China shop. If this is you...you need to hold back. If you're wondering how I would know whether or not I am one, if you are one, one of your favorite phrases with other people is, *"Do you know what your problem is?"*

Funny thing is people who ask this question really don't even want an answer, because their just dying to give you the answer. Your favorite mantra is, *"This is going to hurt you more than it is going to hurt me."* If you tend to be a blaster, hold back. You need wisdom. You need to think, you need compassion. But the kind of courage that some of you need more than anything else right now, that will delight God, is relational courage.

It's a kind of courage God loves – when ordinary people take relational risks, then make deep community possible, and allow others to grow. Some of you are in a relationship that's just stagnating right now, it's withering. The reason is because nobody's taken a step of relational courage in a long time. You've got to do it.

The second category of courage in the lives of ordinary people that God delights in is the courage to resist temptation.

How many of you have lied recently? Let me be vulnerable and share with you a time where I almost always lie. If you ever call me early in the morning and feel like you woke me up because I have that morning voice, and you ask, *"I'm sorry did I wake you up?"* Almost instinctively I always say, *"Oh no I was up already."* And guess what 95% of the time I wasn't.

"Why do I lie?" Why do we ever lie? For me in this scenario I guess it's to avoid embarrassment, there must exist within me some inbred feeling that sleeping in is sinful and having someone up before me makes it wrong for me. Yet reality is for most of us we lie usually to avoid pain. Usually it's fear. I'm afraid of what will happen if I'm completely truthful, so fear prompts us to lie. Fear is also behind why I lie in the mornings, I'm afraid people may think I'm lazy, that all I do is sleep all day, that I'm not working!

You see very often sin works that way. People are gossiping, and I join in even though I know it's wrong because I'm afraid of being left out. Or I hoard possessions because I'm afraid that I might be bored if I can't spend the way that I want to spend, or I might be insecure if I don't have a lot of stuff. Or I flatter someone because I'm afraid that they won't like me if I don't.

You go through the Bible, over and over and over again, if you look to discover what's behind sin, it's fear. Fear of being poor is what made Jacob deceive his brother. Fear of being unloved is what made Saul jealous of David. Fear of having to suffer is what made the disciples run away from Jesus, and made Peter, deny Jesus three times. Fear made them betray their deepest value to their best friend at his greatest need.

It was just plain and simple fear. If you look at most sin, yours and mine, the sin of ordinary people, underneath it, very often, you'll find fear. I'm afraid that if I risk obeying God, he will not take care of me; I will not be all right; something will happen that I cannot handle.

That's why the kind of courage God just loves best is when ordinary people are willing to resist temptation and just trust Him. Some of you are really struggling in your spiritual lives. Some of you are really struggling with sin. The question for you right now is, "*Will you have enough courage to resist temptation?*" And guess what, you'll never make headlines with this victory, but God will know, and you will grow.

In fact will you even have the courage to call your temptation for what it is...sin! We live in a culture that doesn't tolerate guilt, because guilt has the potential to take the fun out of life, so today's mantra is, "It's not your fault." Guilt goes against building up your self image, so words like sin, repentance, atonement, and redemption become outdated, and the new answer to life's issues are: people are victims, and victims are not responsible for what they do. Victimism has gained so much influence that as far as society is concerned, there is practically no such thing as sin anymore, just claim the status "victim". "I am sick" is much easier to say than "I have sinned."

Have the courage to call it as it is friends, 1 John 1:8-9 reads, "***If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.***"

The third area is the courage to pursue dreams. Ordinary people need courage to pursue dreams.

Do you realize that you don't have to teach humans to dream? Every child that is born into this world comes with a dream. Ask any little child, "*What do you want to do? What do you want to be?*" And they all have an answer. Every kid dreams about that. We come into this world with dreams. When I do weddings I see dreams. Every groom looks down the aisle, sees his bride, and he dreams, he dreams of how he's going to change. Every bride looks up the aisle, sees the groom. She dreams of how she's going to change him. We're all born dreamers. We just are.

Having a clear dream is core to who we are. Having a clear dream is core to what it means to be a human being. How about you? What do you dream about? What passion has God placed in your heart about why you're here on this earth? One of the saddest things in the world to see is a person with no dream in his or her heart. Somewhere along the way, they stopped dreaming. And yet I believe it wasn't always this way because every person arrives on this planet a dreamer. But there exist forces that kill dreams, forces some of you have met head on, and forces that crushed your dreams.

Maybe one of those forces was simply time, you've had to wait, and waiting can kill dreams, especially in a society that wanted it yesterday. Dreams have a way of dying while we wait. Or maybe you had another dream, but it was kind of fragile and other people killed it. Some people cheered you on, but others belittled your dreams, mocked them, and your dream was cut short. Maybe it was simply a case of an obstacle that killed your dream.

When roadblocks get in our way, we are very easily tempted to give up on dreaming, but what ever the case is for you, some of you have stopped dreaming somewhere along the line.

If you don't dream about your work, or about your gifts, marriage, or your church, I believe God is asking you this morning, "*Will you dream again?*" because I put you on this earth, whether you know it or not, for a purpose. But this is a fallen earth, and you're going to have to fight for the dream that I created you to realize. So will you do that? Will you have the courage to pursue your dream even if it is going to take time? Even though people get in your way, or don't believe in you, or boulders obstruct you?

God says, "*Will you dream again about your calling, about your purpose, about your character, about your relationships?*" Jesus connected on this level with His disciples, He changed the way his followers actually engaged life...He created an environment where His disciples began to believe the impossible and soon found they were turning dreams into reality. His became a movement of dreamers and visionaries called and compelled to dream of a better world.

Then there's a fourth kind of courage for ordinary people. That's the courage to make difficult decisions, the courage to make the hard call. Now, parents need this maybe as much as anybody, because throughout the course of our lives with our children we will encounter those moments and times where difficult decisions will need to be made.

If we are going to parent our children well, it will take courage. Thus there are times when tough love is required, when kids need to know that they don't intimidate us, and that there will be boundaries to their lives. There will be options to take off the table. There will be consequences for actions, for sinful choices that they made, and times where they will not like some of our decisions.

Maybe for you to be the kind of parent that will delight God and shape a human life the way it needs to be shaped, you need the courage to make hard decisions, to set boundaries, to establish consequences. Take initiative, because some of you have been holding back doing the kinds of things that you need to do as a parent because you don't want to go through the pain of conflict and being disliked. God says to parents, "***Fear not.***"

When you make a hard decision, when "you" do that – not your spouse, not your parents, not your boss, not your friends – when you do that, you get stronger inside. The willingness to make hard calls wisely, and with courage, that's what makes great leaders in the marketplace, great teachers, great parents, and great spouses. Some of you this week need to identify, "*What's a really hard decision that I've been putting off making?*"

Maybe it's at work. Maybe it's as a parent. Maybe it's in a relationship. Maybe it's in your personal life. But I'm telling you when ordinary people make extraordinary hard calls with wisdom and strength, that's the kind of courage God delights in. It's the courage to make hard calls. God is calling some of you to do that. Some of you are aware of a decision right now that you haven't been making. You can do that. It'll make a difference.

The final kind of courage for ordinary people may be the hardest kind – it is the courage to endure. It's just the courage to hold on and hang in and endure, and don't let age determine the success of this. Let me tell you about one six-year-old girl who went to school a number of decades ago, Her name was Ruby – Ruby Bridges. She lived in New Orleans.

When she was six years old, a federal judge said the schools in that city had to open their doors to African-American children. The day when little children would be separated because of the color of their skin was over. Now almost all of the white parents decided that if they had to let black children in, they'd keep their children out. They also said that if any black children actually came, they'd be in for trouble.

So the black children generally stayed home too, except for Ruby. Every day, six-year-old Ruby Bridges would kiss her mom goodbye and march off to school. Only she had two federal marshals walking in front of her, and two federal marshals walking behind her. You see she needed them because she had to walk through a heckling crowd into an empty school building – the only one that went to school. She had to walk through a crowd of people that shook their fists at her – a six-year-old girl.

They yelled at her, and they threatened her and her family if she kept coming back to school. Every morning, at ten minutes to eight, Ruby Bridges walked past all those people, with her head up, her eyes straight ahead. She walked into that empty school building to learn. Then she went home. Every day.

What's amazing about her is not just that she kept coming back. What's really amazing about her is how she did it. One white school teacher described it this way...she said, *"I saw a woman spit at Ruby, but miss. Ruby smiled at her. I saw a man shake his fist at her, and Ruby smiled at him. Then she walked up the stairs, and she stopped at the building, and she turned and looked at the crowd, and she smiled one more time. Do you know what she told one of the marshals? She told him she prays for those people – the ones in the mob – every night before she goes to sleep."*

A six-year-old girl kneeling by the side of her bed, asking God to help, not her, but to bless those people who are mad at me. There's a Harvard psychiatrist by the name of Robert Coles who wanted to know what could create that kind of courage, so he went to interview her and her family. He found that conventional psychiatric, psychological language could not explain this girl and her courage. He wrote a fascinating book called "The Moral Life of Children." In it this is what this non-believing Harvard psychiatrist said about this six-year-old girl, Ruby Bridges, about what made her the way she was.

He said, "If I had to offer an explanation, I think it would start with the religious tradition of black people, which is of far greater significance than many white observers have tended to allow. In home after home I've seen Christ's teaching, Christ's life, connected to the lives of black children by their parents. Such a religious tradition connects with a child's sense of what is important, as anyone knows who has been in a black church and seen the look of pain give way to the look of hope."

This Harvard psychiatrist came down to New Orleans to look at this amazing thing and said, "*I think its Jesus.*" Ruby was the little six-year-old girl who didn't really go to school alone... It wasn't the marshals who gave her courage and it wasn't the authority of a federal judge who gave her strength – not really. That is something that no government, no political or human power can do for her or for you.

There is no human resource. There is no amount of merely human strength of courage that can transform a heart like that. That takes Jesus. Ruby knew about Jesus. She knew that he understands all about facing hostile crowds.

He knew what it was like to have someone spit at him and mock him and threaten him just for doing the right thing. He never turned back. He never stopped loving the very people who were so ugly to him, and he prayed for them.

Ruby knew about Jesus. Somehow she knew that she was not going to school alone. So this six-year-old girl kept walking down a very hard road because she walked with a God who knows all about very hard roads. That's the courage to endure. Some of you need that courage so much. Some of you need courage, not because you're choosing to do risky thing, but maybe because you're in a situation you didn't even choose.

You have to walk down a road you don't even want to walk. God is saying to you, "*Will you trust me? Will you walk that road with me one day at a time, because you get the courage to endure one day at a time?*" Just think about the conversations you have had this week, how many times have you heard you or someone else exclaim " *I have this problem and I'm scared.*" *The biggest difficulty I face is "how will I be able to handle this problem if it lasts weeks or months or years? How can I figure it all out? How can I get guarantee that it's all going to come out okay?"*

The truth is, you can't. You can't. All you can do is walk down this road today. You can't solve tomorrow's problems. You can't carry tomorrow's burdens. All you can do is walk down the road today. But Jesus will walk down this road with you. So you'll need to ruthlessly discipline your mind to be rooted in today. Maybe you're deeply worried about your children and you want some guarantee about their safety and their well-being. That's not going to happen.

God is saying, *“Will you let them go? Will you trust your children to me?”* *“Whatever happens, God says, “Will you trust them to my care?”* Maybe you lost somebody to death, or someone to divorce, or there was some kind of a break-up, and you’re afraid. You’re afraid of never loving again because you might be alone. You’re afraid of never loving again because you might get hurt. God is saying to you, *“Will you take the risk of staying alive and of continuing to love even though you might get hurt? Because I’ll walk with you.”*

Maybe you’ve lost a job, or a financial position, or health, and you find yourself afraid of the future. God is saying, *“Will you keep believing? Will you keep risking and dreaming and growing?”* Because when God walks with you, life gets real different.

This one mother had a son who was really afraid of lightening. She’s in bed one night, and there’s this tremendous thunderstorm. She’s concerned about him because she knows he’s going to be really, really scared. There was this huge flash and a big clap of thunder. She goes running to his room. But when she gets there, he’s not scared at all. He’s looking out the window with a big smile on his face. He said, *“Mom, you’ll never guess what happened. I was looking out the window, and God took my picture.”*

When human beings perceive themselves to be alone in the universe, it’s a scary place to be. But the good news of the Bible is that you are not alone. I don’t know what road you have to walk this week or the next. Maybe it’s a road of deep aloneness. Maybe it’s a road of some failure. Maybe it’s a road of great pain. Maybe it’s a road of much opposition. Maybe it’s a road of an uncertain future.

I don't know what your road is, but what I do know is that every one of us has to walk down a road, and there are parts of that road that we don't like. But God knows all about walking down hard roads. When Jesus was on this earth, he walked down the hardest road of all. One of the reasons he did that was so that you would know, whatever your road is...that he's walking it with you.

The Bible makes this tremendous statement that God never gives a spirit of timidity – never. He gives a spirit of power. God delights in the courage displayed in the lives of ordinary people in unseen moments. He promises – he promises – to give adequate resources to all who follow him. But he only does it one day at a time. God's just waiting. Whatever your road is, will you walk down it with him? Let's pray.