

Acts of Courage
as presented by Lisa Bishop
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Day One

What comes to mind when you think about courage? You have probably heard it said that courage is not the absence of fear but feeling fear and choosing to act. I will be reviewing five acts of courage, and the first act of courage is taking responsibility. Admitting when you are wrong.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where something went awry? A conversation turns into conflict, a misstep turns into a mess, a project at work takes a turn for the worst.... And if you are honest, it was your fault but you didn't want to take the fall for your poor choices so you placed the blame on someone else?

Eve and Adam did that in the garden of Eden. In Genesis God had given them access to every tree in the garden pleasing in appearance and good for food except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. One tree was off limits when the rest of the garden was free reign. The serpent tempted Eve and at that moment of temptation she started doubting the goodness of God. She eats off the forbidden tree and Adam who was with her follows suit. What happens next is blame. When God calls out to them and questions their actions, we see that Adam's response is, "The woman you gave to be with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree so I ate." Then God asks Eve what she has done and she follows along with the game of blame and says, "It was the serpent, he deceived me, and I ate." (Genesis 3:10-13)

The blame game. It started in the garden and has a grip on us to this day. I wonder what would have happened if Eve would have taken responsibility for her actions rather than pinning it on the serpent? If Adam would have owned up to his error, how could that have positively impacted his relationship with Eve, with God? We see blame happening all around us. We are a culture of blame. We lack the guts to admit we are wrong. We more easily point the finger and make it someone else's fault. Admitting we are wrong takes humility. It takes risk. It takes integrity. It takes courage.

If you want to live a life set apart, admit when you are wrong. Take ownership. Admit how you played a part in a breakdown, miscommunication or mishap.

Is there a situation or relationship that is out of sorts in your life? Maybe your part in the breakdown is obvious. Maybe it's not. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the part you played. Then be courageous. Have a conversation with the people your choices impacted. Admit your mistake to your co-worker or boss. Take responsibility for your choices and actions that led to a friendship or relationship breakdown.

Choose courage over blame.

Day Two

Another act of courage is letting go of an offense. Choosing to forgive when you have been hurt.

Think of the last time someone said or did something that hurt or offended you. Just a few days ago a close friend of mine sent an email that had my heart racing and my blood boiling. I felt the email was hurtful and insensitive. If I am honest, I ruminated on and rehearsed the offense which only led to greater dis-ease in my body and not so kind and loving thoughts flowing through my mind. As I got a grip on my emotions and brought them to the Lord, he graciously helped me calm down and bring my hurt and concerns to him.

At first he showed me how in the past I have done the very same thing that my friend did to me. There have been times when I have said things that, while not intended to cause hurt, have certainly been hurtful and offensive to others. There have been emails I have sent that had a not so gracious and loving tone to them. It was the ole "look at the log in your eye first Lisa!" Now this is not to discount that I felt hurt, but rather than continuing to brew on the offense, I took it to God.

Has a co-worker said or done something that offended you? Is there a friendship that has become distant because of a relational hurt? It takes courage to extend forgiveness. It takes moral strength to obey God's instructions when it comes to letting go of an offense. And God's Word has a lot to say about forgiveness:

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice, forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:30).

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:21-22).

Now that is a tall order but with God, it is possible. Bring the offense to God and ask him to give you courage to overlook it.

Day Three

What is your relationship with conflict? Do you love a good conflict or do you run from it and try to avoid it? Addressing conflict is another act of courage.

Conflict. Just the word can make the hair go up on the back of your neck, your body tense, your heart race, or send that warm nervous sensation throughout your body. I think we have all seen or experienced all too often times where conflict has gone wrong, and we don't know how to properly lean into hard situations so we try to avoid them, or so we think. The truth is, we can really never avoid conflict. Avoidance does not make a difficult situation go away.

Just the other day I needed to address a concern with a coworker. She had dropped the ball on something and it reflected poorly on our team. It took courage to initiate the conversation rather than just stew on it or tell others about my frustration.

Instead of going in with guns blazing or with an accusatory or critical spirit, I approached the situation with kindness, humility, and curiosity. I told her what I observed and how that impacted the team. She graciously owned her mistake and then we talked about how to mitigate the same mistake moving forward. I then asked her how I could be of help and support her. I wanted her to know that I was for

her. She actually ended up thanking me for the conversation. Now I realize that not everyone will react the way my co-worker did; some will act defensively. But I am, you are, ultimately, responsible for how you approach and respond in situations. We cannot be responsible for other's responses.

When we approach conflict with biblical wisdom and a Christ-like attitude of heart, leaning into a tough situation can actually be an opportunity to strengthen and deepen relationships.

Proverbs 3:3 says "Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man." Both kindness and truth are important. Proverbs 15:1 says "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." A gentle answer, a kind approach, is one that shows respect and comes from a humble heart.

Speak gently instead of coming out with a critical spirit and biting word. Keep your voice calm, your words sweet, and your attitude humble. Get your heart right before the Lord and ask him to give you courage and a kind spirit in conflict.

Day Four

Setting yourself apart from the crowd is an act of courage.

Not too long ago I worked with a woman who loved to gossip. Even in casual catch-up conversations you could just tell she was itching to share some story from the workplace tabloids. I would ask her how she is doing, or, what's new, and she would give me that look. The one where she was about to tell me something she knew she shouldn't. You know the look. Maybe you have even given it at some point.

When a co-worker or friend is trying to suck you down a rabbit hole of dishing about another person, it takes courage to set yourself apart and not indulge. We get tempted with juicy information and it can be alluring to jump on the gossip bandwagon but resist the urge. Gossip kills cultures. Gossip undermines trust.

The thing about gossip is this: if a person is sharing information about someone that is not theirs to share, you can be certain they will turn around and do the same thing to you. And you undermine your integrity if you are the one with loose lips.

Be trustworthy. Have integrity. Set yourself apart. Don't gossip. Gossip is after all a false sense of connection. You might think you have a close friendship with someone but is it anchored in talking about other people? If so, it is a friendship built on sinking sand.

Other ways we can set ourselves apart at work are by being honest and not telling lies or bending the truth. By avoiding talking poorly about your boss and engaging in that meeting after the meeting conversation where you tear him or her down.

Set yourself apart by refraining from boasting or taking credit for something. Instead, give someone else on your team the shout out due them, lift them up and let them shine.

First John 2:15 instructs us, "Do not love the world or the things in the world." Not loving the world means we do not reflect the world's ways. And, it takes courage to go against the grain.

As a follower of Jesus, you already have been set apart. Might people look at you weird or not include you because you don't play by their rules? Maybe. But remain humble and gracious. There will be people who see you living differently. And when they ask you why, you have an opening for a spiritual conversation. You can share how your faith in Jesus causes you to live and love like him.

Day Five

When is a time where you felt fear and didn't let it stop you? A time you chose to obey and trust God despite being afraid? Trusting God is an act of courage.

In Daniel 6 we see a well-known story of trust and courage: the story of Daniel in the Lion's den. To refresh our memories, Darius, King of Babylon was appointing men to high positions of leadership in the kingdom. Daniel, known as the servant of the living God, was one of the appointed leaders and had so distinguished himself as a man with an extraordinary spirit that the king decided to put him in charge of the whole kingdom. The other men were jealous and did anything they could to discredit Daniel. "But, they could find no charge for corruption, for Daniel was trustworthy, and no negligence of corruption was found in him."

So the men set a trap for Daniel, knowing that he was a man of God, and got the king to issue a decree that anyone worshiping any god or man besides the king would be put to death. This is where Daniel's stellar track record of courage and faithfulness to God is displayed. Despite the decree forbidding worship and the threat of death, Daniel still was unwavering in his faith. He got down on his knees three times a day, prayed and gave thanks to God. In the face of fear for his life, Daniel, had courage to be obedient and faithful in worship and prayer. And his allegiance to God and not man landed him face to face with death in the den of lions. After being holed up in a den of not so friendly felines for a night, the king opens the door to the den the next morning only to find Daniel unharmed. We read that Daniel was taken out of the den uninjured *for he trusted God*.

It takes faith to trust God. It takes obedience to trust God. It takes courage to trust him especially in the face of uncertainty. And while our physical lives may not be threatened like Daniel's and so many of our Christian brothers and sisters across the world, there may be times where we will be ridiculed, mocked, canceled or shunned for our faith in Jesus. It can be tempting to be a covert Christian, especially at our workplace, for fear of what people might think. Yet will we still remain true to God? There are people he has put in your path that need the love and hope of Jesus.

Instead of bowing down to a culture which is anti-God, will you be courageous to live set apart? To be seen as one trustworthy, with an extraordinary spirit, being faithful in prayer and diligent in worship as you love and follow Jesus?

What is one way you can be courageous in trusting God?