

The LITTLE CHURCH in the PINES

MACK'S INN, ISLAND PARK, IDAHO

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COURAGE....is the *choice* and *willingness* to **confront** agony, pain, danger, uncertainty, or intimidation.

PHYSICAL COURAGE is bravery in the face of physical pain, hardship, even death or the threat of death.

MORAL COURAGE is the right to *act rightly* in the face for what may be popular opposition, shame scandal, discouragement, or personal loss.

The classical **virtue** of **fortitude** can also be translated “courage” but includes the aspects of **perseverance** and **patience**.

Patience being the topic on which I spoke last week.

.... Courage, in both small matters and large matters takes a measure of fortitude. Fortitude means “*strength of mind that enables a person to encounter danger or bear pain or adversity with COURAGE.*”

EXAMPLE

1. “They showed fortitude in the face of a hostile encounter.”
2. We pray we have the fortitude to carry on fighting for what is right! This calls for being brave in the face of difficulty, be it physical, mental, emotional, even verbal....in thought word or deed. It is the ability to *act rightly* in the face of opposition when we KNOW what we are saying is backed up let us say, by Scripture, even Jesus own words. Those in themselves are substantive enough to give us courage.

We are at times when right facing unpopular opposition which can be manifested in politics, religion or in any other realm or topic. It could also involve an aspect of patience and perseverance, in the ability to *stay calm* while in a crowd that is not, and even involved in a conversation where there are sometimes great differences in opinions and outlook in any of the above-mentioned topics. STAY CALM...is a great virtue to develop in any situation that has the potential to evolve quickly into a mob situation.

How about in being a part of a conversation where you or I disagree greatly with what is being spoken? Have we the ability to maintain a kind of reverse courage by listening all the way through the conversation until it is our time to speak, without interrupting the person speaking. It is what you would want when you speak so why not give the others person(s) the same respect and patience? One of the most courageous things you can do.... which will draw attention to you is to stand perfectly still.... eyes closed perhaps...and pray. I guarantee you will be noticed.

In the world of our Western tradition, notable thoughts on courage have come from philosophers Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Kierkegaard as a few examples.

In the realm of Western Christianity.... we have such notables as Billy Graham, Philip Yancey (controversial) Max Lucado, Pope Francis, Joel Osteen, J.I. Packer, Joyce Meyer, Aimee Semple McPherson to name just a few. Few have had the impact that Billy Graham has had...being a simple man with a simple and clear message, and having lived a simple, honest, and upright life.

Yet each, in their own way and in their own words have been influential to a greater or lesser degree. Each also, having displayed courage at times by differing and speaking those differences in both words and the written word, that at times veered off from what then was the current mainstream of Christian thought, especially of course the women. Simply preaching publicly was enough to put them on the blacklist of many denominations. Heretics and tools of the devil.

Jesus said you will know them by their fruit....and each and all of these, produced good fruit that is utilized and cherished to this day, and will be tomorrow and beyond. That is often the problem, that we look at people through our prejudices and bias's, seeing neither the person, or the truths they speak and live.... judging them instead on those prejudices and bias's alone.

Gathered here today....in the Name and Person of Jesus Christ, we come from a broad collection of different doctrinal backgrounds, but the same faith.

The ancient APOSTLES CREED written by the forefathers of our faith, who labored over what would come to the cement or glue of that faith. With all our great variety of structures and methodology in expressing our faith.... these words bind all of together. Let's read them....

I want to say and will, that there is a simple hymn in our hymnals that for me is the bottom line and essence of, Who, and what we believe in that binds us together....in love, which we shortly will sing acapella. "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love"

Please think about what I am going to share next.... for it is very important, and for which I am and will be held accountable for.

IT IS NOT OUR DOCTRINE THAT SAVE US.....IT IS A BINDER,
BUT NOT A BOX FROM WHICH WE LIVE, FOR NO ONE CAN
BREATHE AND LIVE IN A CLOSED, AIRLESS BOX.

If...I could get that across to people of faith, that though doctrine (important as it is) may give us comfort....*it is the Lord Jesus Christ HIMSELF who saves us*. We too often worship our doctrine above He, Himself. It is HIM whom we must find our security in. Doctrine is important.... please understand that.... but with our Lord, it was when in discourse with individuals or a crowd.... He *saw the people*, the *pain*, the *heartache*, the *brokenness*, and responded to those things. He always *saw the person*, even above the sin.... of what and who they could become, simply believing in and following Him.

In Luke 9:49-50, is a brief conversation between John and Jesus, (49) “Master, he says, we saw someone using your name to cast out demons, but *we told him to stop, because he isn’t in our group.*”

(50) But, Jesus said, *do not stop him! Anyone who is not against you is for you.*”

By using these words, He is saying, we are to embrace an open-arms attitude toward Christians outside our own group. Back then, there was not yet a bona-fide church of internal and external structure, and not the over 35,000 different Christian denominations that exist today. Yet...we are to rejoice with one another when we see the evidence of **good fruit**, being produced by any Christian gathering or denomination.... or for that matter, any individual. For we will know them by two things.....their love of Christ and good that is produced by them in the name of Jesus Christ.

I do not know if you are aware of this, but several times, people of different denominations and even faiths in Idaho Falls, gather to discuss their commonalities and differences. It has brought together, many people who desire to be healers, finding understanding and therefore being not dividers. Some hundreds have attended, and it has been a blessing as it builds bridges, and not walls. It is about having *courageous conversations* in a godly and peace-filled setting and manner, in order to learn about each other, love and accept each other in an atmosphere of grace and kindness.

Now, somewhat briefly, (*I think*) I am going to turn this conversation to a place that is practical, personal, and potentially courageous, for *the finger* is now going to point to you...and me, of course, in our personal, interactive everyday relationships with one another and, in regard to family, friends, neighbors and even political adversaries.

WE ARE TOLD....”*to love our neighbor as we love ourselves*”, (who is our neighbor?) Mark 12:31...this is not a narcissistic love, self-ego love, prideful self-love...but a *humble love* in understanding that we

are first loved by Him, and if indeed we are, and He loves us, having proven it by His great sacrifice.... *knowing we are loved*, enables us to love the self/person that we sometime do not love. He died for us which proves we are loved and lovable.... just as we are, seen by Him in His eyes. *He made us worthy of His great love*, otherwise why would He have done what He did for us?

We are also TOLD (dang) to love our enemies....and yet He goes further than that, by saying (as His finger points to us) do good to those who would harm us, and spitefully use us.

Well, we know, that just does not sit well with us, but, as He, (from the human point of view, did the impossible, by forgiving those who crucified Him...while hanging from that cross they put Him on.... He is telling us through this graphic example....TO DO THE SAME, no matter how much it costs us (our egos and sometimes pride)

That...is the sort of action that can change an adversary's life as well as our own.

He asks us to do at times what seems the impossible.... but, remember these words...*if we are willing*, “WE CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO WILL GIVE US THE ABILITY AND STRENGTH TO DO SO” if, we are but willing.

So...I am now going to make a recommendation here. At home, set aside some time. Get out a pen and paper and sit at your table or desk. Ask the Lord by His Spirit to assist you..... (not in guilt or punishment) but out of need, show you those things and people in your life, that you need to make amends to, change your mind about, stop judging, whatever! Write on paper or on your computer or phone, this list. Then ask the Spirit now, as to how you can make right that which is not right but wrong, and, that He will give you the wisdom as to how to do so. Remember.... we are weak, but He is strong. In being willing.... much like admitting (if an alcoholic, or addict of any kind) being willing to admit our condition, is the first step toward healing and wholeness.

I can guarantee.... He WILL assist you in this endeavor. The reason is that He wants you whole, and He wants you healed of events such as estrangements, hurts, abuse either given or received. Give to Him those events, people, and pain, willingly and watch what He can and will do.... the key? WILLING

If you are in trouble in your marriage and communication is not exceptionally good.... sit down together and have a *courageous conversation.*

Your children...your neighbor, co-worker, etc., etc.

God...continually will give us the opportunity to be healthy, happy, whole people, whom He loves without prejudice or judgement....NO MATTER WHAT YOU HAVE DONE that has caused sin, sorrow, pain or rejection. ALL can be forgiven and healed. ALL.

If...your request for forgiveness from someone is rejected, it lay on them and no longer on you, *for you will have done* that which God in Christ expects you to do.

In having some of these courageous conversations, they will not at times go as we hope and pray, they will. That comes with being courageous.... but, we will have done what we were willing and courageous enough to do. I can tell you, God will honor our efforts, as we attempt to make things right. That is who He is....and He desires we be like Him as His dear Son exemplifies.

Well...that about wraps it up for today.... hopefully, I have given you some food for thought, with the intention of good and not evil. A way to please God and ease some of the burdens you just may be carrying around. They do not get any lighter.

As we now, as part of our service head to the Table of the Lord, there is something I am going to read to you that a childhood friend sent me yesterday.

It is about God...through the eyes of an 8 year old child....I think this will bless you...as it did and does me. (READ)

I have had a couple of interesting months...and through it all have found myself more emotional than usual....this really touched me in a beautiful way....and so I hope it does you as well.

God loves you....as do I, and God bless you.....