

## ***Living Courageously Though Afraid***

**By Mark E. Bowser**

Fear is one of the most uneasy feelings we can experience. It is not fun and it is not always easy to deal with. But fear is not always a bad thing. It actually can be a good thing. Fear keeps us on our toes and out of trouble. Fear can be a motivator to taking actions toward our dreams. But you might be saying, "Mark, I hear that all the time but it never happens that way in my life. Fear controls me. I am just so scared of making mistakes. I am afraid things will turn out bad. What can I do about my fear? Can I really live courageously though afraid?"par The answer my friend is without out a doubt-----YES!!! The first thing I think we need to do is identify our fears. What are you afraid of? Back in the August 22-24 1997 issue of *USA Weekend*, the magazine ran a story titled *Fear: What Americans Are Afraid of Today*. This is what they discovered through their scientific research:

\*54% are "afraid" or "very afraid" of being in a car crash.

\*53% are "afraid" or "very afraid" of having cancer.

\*50% are "afraid" or "very afraid" of inadequate Social Security.

\*49% are "afraid" or "very afraid" of not having enough money for retirement.

\*36% are "afraid" or "very afraid" of food poisoning from meat.

\*35% are "afraid" or "very afraid" of getting Alzheimer's.

\*34% are "afraid" or "very afraid" of pesticides on food.

\*33% are "afraid" or "very afraid" of being a victim of individual violence.

\*32% are "afraid" or "very afraid" of being unable to pay current debts.

\*30% are "afraid" or "very afraid" of exposure to foreign viruses.

\*28% are "afraid" or "very afraid" of getting AIDS.

\*25% are "afraid" or "very afraid" of natural disasters.

That is a lot of fears. Today, I think we could add a few more. Since the attack on America September 11, 2001, I think we need to add to our list of fears the fear of terrorism and flying in an airplane. But how do we deal with our fears? Can we conquer them? Can we really live courageously though afraid? My friend, I believe we can. In the next few moments, we are going to discuss three steps to living courageously even though we are afraid.

## **STEP ONE: Thrown Into The Circumstance :**

Ernest Hemingway said, "Courage is grace under pressure." Many times, courage comes about because of circumstance. A crisis, an emergency, a disaster. Something has to be done. Someone must act. And so a hero emerges. The hero didn't ask to be put in that situation. They didn't ask to be admired. It was just that....somebody had to do something--so they did.

In his work *Motivation to Last a Lifetime*, Ted Engstrom tells a story about a 70 year old man who became a hero because of circumstance. One day, while aboard a ship a young woman fell overboard. Within seconds, this older gentleman flung himself over the rail into the frigid waters. He made his way to the young woman's side and led her to safety. Because of circumstance the man became a hero.

Later that evening, a party was in full swing on the ship to celebrate the incredible rescue. It was an awesome event. Several speeches were made including one from the captain. But now the time had arisen. The hero was about to speak. The older gentleman made his way to the microphone. He looked out at the enchanted smiling crowd. What stirring words was he about to utter? He leaned into the microphone and he said one sentence, "I just want to know one thing---who pushed me?"par Now, that is just a humorous story but one with a huge point. Many times we are thrust into a situation where we must act. Even though we are afraid, we must act. I am thinking at this moment of the heroes of 9/11. Think about the firefighters and police officers who ran into the World Trade Center to save as many people as they could. That's courage! That's grace under pressure!

## **STEP TWO: Let Your Beliefs Lead You Through Fear :**

In 1934, Adolf Hitler furiously chewed out German church leaders in his office for not supporting his programs. Pastor Martin Niemoller spoke up and expressed that his only concern was for the welfare of the church and the German people. Hitler exploded at Pastor Niemoller, "You confine yourself to the church. I'll take care of the German people." Niemoller bravely confronted the German dictator. He said, "You said that 'I will take care of the German people.' But we too, as Christians and churchmen, have a responsibility toward the German people. That responsibility was entrusted to us by God, and neither you nor anyone in this world has the power to take it from us."par That evening, the Gestapo forced their way into Niemoller's house and raided it. A few days later a bomb exploded in the pastor's church. Niemoller's life was put under a microscope. Everything was analyzed. Every word was listened too. Every nuisance was scrutinized. One day in June of 1937, Pastor Niemoller uttered these words from his pulpit, "We have no more thought of using our own powers to escape the arm of the authorities than had the apostles of old. We must obey God rather than man." It didn't take long for Hitler and his cronies to act. Niemoller was arrested and thrown into prison.

What was to happen to this bold courageous pastor? Do you think he was scared? I know he was. Niemoller's trial was to begin on February 7, 1938. On that morning, a guard came to escort Niemoller from his cell to the courtroom. He led the pastor through a series of underground passages that led to the courtroom which was waiting to decide the lonely pastor's fate. They had exited a tunnel and were about to ascend a final flight of stairs when the expressioness guard leaned over and whispered a simple verse in Niemoller's ear. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." (Proverbs 18:10) Niemoller's fear began to disappear

and that verse and his faith in God is what lifted him up through his trial and the following terrible years in Nazi concentration camps.

When we get scared, we must hold onto our beliefs. What is important to us? What do we believe in? Our beliefs will sustain us through the adversities of life. They will lift us up and guide us through any hardships or victories that may come our way. For it was Dr. Norman Vincent Peale who said, "Faith cancels out fear." Grab hold of your faith! Hold onto your beliefs!

### **STEP THREE: Conquering The Fear-----Trust God!**

The last step in our process of overcoming our fear is to simply trust God. When I think about this one person who comes to mind is Moses. He did not want to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. He threw every excuse in the book at God. Moses said to the Lord, "But who am I to appear before Pharaoh?..." (Exodus 3:11 NLT) But Moses was just beginning with his excuses. Moses pleaded with the Lord, " But Moses protested, 'If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, ' The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they won't believe me....'rdblquote (Exodus 3:13 NLT) A short time later Moses came up with another excuse, "'85'O Lord, I'm just not a good speaker. I never have been, and I'm not now, even after you have spoken to me. I'm clumsy with words.'rdblquote (Exodus 4:10 NLT) Finally, Moses made one last ditch effort to get out of his assignment, "'85'Lord, please! Send someone else.'rdblquote (Exodus 4:13 NLT)

As we know the story, even with his faults and fears, Moses became a great leader and led the nation of God to freedom. God uses ordinary people (like you and me) to fulfill His extraordinary plans. We must trust Him. When must obey. God is the One in control. He is the One who makes the crooked places straight. He is One who accomplishes the victory in us. God is greater than our fears. God is greater than our weaknesses. God is the One who turns our certain failures into wonderful victories.

So, how do we live courageously even though we are afraid? We simply take action when we are **thrown into the circumstance, we let our beliefs lead us through our fears, and we conquer our fear by trusting in Almighty God.** That's the way to put fear in its place. That's the way of champion. That's the way of you and I.