

Becoming a Man of Courage

*A Special Message from Man in the Mirror
Co-CEO and President, David Delk*

Unedited Transcript

1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Good morning, men! It is a joy to be with you! I'm David Delk and it's always a pleasure when I get to sit in for Pat. He is speaking this morning at a prayer breakfast, so I'm excited about the opportunity to get to spend a few minutes with you today. At Man in the Mirror, we are working on a new event for men. Some of you have heard about this, it's called *Rock Solid Men*, and I'm actually going to be teaching one of the lessons from that material today, and the scripture that we're going to look at is in 1 Corinthians 16:13-14:

¹³ Be watchful; stand firm in the faith; act like men; be strong. ¹⁴ Let all that you do be done in love.

This is a section at the end of this book of Corinthians that Paul has written to the church there, and he's gone through a whole bunch of issues to get to this point. He's talked about the problems they've had in the church, the visions, the chaos they've had in worship, the sexual immorality, all these different problems are going on there and he gets to this sort of summary statement, and he says be watchful; stand firm in the faith; act like men; be strong. Let all you that you do be done in love. He's giving them some closing commands, some admonitions that are going to help them correct these problems that they've had in the church. If you look at what he mentions here, he talks about 5 different aspects of manhood, or what they should be doing in the church. They need to be on their guard, they need to be watchful, they need to have vigilance, they need to stand firm in the faith, they need to act like men; they need to man up, they need to cowboy up, and that sort of means the same thing that it does today. They need to have courage in what God's called them to do. They need to be strong in the face of adversity. And then finally they need to do everything in love.

When you look at that, you sort of see what Paul is saying, that if we take these commands seriously as men, then a lot of the things that you've been struggling with in Corinth aren't going to be problems anymore. The same thing is true for us in our lives, so today we're going to focus in on this idea of being men of courage. There are a lot of people in our culture today that are doing all kinds of courageous things. I think about the thousands of healthcare workers that are rushing toward the Ebola crisis. Literally hundreds of thousands of African healthcare workers are right there in the middle of that thing, going to it, to serve the people with Ebola. Now you've got the Doctors Without Borders who have been there, Samaritans Purse has been there, all these other agencies have been there, and now the U.S. Government is sending more people. They're going to the place where there's an invisible, deadly disease that can kill you in 3 weeks. What an incredible act of courage! Today we have firefighters in California, hundreds of firefighters fighting one of the worst fires we've had in America in years! Temperatures crazy, coverage crazy, wind crazy, everything! And they're out there on the front lines doing something that is incredibly dangerous and showing incredible acts of courage.

But you know courage is not always the big things either, is it? Sometimes it's the little things. Sometimes it's being willing to just go at it one more time, to deal with this crisis in your family, or this health issue, or having to get another chemotherapy treatment. So what I'm going to do now is I'm

going to give you about 2-3 minutes and I want you to talk at your tables about someone that you know who has shown courage. Someone you know who has shown courage and what did they do. Take 2-3 minutes at your tables and talk about someone that you know who has shown courage and what was the situation in which they did that. We'll come back in a bit.

All right, let's come back together. So based on what you just discussed at your tables, based on the stories that you heard, how would you define courage? What is courage based on the stories you heard of these courageous actions by people? How would you define what courage really is? Depth of faith. Sticking it out. Overcoming fear. Risking it all. These are good definitions. Let me give you one that I like that's actually from Mark Twain believe it or not. Mark Twain said courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear. Sometimes we talk about people being fearless, but if you're truly fearless, that's not really a sign of courage, that's probably a sign of some kind of mental illness or something. There are certainly things that we ought to be afraid of. Fear can be very healthy, but it's how we deal with that fear that determines whether or not we are courageous. If you think about fearlessness, that really ends in recklessness. You've probably seen these things about the teenage brain in the last few years, about how it's not fully developed. When you see what some of these guys do on skateboards or motocross bikes or whatever, you're thinking yeah I can understand their brain is not fully developed, because that's crazy! That's reckless! So we're not necessarily talking about being reckless but really we're talking about taking cowardly behavior on one hand and fearlessness on the other, and courage is to evaluate the risk, recognize the fear, and then act in an appropriate way. That's what courage is. In spite of the fear, courage acts, courage does the things that God is calling us to do.

Now some of you know that Brett Clemmer is really into rock climbing. Brett's a guest speaker here quite a bit, he's the Vice President over at Man in the Mirror, he's very much into rock climbing; also his kids rock climb and he's a rock climbing coach. I happened to find a picture of Brett rock climbing, and I wanted to use that as part of our illustration today.



Here you can see Brett. This is one or two years ago I think, but here's Brett out doing his rock climbing and... well, maybe it's not him I guess. Anyway, you look at a picture like that and what these guys do is amazing, isn't it? You see them get out there and they start at the base of these incredibly high rock walls and they work their way up. Every move they make is taking them farther and farther from the ground. Every step, every pull. And the difference from falling 6-8 feet off the ground and falling from 125 feet off the ground is pretty huge! Yet they still go up and up. Now what is it that this guy has that gives him the confidence to keep going up higher and higher? Life insurance maybe? That wouldn't help him. He has experience. What else? Training. Strength, but there's something in the picture. A rope! He's got a rope. So with these guys climbing, and this particular guy is not hooked in above his head so it might be hooked in below. But most of the time they're hooking that rope in as they go. Why are they doing that? Because it limits the distance they can fall. So they are secure in taking that next step because they know that there's something holding them. So that person that sits at the bottom in this situation is called the belayer. That's the person that's holding the rope at the bottom and the rope goes up through the hooks and the climber puts it through the hooks as he goes and he's able to hold that climber if he falls so that the only distance he has to fall is however far the rope is to that last hook. If it's in there 5 feet, 10 feet, or whatever, that's how far he'll fall. Actually twice that, but you understand the point, he's being held up because somebody's on the other end of the rope, and that's what gives them the confidence to keep moving forward.

When we think about the need for courage in our life, one of the things we have to realize is: is there somebody holding that rope? All of us are going to face difficult situations. We're going to face situations in our workplace where there's going to be a challenge to our ethical values. We're going to face situations in our home where maybe we should speak up about something and maybe challenge our wife or encourage our wife, and it's going to be easier not to rock the boat. Anybody been there? It's easier just to let it go! We're going to face situations with reaching out to our neighbors or serving other people. It's going to be easier not to do those things. So what is it that's going to help us take that next step? That's what we want to look at today.

Courage is faith in action.

One of the things I want us to see is courage is faith in action. Courage is faith in action. I trust the rope, I trust the belayer, I can take the next step. We see this in the life of Paul. We're looking at Corinthians today and we see the life of Paul. If you think about who Paul was, he was a persecutor of Christians, he was a high ranking, educated Jew, hated Jesus, hated the Christians, and then God saves him. And when God saves him, he gives him a commission to take his message, the message of Jesus Christ, to people who've never heard before. So Paul goes out and begins to do that, but it's not easy. In 2 Corinthians 11 he says:

Five times I received at the hand of the Jews forty lashes lest one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Another place he says:

We don't want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experience in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed we felt that we had received the sentence of death.

So Paul took his calling so seriously that he was willing to pursue it through all of these hardships, even to the point where he believed that he was going to die. So one of the questions that might come to our minds is where does that courage come from? Most of us live, if we're honest, pretty safe and secure lives. We've got airbags, air conditioning, locked doors, and all these things that protect us and make our lives easy. The idea of just taking off to some place where nobody has ever heard about Jesus and not knowing if you're going to live or die when you do it, that almost seems kind of crazy to us!

Where does courage come from?

So where does that kind of courage come from? Paul says when talking about this sentence of death:

That was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God, who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

Paul is relentless because he believes, he put his hope and trust in Jesus Christ. He says this over and over again! Chapter 3 verse 12:

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold.

Chapter 4 verse 13:

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written. I believed and so I spoke. We also believe and so we also speak.

Verse 16:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal way to glory, beyond all comparison.

Chapter 5 verse 6:

We are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

So Paul was able to be relentless in pursuing his calling because he had such a sure foundation of faith in Jesus Christ. So when we look at our own capabilities, we're going to lose courage. If you're facing some kind of health crisis, if you're facing some kind of financial crisis, if you've got something going on in your work place and you don't know how it's going to work out; if you look at your own capabilities and say I've got to figure out how to get through this, then if you're honest, you're going to lose courage. Because more than likely you're not smart enough, you're not tough enough, you're not forgiving enough, you're not compassionate enough. So how do we make it through? The secret is not to look at

our capabilities, but to look at Christ's capabilities. Paul says that it's in his weakness that God becomes strong. Paul really did absolutely trust Jesus to be who he said he was and to do what he said he would do. When we have that firm foundation in the faith, we can put that faith into action, and that's what courage looks like.

Hudson Taylor said this, "Many Christians estimate difficulties in the light of their own resources, and thus attempt little, and often fail at the little they attempt. All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on his power and presence with them. So if we're going to have courage, we can't be holding our own rope. We can't be just letting the rope dangle like the guy in the picture. We've got to know that somebody has the rope and that somebody is God. The Big Idea today is that: **Courage comes from knowing Who is holding the end of the rope.** God promises that he is going to be there for us. Throughout the whole of scripture we have this beautiful picture of God redeeming a people. You can start back with Adam and Eve and the story of them getting kicked out of the garden. In essence, everything that happens from then on is all about God gathering up people to live in his city. Not a garden anymore but a city as we see in the book of Revelation. What does it say about the city? It says that there is no need for a son, because God himself is there. So God was with Adam and Eve in the garden and Adam and Eve are cast out and now there's a separation between God and man. Through Christ that separation is undone and that reconciliation begins and it's completed ultimately in this new city of God, where there's not a son because we are all in the very presence of God. God has been redeeming a people. God has been saving a people that he wants for his own possession, as the scriptures say, and that's where we are. We are in his hands! Jesus says no one can snatch you out of my hand! So we can have absolute trust that he really is holding the end of the rope.

Courage grows as we pursue a goal.

How do we put this into practice? Courage grows as we pursue a goal. It doesn't really matter who's holding the other end of the rope if you're standing on the ground. If you're standing on the ground, I don't need God to belay me, I don't need anything. I'm just standing here. There's no risk, there's no problem. Frankly, that's where a lot of us are. We're not really putting ourselves in situations where we need to show any courage. We're not doing anything with any risk. We're facing these situations and we're choosing to back away, we're choosing to be cowards. We're cowards who look good, and I'm talking to myself too, we're cowards who look good because we're nice guys, and we don't yell at people or flick people off in traffic or scream at people in our office. We go to church, we say please and thank you, we leave a nice tip, but we're cowards, because there's all kinds of situations every day that God is calling us as men to step into to do something about and it's easier for us to turn a blind eye to it. It's easier for us to just go on and live our safe, comfortable lives, but Paul had a goal, and that goal drove him. In 1 Corinthians 4 he says:

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

Paul says he has given me the stewardship of this message, and I have to be faithful. Whatever it takes, I have to be faithful. So for him that goal was to take that message to people who had never heard, and he was relentless about it! He went to Asia Minor, he went to Macedonia, he went to Greece, he eventually went to Rome; taking that message to places and people who had never heard about Jesus.

Where is God calling you to risk and show courage for Him?

So what's your goal? What's the goal that God's called you to? All of us have an overarching goal of bringing God glory, that's kind of the big rubric that might flow over everything, but there's a specific calling that he's placed on you and your marriage. There's a specific calling he's placed on you in your church, in your neighborhood, in your work place, with your friends, with your extended family. If we don't understand that goal, if we're not aware of what that goal is, then we're not going to be drawn towards any acts of courage, because we're just going to stay in our nice little safe place. Maybe there's inappropriate things happening in your workplace and somebody needs to stand up and say something about it? Maybe there's a situation with a neighbor that you've waded to for years and years, but have never really invested any time in getting to know them and finding out where they stand in their relationship with Christ. Maybe there's a financial need in your church, and it would be a little risky for you to step up and do something about because you know it wouldn't be quite as safe. I wouldn't be quite as secure; I might not be able to take care of this problem if it happened way out there in the future. Yet maybe God is calling you to make a larger gift than you're really comfortable with? Maybe he's asking you to do something that's courageous?

Let me ask you this: if you need a goal for courage, how do you get off the ground to start that? I've got a friend who is training for a half marathon. When he decided he was going to do a half marathon, do you think he got off his couch and started running thirteen miles? No, what did he do? He took the first step. He looked at his training regimen and said you need to run a mile and walk a mile. So that's what he did. Then two days later, he ran a mile and walked a mile and a half. A couple more days later he ran a mile and a half and walked a mile and a half. You just take the next step. Today, my encouragement to you is to take the next step. We need to stop avoiding those uncomfortable situations. We need to stop letting our fear or our love of safety, security and comfort from holding us back from what God wants us to do. We need to get off the ground! We need to start climbing! And when you get to that point where it feels a little dangerous, good! That's when you need to trust the person holding your rope! Most of us don't even have to exercise any faith because we never find ourselves there! If you're not doing anything this week that requires real courage, perhaps you aren't risking enough for Christ. Remember the Big Idea: **Courage comes from knowing Who is holding the end of the rope.**

Let's imagine a situation. You're going out with your buddies into the Tennessee mountains to do some rock climbing. You get all your gear together, you drive out there in your 4 x 4, there's a new guy with you, he's talked about how much he loves to climb. He's got all the right gear, it looks great, his outfit, shoes and everything. You all walk in, it takes you an hour and a half to get to this place. Everybody gets geared up. Okay who wants to go? He goes I'll go! Great, I'll set up. Then this guy gets about two feet off the ground and then just stays there, starts moving sideways, going back, moving around. He says wow look at the view, this is awesome, I love rock climbing, this is great. He's got 150 feet above him. This is super, this is awesome! Then finally he gets down. What would you say to somebody like that? What are you doing? That's not rock climbing! You may have the gear, you may look like a rock climber, you may think you're a rock climber, but that is not rock climbing! Now let me ask you, could somebody say that to us about our life with Christ? We may look like a Christian, we may do the things that Christians do sort of, but if it comes time to really show courage, to really step out in faith, to really do something that God's calling us to do, we're playing around two feet off the ground, acting like we're a rock climber. Christ really does have the end of the rope. He really will take care of you, you can trust him! And when you step out in faith, you're going to find a joy and exhilaration and a power that you never imagined you could have, because it's not going to be your strength, it's going to be his strength.

Today, what I would like to ask you to do is I would like to ask you to pray and ask God what are you calling me to do? Where do I need to show courage? Look to Jesus. Ask him! Jesus I want to trust you

more! I want to really believe! I don't want to be fooling around two feet off the ground! I want to really experience what you have for me as a Christian man. I want to be a man of courage, not because of my strength, but because of yours. Then today, right now, today, this weekend, take that next step. Some of you need to confess something to your wife. Some of you need to confront your wife about something. Some of you need to ask forgiveness from your children. Some of you may need to write a check to your church or ministry. What is it that God has called you to do? It's not your strength that's going to make that happen, it's his strength in you when we fully put our faith and trust in him. So I'm going to give you a moment to ask God what his next step is for you today? Some of you are saying I don't know if I've ever put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ? I don't even understand exactly what that means. The first step for you today would be to turn away from your sin and to say Lord Jesus, I repent. I turn away from the things that I'm doing that show that I'm ignoring you. I want to put my faith and trust in you. I want to know what it's like to know that you're holding the end of the rope, because I can't do it on my own. I need the forgiveness that only you can bring. That may be the first step for you today. Others of you are dealing with these specific situations that God has placed on your heart. I'm going to give you 60 seconds to pray and ask the Lord what is that step where I need to show courage and faith in you today. Take a minute to do that.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, each of us come today with different needs and circumstances. Some of the men in this room have been incredibly courageous in the last few weeks and months with the situations they've faced, and we're so grateful for that. Father, others of us have been dealing with things where we have been shying away. We've had a relational issue that we have not been dealing with, it's just been easier to ignore it and hope it will go away. We're facing a financial issue that we don't know how we're going to deal with, and we don't know how we're going to make it through. We need to extend forgiveness to somebody for something that hurt so bad! We need to ask forgiveness of someone that we have hurt so bad! All different circumstances, Lord, but today we pray that you would make us men of courage. Father, we know that we live in a world that is so broken that there are so many opportunities for us to step out in faith and do something in your name. I pray that you would make us willing to do that, that you would show us clearly what our calling is and then you would show us what the next step is. I pray that even today, before our heads hit the pillow, that we would be willing to take that next step, because we know that you are holding the end of the rope. That we know that we are your people, you are our God and no one can snatch us out of your hand. Lord I pray that you would do this in a way that would bring honor and glory to your name, that would bring us deep and abiding joy, and that we would know that we really are men of courage, not in our own strength, but in the strength of Jesus. We pray in his name, amen!