

Bloom

Hope...for the uprooted woman



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Take Courage!

Fourteen times in the Old Testament the Israelites are told to, *"Be strong and courageous."*

When Joshua took on the daunting task of leading the Israelites following the death of Moses, God admonishes Joshua three times in Joshua, chapter one, *"I will not fail you or abandon you. Be strong and courageous."*

Sounds like Joshua needed that reassurance. It's comforting to me to know that even great biblical leaders could be shaking in their sandals. But without fear, there is no need for courage. Right?

Everyday acts of courage

Most acts of courage are rarely as dramatic as leading a nation of refugees like the Israelites. Courage is most often made up of many small decisions and actions to move forward when your mind is telling you to run away. It takes courage to attend a gathering where you know no one, to speak up for someone else, to live with uncertainty, or to start over in a new town.

God's admonition to *be strong and courageous* is inspiring, but what if I'm at the end of myself and I don't have it within me to get up in the morning, let alone be strong and courageous? How do I muster up courage and strength?

This issue of Bloom looks at everyday acts of courage — choosing to listen instead of arguing, acknowledging and learning from deep emotions, making friends all over again in a new town, embracing vulnerability as an act of courage, courage in the face of real and imagined fears — and may surprise you with some new and counterintuitive ideas. Our prayer is that there will be something here that will encourage (literally, IN COURAGE) you to step in to a difficult choice or act that aligns with your values and with God's leading in your life.

Perhaps getting up in the morning *is* your act of strength and courage. For now, that may be enough. For now, your act of courage may only be to cling to Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:9,10, *"Each time [God] said to me, 'My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

Courage in Your Relationships

5 Life-Changing Acts of Courage by Harriet Lerner, Ph.D.

1. In the middle of an intense marital fight, a wife suddenly stops arguing and tells herself that for the rest of the conversation, she will simply ask questions and try to understand her husband's point of view. She shifts into a place of pure listening, detaching from the question of who is right or what is true or how she can best make her case.
2. A man, in the midst of a painful divorce, shares his vulnerability with his racquetball partner, whom he knows is also divorced. It is the first time he has revealed something personal to a male friend.
3. A man arranges to take two days off work when his mother visits, instead of assuming that his wife will entertain her. He arranges a day trip for just the two

of them and gets to know his mother better.

4. A woman takes a bottom-line position with her chronically critical husband. She says, "I love you and I want to be your partner. But I can't listen when you approach me this way. You need to approach me with respect, or I won't be in the conversation." She sticks to her position over time, refusing to continue a conversation at her own expense.
5. A husband tells his wife at breakfast, "I was thinking about the conversation we had last night." He then says, "I was wrong" and "I'm sorry." The last time he said these words to her were...well, he can't remember.



<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-dance-connection/201401/5-life-changing-acts-courage>



Courage to Learn From Your Emotions by Ann Kelley

In a culture that values positivity, there's pressure to "turn that frown upside down." In Christian circles, especially, emotions labeled as "bad" (sadness, anger, fear, grief, etc.) can be viewed as wrong: I shouldn't feel this way, I should have more faith, I should view others as more important than myself.

In addition to viewing some emotions as wrong, we may stuff "bad" emotions because we don't want to *feel bad*. When situations make us uncomfortable or afraid, we can choose to avoid them in order to quickly feel better. However, and this is a big HOWEVER, we may feel better for now, but there is strong potential that we'll continue to avoid situations like these and, at some point, look back on our lives as limited and cautious. Plus, all that energy that went into avoidance could have been put toward courageously showing up to life!

Let's take a closer look at how we can transform our avoidance of negative emotions into courageous living.

Dr. Susan David, a Harvard Medical School psychologist who studies emotions, provides a personal example of this process. The death of her father when she was 15 was devastating, yet "in a culture that valued relentless positivity," she thought no one wanted to know what she was feeling and that the appropriate response was to bury her grief and carry on. An assignment by her English teacher to keep a journal, revolutionized her world. Dr. David remembers, "She said, 'Write what you're feeling. Tell the truth. Write like nobody's reading.' And just like that, I was invited to show up authentically to my grief and pain. Like a gymnast, I started to move beyond the rigidity of denial into what I've now come to call emotional agility."

This experience set Susan David on a path to become a leading researcher in the study of emotions and the author of *Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace Change, and Thrive in Work and Life*. After studying more than 70,000 people she concluded, "The radical acceptance of all of our emotions — even the messy, difficult ones — is the cornerstone to resilience, thriving, and true, authentic happiness."

When you feel a strong, tough emotion, don't race for the emotional exits. What is the emotion telling you?

- Dr. Susan David

Not only do we need to accept our emotions, we must accurately label them. Accurately labeling our emotions requires an honest, deeper look at the true source of the emotion. Is my anger due to a feeling of being disrespected or misunderstood? Is my fear arising from uncertainty or lack of control over my circumstances? Does my sadness stem from the loss of a way of life?

In this way, emotions are meant to inform us and teach us. They are not directives, pushing us toward unwarranted action. Rather, they make us smarter about what we are experiencing. As Dr. David inspires us, "We own our emotions, they don't own us. When you feel a strong, tough emotion, don't race for the emotional exits. What is the emotion telling you?"

All of this became real to me last year when I made a phone call to a neighbor I'd never met. We were negotiating the sale of his kayak when the conversation unexpectedly turned adversarial. The call left me shaken and upset. I grabbed my coat and went for a long walk to process my emotions. It didn't take long to realize that I STILL struggled with a life-long pattern: connecting my worth to being liked by everyone — a recipe for inauthentic living.

Everything in me wanted to avoid this neighbor, but I didn't want a fear of rejection to dictate my actions and I knew the right thing was to call him back and do what I could to clear the air. With a measure of fear I called, and . . . it didn't go very well. But, for me, it was a significant step forward in choosing not to base my worth on someone else's opinion.

Choices like these take courage. In fact, it always takes courage to learn from unpleasant emotions. We may not always like what we see. But acknowledging and learning from our emotions — and not being controlled by them — opens the door to living according to our values with resilience and authenticity.

Watch Dr. Susan David's Ted Talk at https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_david_the_gift_and_power_of_emotional_courage/

Courage to Surrender by Leah Lively

Apparently, bravery is not something we are born with. My son is brave enough to climb the ten-foot-tall tree in our front yard yet feigns illness when his music class performs on stage. I have no fear of speaking in front of a crowd of a hundred yet must summon courage to introduce myself to a new neighbor.

My bravery has certainly been tested, having to consciously choose courage over fear. When a new job opportunity arose for my husband 16 hours away, rather than focusing on the fear of the unknown, we chose to focus on the excitement of moving to a new place, people, and experiences. We chose to be brave for our children so that they would also eagerly anticipate our move and not fear the future.

Within weeks after arriving, we quickly made new friends in our church and neighborhood. My pre-teen daughter immediately began attending a local church youth group. I brought my preschooler to church during the week for Bible study and a local mover's group. We all made a conscious effort to choose bravery over fear, even though it wasn't easy.

When circumstances beyond our control blindsided us, our bravery was challenged again. After eight months in our new town, my husband's job was downsized. Thankfully a new job offer came, but we would have to leave this new place we loved and say farewell to friends we adored. The new job was in our home state, yet we were not ready to return. I had personally put so much emotional energy into making a new home in an unfamiliar place, that I wasn't ready to start all over again.

Although my home state is certainly familiar, I didn't have the courage nor the energy to meet new people; I had already done that several months ago. I didn't want to explore the area around me because knowing no one at church and local stores represented loneliness for me. Somehow, I had to find bravery to begin meeting people. I had to choose to surrender my fears and loneliness to God, so He could give me the courage I needed.

It wasn't until I surrendered those fears to God that He filled my heart with enough courage to start making friends again.

Precious relationships have developed in the least likely places. My neighbors have become an incredible friend base of different cultures, beliefs, and lifestyles from which to draw unbelievable encouragement and support. This fall, after summoning the courage to join a Bible study, I am now surrounded by women more than fifteen to forty years older than me. I am grateful for the examples of Biblical womanhood God has set before me. Unexpectedly, He placed me in a room filled with spiritual mothers who share wisdom and inspire me with their steadfast faith.

Throughout the Old and New testament, God commands us to "Have courage" and "Fear not." I have learned that to obey the command to have courage, I must give my fears to God and acknowledge my weakness. By choosing to acknowledge my weakness and surrender my fears, I made room for *God* to fill me with courage. Fear would have kept me at home in my loneliness. Choosing bravery through the courage God gave me has graciously gifted me with friends and experiences across many states.



Leah Lively is a blogger, wife, and mom to four emotionally charged kids. Her desire is to bring hope and encouragement, wherever life may find you today. bayoublessingsblog.wordpress.com/



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Courage to be Vulnerable

Courage, compassion, and connection seem like big, lofty ideals. But in reality, they are daily practices that, when exercised enough, become these incredible gifts in our lives. And the good news is that our vulnerabilities are what force us to call upon these amazing tools. Because we're human and so beautifully imperfect, we get to practice using our tools on a daily basis. In this way, courage, compassion, and connection become gifts — the gifts of imperfection. - Brené Brown



Vanquishing Gophers by Susan Miller

It's true. I have gophers in my backyard.

When I first discovered their holes and dirt mounds near the wall, I was so fearful of their invasion into my manageable, well-kept little backyard, with my lovely geraniums and faux green grass. I know it's silly, but I was afraid to encounter a gopher face to face. Fear of even going near their territory soon became an obstacle to enjoying my backyard.

Finally, I woke up one morning and decided *enough of these mind games*. I was not going to let fear of these intruders rule me.

I put on my brave, courageous self, my cowgirl boots for protection, my oversized work gloves, and with a long-handle shovel, marched into the backyard saying in a loud voice over and over, "Lord, you and I can do this together. Help me overcome my fear!" I poked the holes and the mounds, just daring a gopher to show his furry face. I flattened the mounds and covered the holes with dirt. I faced my fear head on with courage and felt empowered.

Yes, I still have gophers and I still don't want to come face to face with one, but I'm no longer afraid of them.

This story may sound silly, but it was a very real picture of the many times I've prayed for God to help me face my fears with courage. Since Bill died, it's not unusual for me to lie awake in the middle of the night gripped with fear over some real or imagined hurdle that feels overwhelming: fear of the unknown, loneliness, stepping out of my comfort zone, the "what ifs" of the future, facing another major life change — to name only a few. In those moments I declare, "Lord, you and I can do this together!" I have no doubt that hard things will happen, but I'll never face them alone.

Does fear clutch your heart and flood your mind and emotions? You and I can *control our fear* or let our *fear control us*. But it's not always easy. Many a day I have to release my fear and give it to God through prayer, perseverance, courage, and sheer determination to not let it consume me. I have to lay my fears down at His feet, then stand up and move forward with courage by His power and strength.

As you and I rely on God and trust Him in all things, we can face our fears as the brave, bold, and courageous women we are!

You and I can
control our fear
or let our fear
control us.

But it's not always
easy.

Everyday Courage

You may feel that you've done nothing courageous, but every act in the list below requires a measure of courage. Ask yourself if you've done any of these actions. Bring the list to the dinner table with family or friends to spark a discussion!

- Admitting you are wrong.
- Doing what is right when everyone else isn't.
- Speaking to someone you don't know.
- Saying "no" when people are trying to get you to do something you know you shouldn't.
- Telling the truth and accepting the consequences.
- Standing up for something you believe in even though it might mean rejection or ridicule or even physical harm.
- Defending someone who is considered unpopular or unacceptable.
- Confronting a fear without running away.
- Facing a limitation and giving it your very best regardless of pain or discomforts.
- Giving sacrificially to protect or promote either someone you love, someone who has been wronged, or someone who is in need.
- Being the only one.
- Taking a risk.
- Sharing your heart honestly (including your feelings and fears and failures).
- Living your faith with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength regardless of the cost.

- Dr. Steve Stephens, psychologist and speaker