

Courage

Preparation

Overview

The introductory essay examines the quality of courage on several different levels. Beginning with examples of public courage, the essay evokes the reader's admiration of those who are commonly recognized as heroes. Continuing with examples of private courage, the essay brings courage within the grasp of the ordinary person. The sections dealing with the source of the Christian's courage, positive and negative examples of courage from Scripture, and the necessity of perseverance help the reader to view courage

as an outgrowth of his trust in God. The essay ends with a clear summary of the components of Christian courage.

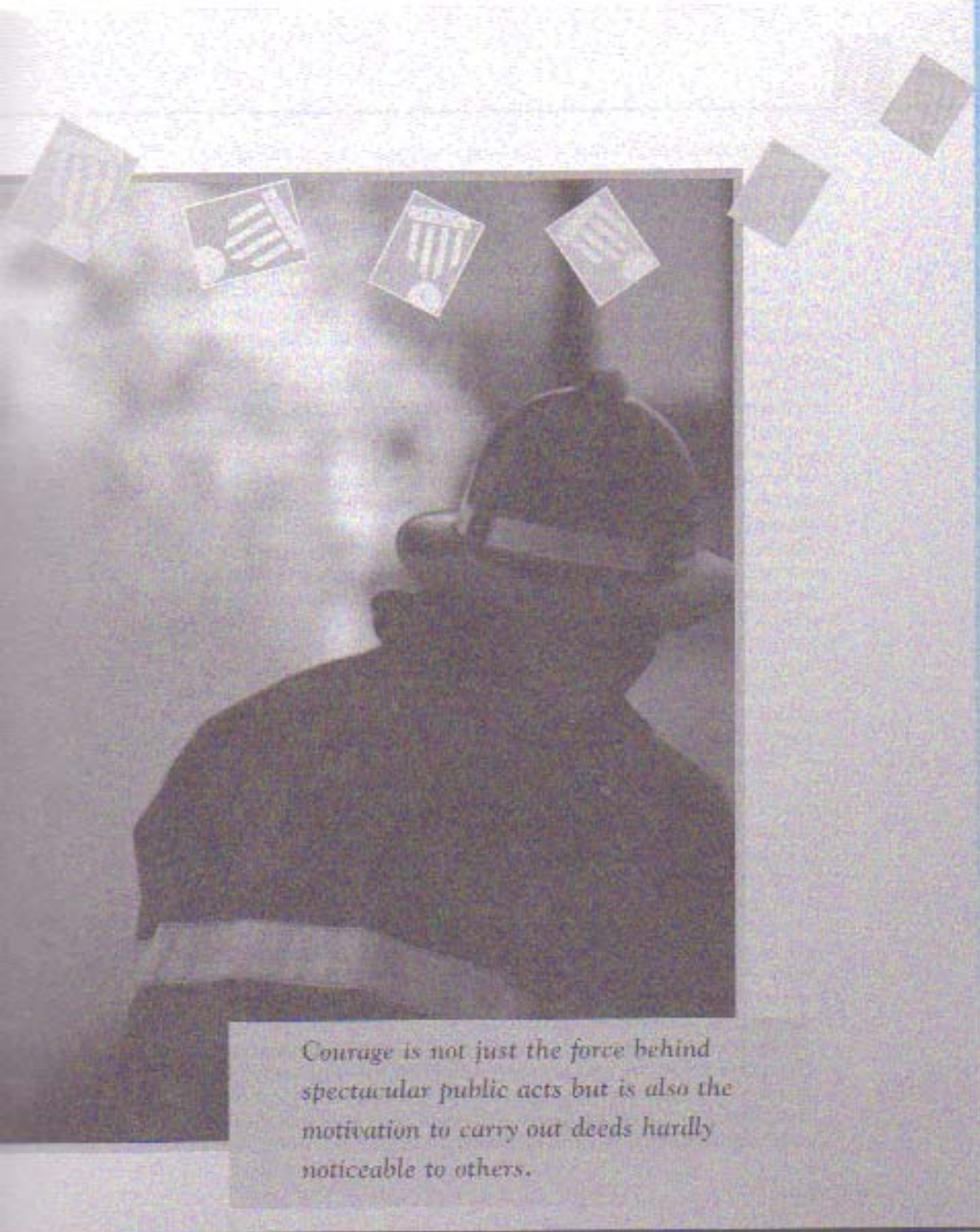
Discussion

Introduction

Guide the students through a general overview of the entire unit by having them leaf through the unit, looking at titles, selections, the hymn, Scripture, and even the artwork.

Then ask them for some general examples of courage. To get the students thinking, you may want to write a few of the examples on the chalkboard (e.g., fighting in a war,

saving a person from drowning). Help them understand that courage begins first of all with a need for action. Next, a person must be willing to forget his selfish desires and *try* even though the action may be full of danger, difficulty, or fear. Nor is it enough to try only once; one must be willing to keep trying. In other words, a courageous person realizes that he may not succeed immediately. Guide the students to the following definition of *courage*: determination to do right in the face of danger, difficulty, or fear, regardless of personal interests. Point out that courage



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Courage

is not the lack of fear but the determination to do right *in spite of* fear.

Analysis

Students may have a tendency to skip over introductory materials, both essays and head notes. Remind them that the introductory lesson lays the groundwork for the entire unit.

To encourage them at the outset in this regard, have a volunteer read aloud the two anecdotes that open the introduction; then have the students compare these anecdotes. What do both incidents have in common? (*swift, decisive action; risk; determination*

to do right in the face of danger, regardless of personal interests)

Read the next three paragraphs orally, noting the three types of courage discussed. Ask the students to discuss other public heroes about whom they know. Draw the students' attention to the fact that Glenn Cunningham and Helen Keller would not be as well known for their achievements today if they had not had such serious handicaps to conquer. We admire heroes such as these because they inspire us to tackle our own weaknesses and succeed in spite of them.

Ask the students to tell about heroes whom they know personally. You may want to initiate the discussion with an example from your own experience. Examples could include parents or other family members who have dealt courageously with hardships but have not been publicly recognized for their strength of character. Discuss the influence of these heroes on the lives they touch, stressing the fact that a person's courage is not measured by the amount of public praise he receives. Courage is a quality that comes from within and is motivated by a desire to do right regardless of who is watching.



Courage

In Los Angeles a short time ago, a citizen reacted with what we often call true courage. While driving beside a roadside park, he saw a blind man being mugged. As he rushed to the rescue, the attacker fled. The good citizen did not give up, though. Risking his life, he gave chase, first in his car and then on foot. Finally he caught the mugger and then held him until police arrived.

An eighteen-year-old Canadian nearly paid the ultimate price for his courage—his life. While he was hiking in British Columbia's Glacier National Park with his girlfriend, a mother grizzly attacked them. With one blow it knocked the boy unconscious. Then it began to bite and tear at the girl. When the boy regained his senses, he leaped onto the bear and stabbed it in the neck with his hunting knife. At this the enraged animal turned its full fury on him, grabbing him like a toy between its front paws and squeezing him. Then with a violent swat at his head, the grizzly peeled off a large section of the boy's hair and scalp. Next it wrapped its front legs around him and rolled to the bottom of a gully. There it repeatedly slashed at the boy's face with its claws. When the boy became still, the bear scraped dirt and leaves over him and shuffled away. It took over a thousand stitches—and later, more than forty operations—to repair the damage to the boy's face and head. Surprised at the public recognition he received, the boy said that he had done nothing heroic. He had not even considered running away and leaving his friend at the mercy of the bear.

Heroes like these often receive public honor. In fact, since its founding in 1904, the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission has awarded more than eight thousand medals to deserving persons in the United States, Canada, and Europe. To qualify for the award, a person must have performed an act of unusual courage in saving human life.

Even though dramatic, a public act of courage is not any more outstanding than many a private act. Those who fight against severe physical disabilities, for instance, display courage as glorious as those who risk their lives. Although Glenn Cunningham was crippled by injuries resulting from a schoolhouse fire, he courageously overcame his disabilities to become a record holder in the mile run. Helen Keller, both blind and deaf, has inspired thousands with her courageous triumph over her disabilities.

Those who stand for right, especially in the face of opposition, are also truly courageous. This type of courage requires us to deny ourselves—our own wishes, fears, and embarrassment—and to stand up for our convictions, sometimes even against our friends. Perhaps of all types of courage this type is the most difficult to practice consistently.

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Objectives

The students will be able to

1. Identify three different levels of courage.
2. Identify positive and negative examples of courage from the Bible.
3. Apply lessons of courage from Bible examples of daily living.

Courage

If time permits, you may want to use the following references for a brief Bible drill at this point: Num. 13:20; Deut. 31:6; Josh. 1:9; 10:25; I Chron. 22:13; II Chron. 15:8; Ezra 10:4; Ps. 31:24.

Before the students read the next three paragraphs, ask them to be prepared to name other men and women of courage mentioned in the Bible (e.g., Joshua, Gideon, Deborah, and Paul). Also ask them to name those in the Bible who lacked courage. Some examples might include Abraham and Sarah, who lacked courage to believe that God would

give them a son; the disciples, who lacked courage on a number of occasions.

Have a volunteer read the next paragraph orally. Draw the students' attention to the fact that while God is pleased with the determination to do right, He is more pleased with the actions that follow such determination. A promise is worthless unless we keep it. Refer to II Peter 2:21. God strongly disapproves of those who turn their back on what is right and good. Help the students understand that a decision to do right is the first but easiest step in the process. For example, it is far simpler to say we are going to be missionaries, to

claim we are willing to die for Christ, or to promise to do our best in school than it is to carry out these intentions.

Read the concluding paragraph orally. Then write the following "equation" on the chalkboard and have the class fill in the missing blanks.

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Courage = desire (to do what is right) + confidence (in God's power) + doing (what God wants us to do in spite of circumstances).

The Bible states important principles about Christians and courage. It commands us to be of good courage and to be strong. It also makes clear that our strength lies in the confidence that comes from God's presence with us. Although the world recognizes the relationship between strength and courage, it ignores God, the source of our strength. The psalmist says, "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord" (Ps. 27:14).

Heroes of the Bible reflect different types of courage in the midst of crisis. David dared to challenge the Philistine giant Goliath. The young shepherd's boldness in the Lord's strength encouraged the frightened army of Israel and led to a great victory. Facing a life of captivity by his nation's enemies, Daniel quietly decided to obey God when the pagan king made a law that conflicted with God's commands. Josiah, who had the Scriptures read to his people for the first time in several generations, bravely turned the Jews back toward God. His determination to seek God helped bring revival to Israel.

The Bible also gives us examples of men who lacked courage. Although not much is said about Demas, the Bible does tell us that he forsook the faith after he had served for a time with Paul (II Tim. 4:10). At Jesus' trial Peter lacked the courage to admit his association with his Lord. But unlike Demas, Peter confessed his sin and ever after spoke boldly for Christ, even dying for Him. The ten spies who returned with Caleb and Joshua after their mission into Canaan lacked the courage to trust God's promises for victory in the Promised Land. Their cowardice was contagious, for all the people supported them.

To live courageously demands wholehearted commitment. Some Christians profess to have the courage to die for Christ, but they lack the courage to live daily for Him. In the excerpt from *John and Betty Stam: A Story of Triumph*, you will see the calm resolve of two twentieth-century martyrs whose courageous deaths for Christ came from the confidence they had gained through living for Him. Not all who make courageous decisions to do right, however, carry through their decisions. Like Demas, they begin well, but they falter. Have you ever made a resolution for a new beginning but then found yourself wavering after a short while? Do you know someone who failed to overcome a problem because his friends influenced him to make wrong choices? This weakness appears in "A Kind of Murder," the story of a student who lacks the courage to continue doing right.

Courage is not just the force behind spectacular public acts. It is also the motivation to carry out private deeds hardly noticeable to others. For Christians, courage in our own strength is false courage (I Cor. 10:12), a guarantee of failure. "Fight the good fight with all thy might," declares the hymn writer; "Christ is thy strength, and Christ thy right." Real courage comes from our desire to do what is right, from our confidence in God's working through us, and from our doing what God wants regardless of the circumstances.

Application

Help the students in their application of these concepts by presenting the following situation to the class: Five boys approached a high school freshman named Jack. "Jack! Guess what?" said Brad. "My cousin here invited me to go camping with him and these other guys this weekend, and he said I could bring a friend. How about it? You want to come? We'll leave early Saturday morning and get back sometime after dark on Sunday. We'll have lots of fun—I mean *real* fun, not the kind of fun you church kids have at your Sunday school parties. This is an outing for *men*. You don't have to tell your

parents exactly where you're going. We don't want any grownups checking up on us this time. Tell them you're spending the night at my house. Think you can come?" With the eyes of five teenagers fixed on him, Jack has to make a decision. Should he agree to go so that the other guys will accept him as one of their group? Or should he refuse? Maybe he could make up an excuse about being too busy or having other plans. What should he do?

Help the students understand that although Jack's decision may not save anyone's life, his courage is being put to the test. We may not be

called upon to save someone's life by swift action, but we have many opportunities to reveal courage in our everyday lives. Private acts of courage we must daily face require as much, and perhaps even more, courage as spontaneous actions to save someone from danger. When we refuse to cheat on a test or turn down an invitation to participate in a sinful activity, we are showing our willingness to face the ridicule of others.

Ask the students to name things that do not go together, such as tuxedos and camping trips, English teachers who say *ain't*, and rock music and worship. Point out that a