



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.

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.

Our farms so lonely and spaced far
 Could never have grown the nation we are
 But for this man, come sun, come snow,
 Who went where God alone could go.

30

... About the Author ...

Growing up in rural Maine, Robert Coffin (1892-1955) knew well the area of a country doctor's activity. He earned several honors and awards for his work: he was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford and in 1935 won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. He also ran several farms himself as well as writing and illustrating many of his own works. His writings celebrate the history and attitude that permeated American life in the first half of the twentieth century.

How to Avoid Contact

Lewis Gardner

If you keep your eyes straight ahead
 and your forehead tense
 and your mouth straight, not frowning, not smiling,
 then no one will try to talk to you.

Beware. If you let your eye stray
 even one quarter of an inch
 to watch another walker,
 he may smile back—

5

unless he too knows
 and carefully observes these rules.

10

To bums who prepare with appealing looks
 to ask for money, turn a brusque* shoulder.
 If someone bumps into you,
 never say excuse me—nod, with a smirk.*

brusque: abrupt and ungracious
 smirk: all-knowing smile

Above all, avoid the tapping approach
 of the blind man
 and the slump and shuffle* of the old.
 They may ask you to help them.

15

shuffle: foot-dragging walk

About the Author

Lewis Gardner was born in Massachusetts in 1943. His career has included teaching English, editing textbooks, writing, and acting. His interest in the stage began when he was eight years old; and since then he has acted in stage productions, a television play, and a film and has given poetry readings of his own works. He has written two plays and the lyrics for two musicals. According to Gardner, "I began writing poems when I suffered a temporary loss of the stamina needed for working in longer forms. In periods when I have been unable to write at all, I have done paintings and drawings." His interest in the education of young people has led to his involvement in textbook publishing and Poets-in-the-Schools programs.

A Poison Tree

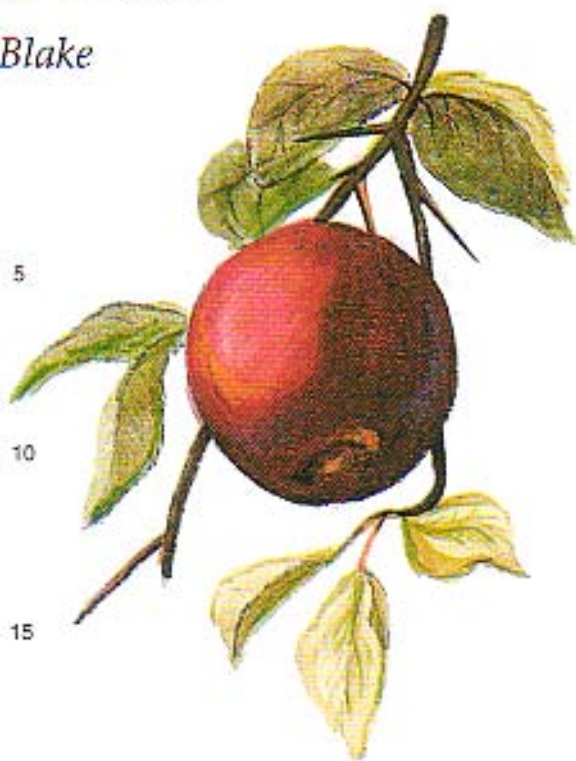
William Blake

I was angry with my friend;
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night
Till it bore an apple bright;
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole
When the night had veiled the pole:
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.



5

10

15