

Being Courageous

New Year's Message: 8th January 2012

I don't know whether anyone here has made any New Year Resolutions (things you want to do differently in 2012)?

Some years I have, but I have been a bit more vague the last few years.

But a few days ago I was thinking 'what would I do if I was making some resolutions?' and then a quote I heard once came into my mind:

"Do one thing every day that scares you" (Eleanor Roosevelt)

As it came into my mind, I believe God challenged me and said "Why don't you do something for Me every day that scares you?"

It was one of those moments when I felt lovingly rebuked by God and it really stirred me and got me thinking.

There are times in my life when I have taken risks for God and have put my faith on the line, but generally there is a tug in me to do what is safe.

And I when I stop deliberately taking risks, I end up doing what is comfortable and playing things safe.

I think that there are some sins that are seasonal – that affect different cultures at different times. In the UK at the moment, I think 'playing it safe'; in other words, apathy and fear are big, prevalent sins – and they are so 'normal' that we can even stop thinking of them as sinful.

And I think you can see this in us as a nation; we have become 'risk-averse'

- We are led by politicians who often make decisions based on what will be popular and what will get them re-elected and are scared to do what they think is right.
- C&F's School stops people running in the playground in case someone falls over!

- People are afraid to do anything in case they are sued, so there are cases of people walking past people who are dying, because if they get involved and do the wrong thing they could be sued

And for us as followers of Jesus, I think we can walk into sins like apathy, fear and laziness without even recognising that they are wrong.

We can have an attitude of thinking that as long as we're not doing anything wrong, then that's okay, and so we can just keep our heads down and not really ever put ourselves in many situations where we need to use our 'faith muscles'

There are sins of commission – what we do wrong, but actually there are also sins of omission – what we should do, but don't – and we need to be aware of both

My guess is that for most of us, our normal default setting is "Play it safe" – and we need to deliberately make decisions to step out, take risks and live by faith.

Human nature likes being safe and comfortable;

Living by the Spirit requires faith; it means not living by what we can see and by what our friends might value; security, comfort, ease; but instead living by what we can't see – and that's never comfortable.

So as we're looking at the year ahead, I want to talk about a few ways we can step out in our faith and be courageous.

- **Courage in faith**

Firstly, we can show courage in taking steps of faith.

When we do this, God loves it and His eyes are on us in a special way:

For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. (2 Chronicles 16:9)

And somehow our faith affects Jesus:

Jesus was amazed at the faith of the centurion (Luke 7:9) and amazed at the lack of faith of the people in His home town (Mark 6:6)

I want to amaze Jesus and I want the Crown to amaze Jesus (even a little bit) for the right reasons, not the wrong ones – faith, rather than lack of faith.

I learned a new word last month – “Liminal Space” – it means living on the edge.

When I went to visit Dan and Lucy in Tajikistan we had to drive over mountains that were over 20,000ft. It wasn't a comfortable experience, but I'll never forget it and I'm really glad I did it.

Putting ourselves in a place where humanly speaking things won't work isn't a comfortable experience – someone said it's living “On the brink of disaster and the edge of a miracle”

Jamie Buckingham said “attempt something so big for God that it would definitely fail if God isn't in it.”

It's about putting ourselves on the edge in our faith.

Colin Gault – friend in Reading, leading nice church in an affluent part of the town – felt God stirring him to move to Slough – much less nice! – moved with young family – limited support, financial uncertainty, on their own – currently him and his wife are giving out 21,000 invites to his church plant. God loves that!

Courage to pray for unbelieving friends in impossible situations; to dare to say that you'll pray for them and that our God can intervene.

Courage to pray for healing – me with man in wheelchair – arthritis – painter – healed!

Courage to give financially

- DS – gave away his grant cheque and lived by faith
- Dave Ridler
- Me giving away my last money – going to Romania

Courage to bring words of knowledge or to step out in using the Gifts of the Spirit like you've never done before – when you do, you feel exposed – could all go wrong!

So is 2012 going to be another year like the last one, or will you be able to say of this year – “That’s when I first did this..”?

I want you to ask yourself the question:

What is there in your life now that is requiring courage and faith?

If you can't answer, don't be stupid and do rash things for the sake of it; – ask God what He wants you to do – then have the courage to do it.

We all get tested and go through trials at times, but let's not be passive, waiting for things to come along that test us; let's be people who are looking for ways to test our faith; let's be people who live asking God “What's next?”

And as God tests us and proves Himself to be faithful, it's like we get another handhold in Him to help us with the next test.

Story of Elijah – started off smaller and more hidden – Drought – Kerith – Widow of Zarephath – oil – then Mount Carmel, calling down fire from Heaven.

Elijah wasn't a superman, he was a man that had been trained by God, but at every step it took courage.

In Matthew 15, there is the account of a Canaanite woman who came to Jesus. That was a really big thing because Jews despised the Canaanites she was from a neighbouring country and an enemy - and she was a woman – and women wouldn't talk to men.

But she took a massive risk – because she was desperate – her daughter was demon possessed and she had nowhere else to turn.

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”

If you knew a little bit about the Bible you might guess what happens next – Jesus says ‘of course’ and the girl is healed... but it doesn’t go like you expect:

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

This woman gathers up all her courage and faith and asks God for a miracle – and she is met by silence – and then the mob of disciples comes and tries to get rid of her.

He (Jesus) answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

Who is Jesus talking to here? I think it is the Disciples – but the woman gets even more courage and presses on:

The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

You’d think that at this point Jesus would show compassion and say “okay, I’ll heal her” but He continues – again, probably still speaking to His Disciples:

He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

So Jesus again seems to brush off the request, but she still humbly and with huge courage perseveres:

“Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment. (Matthew 15:21-28)

There is a lot going on in this passage; it is not Jesus having a grumpy day; I don’t think the outcome was ever in doubt! I think that Jesus was teaching His Disciples an important lesson that it wasn’t just the Jews who monopolised

faith, but that His Bread – the Gospel is for everyone who is hungry. Maybe we'll look more at what's going on here another time.

But seeing this from the woman's perspective, it is a model of courage to keep clinging to Jesus; it's about perseverance and humility and faith and having the courage to cope with delay and discouragement and obstacles.

And I think there are lots of lessons we can learn here about courage to keep on going in hard times – and it is sometimes quiet, hidden courage to keep on going when God seems silent and when things are hard that is the most important.

Maybe you have prayed and prayed for the same thing for years and it seems like nothing has changed; or if it has, it's got worse! – And you're at the point of thinking 'what's the point! I might as well give up.'

Sometimes it takes phenomenal courage just to keep clinging on – even when you're not seeing anything change.

It takes real courage to come along week after to bare your heart in worship and ask again for the same thing – healing or breakthrough or provision or a sense of God's closeness.

But God loves courage and faith like this; it amazes Him; it pleases Him; it makes His Heart leap! And as I said, His eyes are on us and I don't believe that He can resist blessing courage to cling to Him like this.

A couple more places where we need courage:

Courage for evangelism

For me, evangelism always needs courage – I don't find it easy. *There was a time when I felt God tell me to buy a Bible for a girl in the office I worked in – It was maybe the thing that took most of my courage that year.*

Often though, I need more courage to make the most of opportunities rather than worrying about damaging a friendship (need wisdom too – build bridges of friendship that are strong enough to carry hard conversations)

I know I can be too respectful to people of other faiths – I know I need to have wisdom in how I present the Gospel to them; but I also need courage!

Courage in relationships

This is probably the place that I need most of my courage over the last few years.

From time to time I need to have tough pastoral chats with people – and I always find it hard.

But we are all called to “[Speak the truth in love](#)” (Ephesians 4:15) and as we do that, we are imitation Jesus who “[came from the Father full of Grace and Truth](#)” (John 1:14)

If we have too much Truth but no Grace or love, then we end up being harsh and condemning; but if we are full of grace but don't speak the truth, everything is nice and fluffy, but no-one grows and nothing changes.

It's always hard to challenge someone (some people are harder than others!).

It's always hard to fix a broken relationship

It's always hard to apologise when we've hurt someone

There are always a thousand other things I'd rather be doing than going up to someone and saying “we need to talk...” I always get the same feeling I get when I'm going to the dentist! It always requires courage.

But we need courage to do it – if we don't, maybe no-one else will and the person may suffer as a result.

And we need courage to hear it when we're on the receiving end of people challenging us if we are to grow and mature as individuals and as a Church family.

In closing, there are 2 last things I want to say:

If we're going to step out in faith and live on the edge, sometimes we're going to fail – sometimes spectacularly. This is the real world, not a video game and sometimes it goes wrong and we and others get hurt.

I love the verse in Proverbs that says:

...though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again,
but the wicked are brought down by calamity. (Proverbs 24:16)

We've got to get over being afraid of failing – and that takes courage.

But the alternative is that we live safe, risk averse lives.

I think God calls us and inspires us to more than that!

Someone told me once that it says “Don't be afraid” 366 times in the Bible (I haven't counted!) – once for every day of the year plus one for a leap year!

It also says “Be Bold” around 31 times and “Be Courageous” another 33 times.

Finally, if we're going to be people of courage, then we need one another.

We need to encourage one another and we need encouragement.

Literally, encourage means “to put courage into”

...let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day
approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

How do we do that?

The different words the NT uses mean “come alongside,” “support,” “speak tenderly to,” “intercede for”

And it's a Gift God has given to His Church – ranked alongside prophecy and leadership and other spiritual gifts in Romans 12:8 **So if your Spiritual Gift is to encourage, then give encouragement!**

I have a book written by someone who was a missionary in China called “Proving God”

I want to do that in my life.

But we can't do it without Faith

And we can't live by faith when everything is easy and we know all the answers

So that means risk

And that takes real courage!

Pray.