

The Responsibility Of Courage

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Though Love is undoubtedly the King of all Virtues, without dearest Courage, nothing can be confronted, rectified, surpassed, or overcome. If, when our time on Earth has expired, we are to say that we have truly loved, it must also be said that we have been courageous in doing so.

Hatred is the antithesis of Love. It is rooted in fear and is nothing more than cowardice masquerading as bravery. Courage is the antidote to fear. It is this understanding that centers my being when I have lost my way.

Some years ago I came across a young man that was in danger of losing his way and his life. I was leaving my home, having returned from school earlier in the afternoon, and was headed to the Eastern Parkway train station to run some errands when a commotion coming up out of the entrance of the station caused me to pause before entering. As I stood at the top of the entrance stairs, a young man, about the age of 16, was racing up from the station, cursing furiously at police officers who were not far behind him. Several others, civilians who had seen officers take the young man's girlfriend into custody after a dispute that happened in the station, followed behind as officers chased after him. Without caution, care or concern of consequences, I threw myself between the boy and the officers. Arms stretched out, using my body as shield to protect him, I attempted to diffuse a high-octane situation that I had no plans of seeing ignite.

More officers followed the initial two, and I watched as full grown men, hands primed on their pistols, taunted a minor half their age. Fearing the young man would soon lunge at them, I turned away from the officers to face him, and placing my hand upon his chest, I whispered into his ear. Speaking in the softest, slowest tone that I could, I said "you are not going through

anything that no other black man has not gone through before you and I need you to be calm, because if they shoot you, they are going to have to shoot me first". Upon hearing my plea, the young man, understanding fully, nodded and obliged my request.

From the time I reached the train station that afternoon, to the time when the officers left-leaving myself, the young man, and bystanders behind-fifteen minutes had not yet passed. In less than fifteen minutes, I felt the flame of my life flicker and found myself more than willing to have it blown out if only to see another's flame remain. Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the taming of it. Many think of courage as an attribute of choosing when in fact being courage is not a recommendation, but a commandment. In the biblical Book of Joshua, in the ninth verse of the first chapter, it is God himself that commands and insists that the men who have joined to him in covenant not be afraid; "Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest". (*The Original African Heritage Study Bible*, Jos. 1.9).

Despite the obvious dangers of interfering in the affairs of law enforcement, I truly deemed it necessary to do so in order to intercede for that young man. For me the choice was clear, and although made in a matter of seconds, it was quite simple. Either I would stand aside and possibly witness this young man's death and thus witness something die inside of me due to my own lack of fortitude and forbearance, or I would bind myself to his struggle (whatever that struggle may have been) in acknowledgement of his humanity. In doing the latter, I simultaneously recognized, rediscovered, and stood in remembrance my own humanity.

According to Aristotle, “a virtue is a trait of character manifested in habitual action” (Rachels, *"The Elements of Moral Philosophy"*.p.159). This observation could not be more truthful. As a nation,we are collectively bearing witness to the erosion of long-standing virtues. Despite hailing from various cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, many Americans are dissatisfied with the overall lack of moral and ethical considerations that have clearly poisoned the fabric of our country’s creed; E. Pluribus Unum.

It is our repeated refusal to acknowledge our own society’s pathologies that strengthens and emboldens the current dystopic state of human and civil rights not only at home,but subsequently abroad as well. In a post-9/11 world, where our last Presidential election was marred with division and strife along every walk of life,I find it is crucial to not only have the courage to stand up for our own convictions,but also that of our neighbors. Loving “thy neighbor as thyself” in such times as these is vital and requires courage. Dr. Martin Luther King,in his “Letter from Birmingham City Jail” writes about the very real,tangible moral decay a culture can suffer when we collectively ignore or neglect the injustices and oppression of those deemed as “other”.

In the letter,written while he was imprisoned in Alabama for conducting protests against racial social protocols in The American South during the 1960s, he states;

“It is the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills...I am coming to feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than people of goodwill. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people. We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability” (King, p.639)

Inevitability suggests that catalysts are not needed for changes to occur, and nothing could be further from the truth. However, when the risk of actively changing something crucial is seemingly greater than the necessity and reward of that change occurring, we must self examine our own fears,motives,and morals and take courage that if we stand firm within our convictions that, we too, shall overcome whatever challenge is at hand.

As a nation, the journey ahead is certain to be perilous, in part due to the ominous realization that our nation’s laws are unable to adapt effectively in a timely fashion to the onslaught of recent technological innovations such as the Internet,UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles),and even more recently,AI (Artificial Intelligence) . Whether it be issues or concerns of privacy, or personal information piracy, more and more corporations that are invested in such technological advancements are declining to take responsibility for the damages their ‘products’ cause in real time to real human lives. Brian Green , an associate director of Campus Ethics at The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, spoke about the dangers of such companies’ blatant disregard for the social effects that their innovations,can cause. According to Green,

“A good use of technology is one which improves human physical, mental, spiritual, and moral well-being. It helps people become healthier, more educated, more loving of God and neighbor, and better at making moral decisions. A bad technology will do the opposite: make us sicker, less educated, less loving of others, and worse at making moral decisions”.(Green, Brian. "The relationship of Morality and Technology." *Santa Clara University*, Aug. 2017, <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/all-about-ethics/the-relationship-of-morality-and-technology/>).

In such contemporary dilemmas, I often ask myself whether or not one individual, entity, or institution could possibly make a difference. When the monetary value of such technologies (as well as the data-driven economies these technologies create) are seemingly worth far more than the quality of life of those that are affected by them, it may be time to say a crisis of monumental proportions has occurred. Such crisis, and the restoration of the idea that mankind is of inherently immeasurable worth, can only be reinstated with the conviction of courage.

I would not be honest if I stated that there are experiences and circumstances that do not attempt to plant fear within the corridors of my heart. While this is true, it is my belief that though my body may tremble and my stomach grow weak, the spirit inside me shall prevail. I am not alone in this struggle that many face daily. Dr. Fan A. Shen, author of “Gang of One: Memoirs of a Red Guard” describes perfectly the spirit of why we must always be determined to overcome our fears; “At the center of this mental struggle, which lasted several years and is still not completely over, is the prolonged, uphill battle to recapture “myself”. (Shen, p.362)

If we are to ever find ourselves in a place where we have lost our way,we will need take heart to start the journey of finding our paths,and thus finding ourselves, again.

And we will do this with Courage.

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