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Fortitude

Fortitude, which is known to be synonymous to courage, bravery, and resilience, to name just a few strong, comparable terms. Upon looking up the definition of fortitude itself, one may see it described as something along the lines of ‘mental strength and courage that allows someone to face danger, pain, etc.’ as it is described in the Merriam Webster dictionary. Every language and culture has their own examples of such, but fortitude is also regarded as one of the Four Cardinal Virtues in ancient Greek times, alongside prudence/wisdom, justice, and temperance/self-control. Plato described the attributes of a good city to contain these Four Cardinal Virtues. The following excerpt from The Legion of Mary Tidewater defines Fortitude as being ‘the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions.’ You can see the four virtues tie together with the following passage from the same source. “To live well is nothing other than to love God with all one's heart, with all one's soul and with all one's efforts; from this it comes about that love is kept whole and uncorrupted (through temperance). No misfortune can disturb it (and this is fortitude). It obeys only [God] (and this is justice), and is careful in discerning things, so as not to be surprised by deceit or trickery (and this is prudence).”

Next, I feel the need to emphasize the following paragraph from Catholic Answers, ‘to have fortitude does not mean that a person is immune from fear. Instead, a person with fortitude recognizes fear, but does not allow fear to prevent him from doing what is good or, worse, to do what is evil. Think then of how important fortitude is to withstand peer pressure.’ Life’s experiences has taught me a great deal on how I can control my life, its’ outcomes and how I can persevere through fortitude. I have experienced a lot of ups and downs, more downs than ups it

seems like, as well as emotional turmoil, loss, and mental health struggles. There was a time where I wanted to give up, many times in fact. I was ashamed, I didn't want to tell anyone of how I was feeling and what I was going through. I knew this inner turmoil and mindset was selfish, unhealthy, and ungracious in comparison to real world problems and yet I couldn't bear to burden anyone with revealing my private obstacles. It was so easy to live a life that was unfulfilling; to go along with the current of negative peer pressure, and to let my fear of failure and the unknown take over.

I wasn't living my life; I was simply existing feeling sorry for myself. I was not happy; I was not succeeding. I was harming myself physically and with toxins. After what felt like an eternity, when my ideations of ending my life started to become a plan, I sought help and started to change my actions as well as my mindset. Fortitude introduced itself to me and I was not even aware of it at the moment. Little did I know, that seemingly simple and ignorant first act of courage was only the beginning. Attaining and practicing fortitude made me who I am today. I slowly started making the effort to make the appropriate actions in my life for a better life, regardless of my fear of failure and uncertainty for the future. Mental fortitude had me change my mind, my outlook and gave me the motivation I so desperately needed.

Life does not come with an instruction booklet, often we learn from each decision that we make or don't make. That was something that was initially difficult for me to grasp. Fortitude taught me patience and logic in my decision-making processes. It gave me the strength and ambition I needed to become this hardworking person who deems life rewarding, while overcoming my fears and anxieties. I will honestly say I doubted myself and my choices many times, but through the act of fortitude I still keep pushing through even in current days. While reading some wonderful work by Joseph Rickaby, he states that while virtues can be performed

habitually, they are not solely habits. They require training and strength. This is exceptionally true in my experience and opinion. Not just for fortitude but for all virtues, they each deserve time and practice as it truly is a way of life. Mr. Rickaby put it best when describing how the Four Cardinal Virtues perform in conjunction, ‘Prudence is the safeguard of health; fortitude keeps up strength; temperance, which includes chastity, is the defender of beauty; while justice prevents man abusing his worldly wealth and position. So that, without the cardinal virtues, health, strength, beauty and social competence, may prove a curse rather than a blessing to the owner. And the same of all other corporal and material advantages’.

I only recognized how much fortitude changed my life when I was hurting the most. It may seem hard to believe that things can get worse after what I have shared thus far, but it did. On July 7, 2020, I lost my grandmother. I have never felt a pain so intense until that day. Throughout my time where I was struggling, it truly devastated me when I didn’t make her proud. With COVID-19, she wasn’t able to see me traditionally graduate; instead, we were forced to learn how to live in a virtual world where video calls replaced in person interactions altogether. Given my previous circumstances, no one in my family thought that I would go back to college, nonetheless graduate with my first degree and proceed to work on a second degree right after. In high school I was often picked up by truancy and I skipped school so often that my mom and I were sent to family court. I received my GED at seventeen years old and eventually dropped out of college due to lack of motivation two years later, leaving my degree unfinished. This graduation meant everything to her, to us, and to everyone else in my family. Now that she is no longer here to see me in a cap and gown or to share any of these happy moments with me, it is still a devastating wound that hasn’t healed.

The emotions that were surging through me was quite the overload, but I vowed to continue to strive and thrive for her, to make her proud. This is where I can truly express my gratitude for being so lucky to possess and practice fortitude within every area of my life. I couldn't spend my time grieving in my loss, I had to take action and keep pushing through my life. I ended up landing a great job after leaving a company that I was thoroughly unhappy at, started my classes here at Hunter College the following week of her passing and I have since maintained a GPA that can land me a spot in an honors program. 'Fortitude strengthens the individual's resolve to resist temptation, overcome personal weaknesses, and make sacrifices for what is good', as Catholic answers beautifully states.

While I will be forever grieving and dealing with the struggles to regulate my internal emotions, I continue to practice fortitude to make my life everything I dream of it being. Each and every one of us has the ability and the power to unlock fortitude. Plato has described courage and fortitude to be the virtues of the spirited part of the soul. I must concur with him as I compare spirit to passion, and I see it right in the soul. Our souls are what makes us who we are, and our spirits are what drives and motivates us, and I truly believe it's in everyone, each person has their own unique soul and spirit to create and maintain their own fortitude. Through consistency and choosing fortitude as not only a trait or a virtue to possess, but as an overall way of life will lead to happiness and a fruitful life. As a student majoring in psychology, I enjoy uplifting others and unlocking happiness, as well as a positive and healthy mental state; more than anything I want people to believe in themselves. Knowing that I wanted to better myself and help myself, it made me become truly passionate in my area of study. I have fortitude to thank for that. Each and every day I feel grateful for finding my inner spirit, my fortitude, my courage,

and I continue to work on myself and my goals. Life is only what you make it, and I am making sure it is all that I could ever dream of. My grandmother would not have it any other way.

Works Cited:

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