



Moral Principles for Young People

The Courage to Live



by Lonnie Garrison

A soldier was home on furlough before being sent to the front lines. He visited his grandfather who was an invalid, afflicted with a painful disease. Both the grandfather and the grandson were Christians; so they had a good time discussing spiritual matters. As he prepared to leave, the boy said to his grandfather, "Grandpa, pray for me that I'll have the courage to die." The old man looked up through eyes that revealed the pain he was enduring, and he said, "I will, my son; and please pray for me that I'll have the courage to live."

It takes courage to die! But sometimes it takes more courage to live. When a Christian dies, he goes to be with Christ, which is far better. But to live day after day, year after year, with pain or difficult circumstances is another matter. Perhaps this is why more than twenty thousand persons a year commit suicide in our country, and many thousands make the attempt but fail. Suicide ranks tenth as a cause of death in the United States, and it is becoming more and more prevalent among college students and teenagers.

Realistically, suicide doesn't solve any problems, no matter how noble men might try to make suicide appear. Dr. "what's-his-name" notwithstanding, suicide is not the answer to physical pain. I'm sure that in some cases the person has a mental or emotional disturbance and perhaps is not totally responsible for his decision. But more than one person with a clear mind has contemplated taking his own life, simply because life had become too difficult for him.

Moses had this experience, and Moses was a man of God. One day he was so overwhelmed by the problems of the nation of Israel that he said to God, "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me, kill me, I pray thee . . . and let me not see my wretchedness" (Numbers 11:14-15). Of course, God knew that His servant was overwrought and discouraged; and God did not answer his foolish prayer.

The prophet Elijah became discouraged and also prayed that God would take his life. So the pressures of life are real, and it takes courage to face life.

Take a good look at Jesus Christ. He died to give us life – eternal life; and He lives today to help us face life and live it victoriously. Being a Christian means more than going to Heaven someday, as wonderful as that is. Being a Christian means having the courage to face life today, and face it as a victor and not a victim. It means singing a song when others are complaining. It means joining the apostle Paul in that great affirmation of faith: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

Have you ever thought of the difficulties Jesus faced when he was living here on earth? He knew the meaning of poverty because he was born into the home of a poor carpenter. He grew up in the despised village of Nazareth. It is likely that while he was just a lad, His foster father Joseph died, leaving Mary a widow. There were other brothers and sisters in the home; so it must have been a crowded, uncomfortable situation. Jesus knew what it was to work with his hands and earn a living. He went through the difficulties of life that you and I go through, and yet he never became discouraged.

When Jesus started his public ministry, he knew what it was to be laughed at and misunderstood. Some of his friends and relatives even said he was crazy. They called him a glutton and a drunkard; they said he was demon possessed. He was misunderstood even by those who should have best understood. His life was threatened. When he displayed love, men retaliated with hatred. When he spoke the truth, they spoke lies. Believe me, Christ’s life here on earth was not an easy one.

Think of the humiliating way that he died. He was arrested illegally. The witnesses lied about him. The soldiers, instead of protecting him and giving him his rights, persecuted him and laughed at him. They spat in his face – they struck him with their hands – they crowned him with thorns – and then they crucified him. And through all this inhuman treatment, Jesus was able to say: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Jesus Christ went through every trial and testing that you can ever go through – and he won the victory. If his crucifixion looked like a defeat, his resurrection from the dead changed all that. We look back at the cross and realize that it was not a defeat, but a tremendous victory. On the cross, Jesus conquered sin and death and hell. Every enemy bows at his feet.

That is why Paul could write in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.” Paul faced far more difficulties in life than you and I face; yet he came through in victory. Why? Because of anything he had in himself? No! It was because he permitted Christ to work in and through his life. Paul’s testimony was, “Not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). The Christian life is not imitation, it is incarnation: Christ living His life in and through us. This is what gives us the courage to live.

Have you ever tried to put together a picture puzzle without first having seen the picture? It can be done, but it’s very difficult. Once you have seen the picture, you know where the various colors belong. Well, life is something like this. Because today we cannot see the total picture, we don’t know exactly where the individual pieces belong; and we get discouraged. We think God has forgotten us, or worse yet, that He has turned against us. It is then that we lose the courage to live, and living becomes a monotonous grind instead of exciting experience.

We need to get hold of a basic fact: God sees the total picture. It really isn’t necessary for me to know the end from the beginning, because God already knows. God does not have to give us reasons, because He gives us promises. We say, “Oh, if I only knew what tomorrow holds, I’d be happier.” Yet if we knew what tomorrow holds, we might be terribly frightened. The important thing is not to worry about tomorrow, but to live for Christ today. We don’t have to know what tomorrow holds, just who holds tomorrow!

Life has never been easy. This world is a battleground, not a playground. Jesus said, “In this world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” The difficulties of life are God’s tools for building character and making us more like Jesus Christ. I’m sure that all of us have times of depression when we feel like throwing in the towel and quitting, but those are the times we need to turn to Christ and let His power go to work.

Yes, it does take courage to live and, yet, it does take courage to die. In ourselves, we don’t have this courage. But through faith in Christ we can face life with confidence and know that He will see us through. He never leaves us, He never forsakes us. His power is always available for every demand of life. He can give us what we need – patience, wisdom, kindness, love, understanding, and moral courage. He never fails.

For Further Study

Verses to Consider

- Exodus 18:13-23
- Deuteronomy 1:9-14
- Job 2:9-10
- Job 3:11-13
- Job 3:20-26
- Job 7:13-15
- I Samuel 31:3-4
- II Samuel 17:15-16, 21-23
- I Kings 16:16-19
- I Kings 19:1-18
- Ecclesiastes 2:17
- Jonah 4:1-11
- Matthew 27:3-5
- John 16:33
- Romans 15:4
- Hebrews 6:18-19
- I John 3:1-3

Questions to Ponder

- 1) Can committing suicide solve a problem in life? Why or why not?
- 2) Several people in the Scriptures pleaded with God to take their life. How many were granted their desire? Why do you suppose it was this way?
- 3) Lists the reasons a person may become overwhelmed and depressed, then lists ways the Scriptures show people can overcome their depression.

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