



Glenn Brown

441 ½ Lark Drive
Grand Junction, Colorado 81504

telephone 970-434-1377

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DO YOU WANT TO BE BRAVE OR SAFE?

That is the question Gary Haugen poses to the church in his book, JUST COURAGE. The following, greatly condensed, is from Gary:

"When I was ten years old, my father took me and my two older brothers on a wonderful hike on Mount Rainier, a challenging mountain that steals the lives of scores of climbers. He proposed we climb to Camp Muir, the base camp used by climbers heading for the summit, and my brothers eagerly accepted. I was afraid. Dad assured me he would help me, as he had on previous hikes, but I resisted. *What if Dad is wrong and I can't make it? It will be so humiliating to be the one who needs help again. What if Dad doesn't even know the way up there? What if it becomes too aggravating for him to help me, and I get stuck?* My heart was beating wildly, and I said, "No. That looks boring! Let's just stay at the visitor's center." Dad tried a few more times to woo me up the mountain, but eventually he left me there by myself while they headed up the mountain.

"The visitor's center was warm and comforting, with lots of interesting things to watch and read. But as the afternoon stretched on, it started to feel mighty stuffy. I got tired of the stuffed animals, of looking at the people, at watching the loop videos about the mountain. I felt bored, sleepy and small, and I missed my dad. Totally safe, but stuck!

"After the longest afternoon of my life, my Dad and brothers returned flushed with their triumph. Their faces were red from the cold and their eyes clear with delight. My brothers were wet from the snow, famished, dehydrated, and nursing scrapes from the rocks and ice, but they had stories and an unforgettable day with Dad on a great mountain. What did I have? A day of safety and boredom. Truth be told, I went on the trip and missed the adventure. And thirty-four years later, I still remember the day at the visitor's center.

It is my sense that many Christians are starting to suspect they are stuck at the visitor's center. They suspect they are traveling with Jesus but missing the adventure. Our heavenly Father offers us a simple proposition: Follow me beyond what you can control, beyond where your own strength and competencies can take you, and beyond what is accepted as acceptable Christianity by the crowd - and you will experience me and my power and my wisdom and my love. Jesus beckons me to follow him to that place of weakness where I risk the vulnerability of a child so that I might know how strong my Father is and how much he loves me. But most of us choose the smart course, the safe course, the comfortable course, of staying safe and warm at the visitor's center.

(Gary is president and CEO of International Justice Mission, IJM, a human rights organization based in Washington, D.C.

social workers and advocates. They rescue victims of violence, sexual exploitation, slavery and oppression around the world. He left a lucrative job with the government in 1997 - with much fear and trepidation - and now they have about 300 full-time staff around the world, most of whom are nationals working in their own communities in the developing world.)

"God has called us into a battle with violence and aggressive evil that my colleagues and I know we cannot win without the specific intervention of God. We are forced by our own weakness to beg him for it. Prayer is not an option! And we have found him to be real, and his hand to be true and strong, in a way we would never have experienced had we stayed in our safe places.

"What does the desperation look like? For me, it means being confronted with a videotape of hundreds of young girls in Cambodia being put on open sale to be raped and abused by sex tourists and foreign pedophiles. It means going into a brothel in Cambodia as part of an undercover investigation and being presented with a dozen girls between the ages of five and ten who are being forced to provide sex to strangers. It means being told by everyone who should know that there is nothing that can be done about it. It means facing death threats, high-level police corruption, inadequate aftercare capacities for victims, and a hopelessly corrupt court system. It means going to God in all honesty and saying, 'Father, we cannot solve this,' and hearing him say, 'Do what you know best to do, and watch me do the rest.' And it means seeing God do more than I could have hoped or imagined - setting girls free, providing high-quality aftercare, bringing the perpetrators to justice, shutting down the whole nasty operation, training the Cambodian authorities to do this work themselves, and seeing the U.S. government be willing to pay for it.

"Again and again, God calls us not just to live a moral, Godly life, but to *Seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.* (Isaiah 1:17) The sin of injustice is defined in the Bible as the abuse of power - abusing power by taking from others the good things that God intended for them, namely, their life, liberty, dignity, or the fruits of their love or their labor. Scores of Bible stories illustrate this sin:

- The Egyptians stole the Hebrews' liberty and well-being through forced slavery
- King David stole Uriah's wife and then Uriah's life.
- King Herod stole the lives of all the young boys of

Bethlehem

- The religious leaders in Jerusalem stole from the people and from Jesus' followers

"In our time, there is human slavery! Yes, over twenty five million people are serving in situations of hunger, beatings, endless labor, not to mention the sexual exploitation industry. There are religions where the killing of wives and young women is the accepted norm. There are all sorts of violence by bullies - from families to schools to businesses to government. There is illiteracy. There is sexual abuse. There is AIDS. There are pedophiles. There is the injustice of the credit card industry and the "Payday loans" scam, and nursing homes that mistreat their charges. There are pregnancy centers that need volunteers. There are abandoned children that need to be adopted.

"Why doesn't God do something about all this injustice? He has. He has an army on earth (many of whom are sitting, snug and safe, in the visitors' center). Sending our money is certainly good, but it is definitely the safe path. He says to that army, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you!" He says, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream! He says, "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." He says, "The great commandment is to love God, and to love your neighbor." And who is my neighbor? 'He is that stranger, that foreigner, who had been beaten and robbed and left for dead, and whom the religious people were passing by and ignoring,' replied Jesus.

The good news is, many in the church are taking up the challenge. Hallelujah! Many young people are going into dangerous places to offer their lives for the Lord. (And what a test for Christian parents when their children really choose to do what their church has been teaching them to do all their lives.)

Do you want to be brave or safe?

What would God have me to do? Ask Him.

THE APES ARE ENDANGERED!

I saw a report that the great apes are an endangered species because of shrinking habitat and poaching, and it made me very sad. They are such magnificent animals. However, the report didn't affect me as badly as it did a lot of people who are directly descended from apes, so they say. It must be especially painful for them to see their kinfolks treated so shabbily.

DEPRESSION IN GOD'S PEOPLE

Sometimes Christians think they should be above normal human problems: Sickness, depression, family problems, children problems, financial problems, etc. One of my dear friends led a thriving church some years back. He almost died from internal bleeding, and only an emergency operation and much prayer saved his life. The day he was released from the hospital, his worship leader came to accuse him of not having enough faith to be healed and therefore not being qualified to pastor their church. He convinced two-thirds of the members to join him and a young evangelist in a newly formed "spiritually correct" faith church. In 2 Timothy 4:20, Paul

writes that "I left Trophimus at Miletus sick," and in Phil. 2:26 he says that Epaphroditus was so sick he nearly died. So maybe Paul should have been fired as an apostle because everyone was not healed that he prayed for?

Depression has been a condition that many Christians, at least in the past, have thought was a certain sign of a lack of faith. But many Godly people in the Bible struggled with depression:

- Job was so discouraged that he cursed the day he was born. His crops and herds and servants and home and children were all destroyed in one day. Then he got a loathsome skin disease, and all his family and friends deserted him. Then his wife told him to curse God and die. And for some reason he got depressed.
- Jeremiah was publicly whipped, put in stocks, abandoned by all his friends, put into a cistern without food, and he also got so depressed he wished he had never been born.
- Mighty King David wrote a Psalm at one point and said, "I am troubled. I am bowed down. I go mourning all the day long. I groan because of the turmoil of my heart." (Psalm 38:6) And he wrote in Psalm 143, "The enemy has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me dwell in darkness like those who have long been dead. Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me. My heart within me is distressed, my spirit fails!"
- And Paul, the Apostle Paul, said in 2 Cor. 7:5, "When we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears." Did you see what he said, "Outside were conflicts, inside were fears." And he said in the first chapter of that same book that "We were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired of life."
- And Jesus, our Lord, as He hung on the cross, cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?"

All of this to say that you and I get a pass for being human and suffering all the frailties and pains of the rest of our race. In the midst of their suffering, Job and David and Paul reached out to God and He lifted them up and rescued them. And God reached out to Jesus and lifted Him up in resurrection and ascension, and He now sits at the right hand of His Father in heaven! Glory to God!

FIRE DEPARTMENTS IN TROUBLE!

The Associated Press reported recently that rural fire departments are in trouble because of the falling number of volunteers. They can't afford paid firemen, so "It's the volunteer fire department or nothing." There are also falling numbers of volunteers across the spectrum: Churches, hospitals, police departments, Boy Scouts, Little League coaches, etc. What is going on? I believe that in a post-Christian society, where the value of service is being leached out of society, the falling numbers of volunteers is a natural consequence.

FOR CONSIDERATION

In Deuteronomy 29, God says that those who turn away

from the true God to idols are under a curse, and He says in Verse 19, "It may happen that a man hears the words of this curse, but he may bless himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall have peace, even though I follow the dictates of my heart' - as though the drunkard could be included with the sober."

FOR MEDITATION

2ND Thessalonians 1:8-9 (AMP) says that God will "*Deal out vengeance upon those who do not know God, and refuse to obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Such people will suffer the punishment of everlasting and eternal exclusion from the presence of the Lord and His glory.*" Whoa!

- God will judge all those who do not know Him! (Remember from my Newsletter two months ago that everyone knows there is a God, according to Romans 1, and we are free to seek God or to ignore Him.)
- The Gospel, the Good News about Jesus and the Kingdom of God, is not only to be believed but to be obeyed! I believe that means that Jesus is not only Savior but Lord, Master, King. (Remember that Romans 10 says we are saved if we *confess with out mouth and believe in our heart Jesus as Lord.*) Jesus can't be our Savior if He is not our Lord!
- The penalty for not believing and obeying is spelled out in clear and terrifying fashion.

FOR MEDITATION

- *Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, if the Lord has not commanded it?* (Lamentations 3:37)
- *John answered. A man can receive nothing (he can claim nothing, he can take unto himself nothing) except as it has been granted to him from heaven. (A man must be content to receive the gift which is given him from heaven; there is no other source.)* (John 3:27AMP)
- *Apart from Me, you can do nothing.* (John 15:5)

MINISTRY

I leave for the Amazon on Monday, Sep. 22. Will fly to Dallas-Miami-Lima, Peru (a night flight) - Equitos, Peru; spend the balance of that day and night in a hotel (couldn't make a better connection) - leave early Wednesday via a small river boat for an 8-hour trip on the Amazon to Requena, Peru; starting the next day spend four full days and nights (sharing teaching time with several other pastors) as we preach and minister to about 1,500 pastors and leaders who will come from Peru, Colombia and Brazil. Arrive back home on the evening of October 1st. Wow, does that sound like an adventure, or what! (I had my choice: I could either go on this trip or sit out on my patio in a rocker, chew tobacco, and spit, and since I hate tobacco I decided to go.)

Could I ask you please to fast (at least one or two meals) and pray for us? There is always spiritual opposition when we make these trips. Pray for the presence and anointing of the Holy Spirit (apart from Him we can do nothing); for protection for all who travel, including the poor pastors and their families who are making a big sacrifice to come; protection from enemies of the Gospel, including protection from witchcraft; protection from sickness (If I have gotten sick on many mission trips, I believe because I did not have sufficient prayer-cover); for blessing and favor from government leaders; for help in crossing borders and customs; pray as the Lord leads you.

God Bless,

Glenn

WEBSITE:

glennbrownministries.com

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