



REAL COURAGE

SERMON NOTES

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These sermon notes are to be used in conjunction with *Real Courage: Where Bible and Life Meet* by Thaddeus Barnum (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016).

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ABOUT THESE NOTES

Real Courage by Thaddeus Barnum serves as the text for this interactive study. With clarity and utmost practicality, *Real Courage* helps us face our fears, weaknesses, and times of sagging faith, along with drawing us closer to God. Barnum shows us the heart of being a disciple as he relates seven events in Jacob's life with poignantly told stories from Barnum's own life.

Trust the Lord to enrich your life and the lives of your group members as you explore the meaning of real courage in these sessions.



WEEK 1

WHEN FAITH TAKES A TUMBLE



1 Kings 19:1–19

INTRODUCTION



Perhaps you have seen the TV commercial in which an elderly woman lying on the floor pushes an emergency help button. Frantically she screams: “Help! I’ve fallen and I can’t get up.” A medical responder answer, “Help is on the way.”

Elijah exhibited courageous faith on Mount Carmel. He boldly summoned the Israelites to return to the Lord. He defeated the prophets of Baal in a contest to determine whether Baal or Jehovah was the true God, and finally he put the prophets of Baal to death (see 1 Kings 18). But then his faith took a tumble and needed help to get back up.

Elijah fled from Israel when he heard that Queen Jezebel had sworn to kill him by the next day (19:1–3). Fortunately, help was on the way.

SERMON OUTLINE



I. What Causes Faith to Take a Tumble? (1 Kings 19:1–4)

A. Threats We Heed (vv. 1–3)

We cannot avoid the threats that bombard us. The world is a threatening place. But we do not have to heed them. Elijah should have expected Jezebel to retaliate against him for slaying her dearly loved prophets, but he should have believed God would protect him. Unfortunately, he feared Jezebel more than all the false prophets. So he ran for his life.

B. Thoughts We Harbor (v. 4)

Sitting under a broom tree in the desert, Elijah held a one-man pity party. He entertained the thought of having the Lord take his life. He even prayed for the Lord to end his life. Also, he harbored the thought that he was no better than his ancestors. He, like them, had failed God. Do you ever feel so miserable that you want to die? Do you ever feel like a complete failure? Thoughts like those indicate your faith may have taken a tumble. Fortunately, your faith is renewable.

II. What Helps to Cure Faith That Has Taken a Tumble? (vv. 5–18)

God did not answer Elijah's prayer for an end to his life. No doubt it is a good thing God doesn't answer our prayers when they are irrational. Graciously, God restored Elijah's fallen faith.

A. Physical Renewal (v. 5–8)

1. Rest

A pastor used to say, "Christians on their way to heaven should be in bed by eleven." Although we shouldn't be legalistic about this instruction, we should be serious about getting sufficient rest. If we overwork our bodies, our spiritual life will suffer. Elijah needed to rest. He had run a long distance and was surely exhausted. So the Lord let him sleep.

2. Proper Nourishment

The Lord provided food and water for Elijah. Do we eat properly or do we skip meals or eat unhealthy snacks? We need the nourishment provided by healthy eating, so we need to eat regularly and properly.

B. Spiritual Renewal (vv. 9–14)

When our faith takes a tumble, we need a new revelation of God. Elijah had often seen God perform miracles. The prophet's life was full of sensational glimpses of God. Now, however, he needed to see God in "a gentle blowing" (v. 17). He received this revelation of God while he was inside a cave. The Lord sent a strong tornado, an earthquake, a fire, but he was not in these sensational things. He was in the gentle blowing.

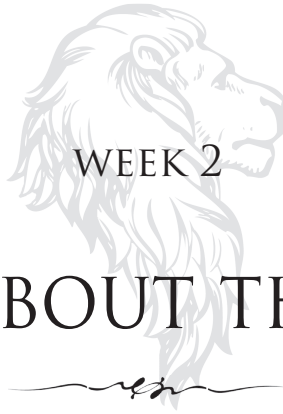
C. A New Commission (vv. 15–19)

Elijah had asked God to end his life, but God still had work for him. He commissioned Elijah to anoint kings and a successor. The Ahab-Jezebel regime would topple! With his faith restored, Elijah set out to do what God instructed him to do. Our God is the God of second chances. As long as we are still breathing, He has work for us to do.

CONCLUSION



Let's learn to see God in the ordinary things of life, as well as the extraordinary. He is with us while we work at a computer, drive a tractor, or wash dishes. And let's recognize that He has left us on the earth to serve Him.



WEEK 2

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE LENSES

Genesis 28:10–15; 32:3–21

INTRODUCTION



A dentist removed a male patient's eyeglasses before injecting Novocain and drilling to remove tooth decay. After fitting the patient for a crown, he handed a pair of eyeglasses to the patient. On his drive home, the patient realized his vision was seriously distorted, but he thought the Novocain had reached his eyes and caused the distortion. He hoped he would arrive home without an accident.

Upon arriving home, the patient removed the eyeglasses and found, to his complete surprise, they were not his. They were obviously a woman's eyeglasses. He returned to the dentist's office and learned he had received the female dental assistant's eyeglasses. The distorted vision cleared up instantly when he and his own eyeglasses were reunited.

Looking through the wrong lenses can be very problematic. In the story of Jacob, we discover that God looked at Jacob through the lens of love, whereas Jacob looked at his brother Esau through the lens of fear.

SERMON OUTLINE



I. God Looked at Jacob through the Lens of Love (Gen. 28:10–15)

Romans 9:13 quotes God as saying, "JACOB I LOVED." Surely God showed His love to Jacob during Jacob's first night on the run from Esau. Alone and in the darkness, Jacob used a stone for a pillow and fell asleep (Gen. 28:10). In a dream, he saw a stairway stretching from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending (vv. 11–12). Best of all, he saw God and heard Him speak.

A. A Glimpse of His Person (v. 13)

God identified himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac, He was the covenant-keeping God, who had revealed himself to Jacob's father and grandfather.

B. Unqualified Promises (vv. 13–15)

God promised to keep the Abrahamic covenant through Jacob. Jacob's descendants would be numerous. They would possess the Promised Land and be a source of blessing to all nations (v. 14). This blessing would come through the Messiah (see Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16). God also promised to protect Jacob and bring him home again (Gen. 28:15). He promised not to leave Jacob until He had fulfilled His purpose for him. Hasn't God made similar promises to us? Because He loves us is with us every step of life's journey. He protects us and is fulfilling His purpose in our lives.

II. Jacob Looked at Esau through the Lens of Fear (32:3–21)

Too bad Jacob did not burn God's promises into his heart. Instead, when he heard that Esau and 400 men were approaching, he responded in fear.

A. He Tried to Buy Esau's Favor (vv. 3–5)

He sent gifts to Esau and instructed the messengers to tell Esau how wealthy he had become while staying with Laban. Clearly, Jacob was relying on his wits instead of on God's promises.

B. Jacob Resorted to Plan B (vv. 6–12)

His plan included both scheming and also prayer, direct opposites. He planned first and then prayed. Unfortunately, we, too, follow that pattern far too often. Jacob had not forgotten God's promises; he had simply failed to act on them (vv. 9–12). He was looking at Esau through the lens of fear instead of looking at God and His promises through the lens of love.

CONCLUSION



A young pastor tried to comfort a godly, elderly, bedridden woman by telling her Hebrews 13:5 in the original language includes a triple negative. He explained that God said, "I will never, no never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

The elderly saint responded, "Well, maybe God had to say it three times for you unbelieving preachers, but once is good enough for me."

Let's look to God through the lens of love and thank Him for His unfailing promises!



WEEK 3

A PRAYER OF DESPERATION FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA



Jonah 1–2

INTRODUCTION



When a child of God disobeys his or her heavenly Father, he or she begins a downward journey that leads to desperation. Jonah’s journey was down, down, down. He went down “below deck.” He went down into the sea, and he went down into the belly of the great fish.

SERMON OUTLINE



I. A Desperate Situation (Jon. 1 — 2:2)

A. Jonah’s Disobedience (1:1–3)

Jonah tried to run from God’s presence and call. He traveled in the opposite direction from Nineveh.

B. Jonah’s Desperation (2:1–2)

Jonah described his situation as distressful and “the depth of Sheol” (v. 2).

II. A Desperate Prayer (vv. 1–9)

A. He Desperately Needed to Be Heard

Jonah recognized God was chastening him, so he prayed toward the right place, the temple, and cried out to the right Person.

B. He Desperately Needed Help

He acknowledged that deliverance comes from the Lord: “Salvation is from the LORD” (v. 9). God chastens His erring children, but affliction is designed to drive us back to God.

III. Deliverance (v. 10)

A. The Lord Commanded the Fish

Nothing is too hard for the Lord. If He can command a great fish to do what He says, He can take charge of any of our desperate situations.

B. The Lord Completely Delivered Jonah

The great fish did not release Jonah into the sea to fend for himself. It released him onto dry ground.

CONCLUSION



When the Lord commanded Jonah a second time to go to Nineveh, Jonah promptly obeyed (see 3:1–2). God can deliver us from even the most desperate situations, but we must not think we can rescue ourselves. Rather, we must humble ourselves, pray, leave the escape route in His hands, and promptly do His will.



ALL NIGHT WRESTLING

Genesis 32:22–32

INTRODUCTION



Professional wrestling has become a highly entertaining and lucrative sport. Millions of fans watch their favorite wrestlers in person or on TV. Whether fake or real, wrestling commands a large audience and the top wrestlers sport huge championship belts, as well as receive lots of money.

Genesis 32:22–32 focuses on a wrestling match that took place thousands of years ago between God and Jacob. The big event lasted all night, and it brought Jacob three valuable benefits.

SERMON OUTLINE



I. Jacob Received a New Encounter with God (Gen. 32:22–30)

A. The All Night Wrestler

Jacob had sent his two wives, two maidservants, eleven sons, and all his possessions across the Jabbok River (v. 22). And then he was alone in the darkness. Suddenly a man appeared and wrestled with him all night (v. 24). Perhaps Jacob thought the wrestler was Esau. The two fought furiously. Jacob put up a valiant fight, but finally, at daybreak, the man asked Jacob to release his hold on him and let him go. However, Jacob said he would not let the wrestler go until the wrestler blessed him (v. 29).

B. The Blessing In the Dark

After receiving the blessing, Jacob realized the wrestler was God, so he named the place Peniel, saying, “I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been preserved” (v. 30).

Have you ever felt like Jacob, alone, in the darkness, feeling imminent danger? If so, did you wrestle with God in prayer throughout the night? Did you feel a desperate need of answered prayer? You may need a new encounter with God, one that is up close and personal. Fortunately for Jacob and us, God struggles with us in order to bring new blessings and give us a better view of himself. If life were all sunshine and roses, we might miss getting close to God and being blessed by Him in some new and wonderful way.

II. Jacob Received a New Name from God (vv. 27–28)

A. A New Name

When the wrestler—God—asked Jacob’s name, Jacob answered, “Jacob” (v. 27). That name was a reflection of his character. He was a heel catcher, a deceiver, a trickster. However, God had a new name for Jacob. “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel” (v. 28).

B. God Fights for Us

Although the meaning of the name Israel is uncertain, it probably means “God fights.” Until the wrestling match, Jacob had fought to advance his own interests, using his cunning and trickery. Now that God had subdued him, He would fight Jacob’s battles. He would fight for Israel, the man, and for Israel, the nation. A study of history shows how God has fought for the nation of Israel, even when Israel’s foes seemed to be an insurmountable force. God also fights for you and me. No weapon that is formed against us will prosper. “If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?” (Rom. 8:31) “In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” (v. 37).

III. Jacob Received a New Walk before God (Gen. 32:25–31)

A. The Limp

During the wrestling match, God dislocated Jacob’s hip (v. 25). As the sun rose following the all-night wrestling, Jacob walked with a limp because of the dislocated hip (v. 31). Symbolically, his new walk caused him to rely more fully on God for strength.

B. A Better Walk

We, too, walk differently since God won the battle for our souls. Before we became believers, we walked in darkness, following the ways of the world (Eph. 2:1–2). Now, by grace, we can walk (live) worthy of our calling, in love, and in the Spirit (Eph. 4:1; 5:2; Gal. 5:16).

CONCLUSION



After wrestling with God, Jacob did not lead a perfect life, but he was more compliant in God’s hands and less prone to act in self-will. We, too, are not perfect yet, but our life is holier than it was before we became believers. It has been said, “We are not as good as we ought to be, and not as good as we are going to be, but, praise God, we are not as bad as we used to be.”



WEEK 5

PETER: A WORK IN PROGRESS

John 1:41–42

INTRODUCTION



Andrew was one of John the Baptist's disciples until he met Jesus and spent a day with Him. Convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, he quickly found his brother Simon and brought him to Jesus (John 1:35–42).

The best thing that can happen to anyone is to be brought to Jesus, because Jesus saves and changes life for the good. That's what He did for Simon. He looked at Simon, but He also looked beyond Simon to see what He would make of him. He would change him from Simon ("One who hears") To Cephas (Peter, "a stone"). Just as the Lord changed Jacob's name to Israel and also changed his life (Gen. 32:28–31), so He changed Simon's name and would also change his life.

Of course, like us, Simon Peter was a human being who would fail the Lord and occasionally fear when he should have trusted. However, because the Lord was working in his life, he would become a man of great faith.

SERMON OUTLINE



I. Peter's Failures

A. Self-will (Matt. 16:21–23)

When Jesus told His disciples that He was going to Jerusalem where He would suffer, be killed, and rise again, Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him. This was failure on Peter's part to understand the ultimate purpose for which Jesus had come into the world.

B. Self-Confidence (26:31–35)

When Jesus foretold that His disciples would fall away on account of Him, Peter demonstrated unfounded self-confidence. He assured Jesus that he would never let Him down.

C. Desertion (vv. 55–58)

Not long after Peter's boasting, Peter fled from Jesus when soldiers arrested Him.

D. Denial (vv. 69–75)

Just as Jesus had predicted, Peter denied the Lord three times in the high priest's courtyard. If we search our past, we may find we are a lot like Peter. We think we will not fail our Lord, but self-will and self-confidence cause us to act as though we do not know Him. Occasionally, under social pressure we may try to cover the fact that we belong to Jesus.

II. Peter's Fears

A. In a Storm (14:24–32)

When a strong storm arose over the Sea of Galilee, Peter and the rest of the disciples feared for their lives, especially when Jesus walked toward their boat. They thought they were seeing a ghost. When Peter began to walk on the water at Jesus' bidding, he started to sink. In desperation, he called to the Lord to save him.

B. In an Upper Room (John 20:19)

After the crucifixion, Peter and the other disciples concealed themselves behind locked doors. Like Peter, we have unfounded fears. They shouldn't exist in view of Jesus' presence and promises.

III. Peter's Faith

In spite of his failures and fears, Peter belonged to the Lord, and the Lord kept working in his life. After He restored Peter, Peter often demonstrated great faith and became a leader in the early church.

A. At Pentecost (Acts 2:14, 22–23)

On the day of Pentecost, Peter boldly presented the gospel of Christ in Jerusalem, the city that had clamored for Jesus' death. Only strong faith in the risen Savior would enable Peter to summon the Jews to repentance.

B. In Herod's Prison (12:1–12)

After Herod executed James, he threw Peter into prison. He intended to execute Peter the next day, but Peter did not lose a moment's sleep. He must have believed what Jesus had told him after the resurrection. Jesus said Peter would die as an old man (John 21:18). When he was in prison, he wasn't old yet, so he rested on Jesus' promise and slept well.

C. In His letters (1 Pet. 1:3–5; 5:7–9)

Peter's faith is evident in his first epistle. He wrote about a bright future (1:3–5); and about deliverance from anxiety (5:7), and from the Devil (vv. 8–9).

CONCLUSION



The Lord is working in our lives too. He is looking beyond what we are now, and sees what we will become when He finishes shaping us according to His will (Rom. 8:28–29; Phil. 2:13). He is like a potter, who takes a mass of clay and molds it into a beautiful vessel. When the Master Potter finishes His work, we will be vessels that resemble His dear Son.



WEEK 6

COURAGEOUS FAITH

Nehemiah 1:1—2:8

INTRODUCTION



From the story of Jacob we learn that Jacob was afraid to meet his brother Esau until God replaced his fear with courageous faith. Centuries later, another man, Nehemiah, a descendant of Jacob, chose to confront a desperate situation with courageous faith. You and I must also choose between fear and faith when life brings a desperate situation to our doorstep.

SERMON OUTLINE



I. A Troubling Situation (Neh. 1:1–3)

A. The Reporters (vv. 1–2)

Nehemiah lived in the Persian winter palace. He was a Jew. He served the king as his cupbearer, which was a dangerous role. He had to taste the king's wine before the king drank it. If it were poisoned, Nehemiah would die. Hanani, one of Nehemiah's brothers, and several other men brought a report about the survivors of the captivity.

B. The Report (v. 3)

The men reported that the survivors in Jerusalem were “in great distress and reproach,” the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, and the city's gates were burned (v. 3).

II. A Request Made of God (vv. 4–11)

A. It Was Intense (vv. 4–6)

The tragic news caused Nehemiah to mourn, fast, and pray (v. 4). Do we respond like that when we learn about a church split or a pastor's moral failure? Nehemiah prayed day and night, and addressed God as sovereign, "great and awesome" and covenant keeping (vv. 5–6). By faith, he knew nothing was too hard for God.

B. It Was Confessional (vv. 6–7)

The dreadful situation in Jerusalem wasn't God's fault. Nehemiah identified with the nation of Israel in owning up to her wicked ways. He confessed they had not obeyed God's laws and had failed to believe His pledge to scatter His erring people among the nations (vv. 6–8). However, God had also pledged to restore His people to their land if they would repent (v. 9). If we want God to answer our prayers, we must be confessional and repentant. He graciously restores the fallen when they humble themselves before Him.

III. A Courageous Request Made of the King (2:1–7)

A. It Was Specific (vv. 1–5, 7–8)

Nehemiah appeared before the king, but his face was sad (v. 1). Because the king wanted to be surrounded by happy faces, Nehemiah's countenance put him in grave danger. He explained his sadness was due to the destructive state of Jerusalem (v. 3). And then the king asked, "What would you request?" (v. 4). Nehemiah requested permission to go to Jerusalem to rebuild it (vv. 5–6). But he also asked for letters of safe conduct to the governors of the lands he would pass through to get to Jerusalem. Further, he requested a letter to the keeper of the king's forest so he would supply lumber for the gates of the citadel by the temple, for the city wall, and for what would be Nehemiah's residence (v. 8). Faith dares to ask specifically and boldly!

B. It Was Supported by Prayer (v. 4)

Before answering the king, Nehemiah prayed. We can do no better than pray when danger stares at us. We can pray anywhere: at the office, at home, in the market—anywhere!

IV. A Favorable Response from the King (v. 8)

A. He Granted Nehemiah's Requests

God moved the heart of the king. He granted Nehemiah everything he had requested.

B. God Was Gracious

Nehemiah attributed his success with the king to the fact that God's gracious hand was upon him. Let us never forget that God is good and gives us whatever we ask for if we ask according to His will.

CONCLUSION



A journalist interviewing an enormously wealthy maharajah in India was taking notes with a ballpoint pen and notepad. The maharajah, who had never seen a ballpoint pen, remarked that he would love to have a pen like that.

“Here, take this one,” the journalist offered.

The maharajah was overwhelmed by the journalist’s kindness. “What can I give you as a sign of my gratitude?” he asked.

“Well,” replied the journalist, “I like to play golf, so if you are ever in my country, you can buy me a golf club.”

Years had passed, when the journalist received a call from the maharajah. “I am in your country and want you to know I have bought you not just one golf club but two, and each one has a swimming pool.”

When God answers our faith, He does so according to His riches in glory and bestows far more on us than we could ever imagine.



WEEK 7

FACING THE FUTURE COURAGEOUSLY



Joshua 1:1–9

INTRODUCTION



Moses was dead but God was still alive. He had work for Joshua to do. Leaders come and go, but God's work continues. We must ask courageously what role He wants us to fill.

SERMON OUTLINE



I. Joshua's Appointment (Josh. 1:1–4)

A. His Training (v. 1)

We need to step up courageously to a new level of leadership when God makes the assignment. Joshua had been Moses' faithful aide. If we are faithful in little things, the Lord will give us responsibility for greater things (Luke 16:10).

B. His Task (Josh. 1:2–4)

Joshua would lead the Israelites across the Jordan River and through rough land to face a fierce enemy, but God's call brings His enabling power.

II. Joshua's Encouragement (vv. 5–6)

A. The Lord's Presence (v. 5)

Jesus promised, "I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20). A visiting guest speaker told the pastor, "The Lord is here today. I can feel His presence." The pastor wisely responded, "He is with us whether we *feel* His presence or not. He is always with us." We can draw courage from the fact the Lord is with us always.

B. The Lord's Provision (Josh. 1:6)

The Lord promised the land of Canaan to Joshua's forefathers. He would keep His word. He will provide what He has promised to us too: strength, financial assistance, wisdom, and power.

III. Joshua's Responsibilities (vv. 7–9)

A. Revere the Word of God (vv. 7–8)

The Bible is God's inspired Word. Paul told Timothy to preach the Word and said people would not always receive it (2 Tim. 4:1–4). Often, churches turn from the Word to entertainment, but people still need the Word. Individually, too, we need to meditate on God's Word and obey it (Josh. 1:7–8). Armed with Scripture, we can serve God courageously.

B. Rely on the God of the Word (v. 9)

Trust in the Lord drives away fear and instills courage. The disciples hid behind closed doors out of fear, but after receiving the Great Commission and the power of the Holy Spirit, they declared the gospel courageously at Pentecost.

CONCLUSION



No one, except the Lord, knows precisely what the future holds. It may bring prosperity or persecution, health or illness. Whatever it brings, we can meet it courageously if we trust in the Lord and obey His Word.