

To be Brave, and Strong, and True

The 1969 movie called “Goodbye, Mr. Chips” with Peter O’Toole and Petula Clark, is about a teacher in an English boarding school for boys in the early 20th century, and the school song speaks of being brave, and strong, and true. The verse lyrics speak of three ages of life: childhood, adulthood, and old age:

In the morning of my life I shall look to the sunrise.
At a moment in my life when the world is new.
And the blessing I shall ask is that God will grant me,
To be brave and strong and true,
And to fill the world with love my whole life through.

In the noontime of my life I shall look to the sunshine,
At a moment in my life when the sky is blue.
And the blessing I shall ask shall remain unchanging.
To be brave and strong and true,
And to fill the world with love my whole life through.

In the evening of my life I shall look to the sunset,
At a moment in my life when the night is due.
And the question I shall ask only God can answer.
Was I brave and strong and true?
Did I fill the world with love my whole life through?

This got me thinking of what it means to be brave, strong, and true in God’s eyes, in line with our previous series of studies on being “Valiant for Truth”. The movie and its song are teaching that we should inculcate in our young boys (and girls) a more noble desire and aim than mere worldly satisfaction. Each one of us has a God-ordained purpose in life, and in order to fulfill that purpose requires strength of character. Three important parts of a noble character are bravery, strength, and staying true.

Be Brave

To be brave is to face danger or difficult circumstances with courage, and not to allow fear to hinder our actions. It is to rise up in determination to do all we possibly can, come what may, and not to shirk responsibility because of a likelihood of ridicule, injury, or even death. We cannot be called brave unless we face difficulties, danger, or temptations to compromise.

It is interesting that the words brave or bravery do not occur in the KJV except once, and that has to do with women’s immoderate dress, not moral bravery. And yet the Bible is filled with examples of bravery, as David and Goliath, Daniel and his three friends, Jonathan and his armor bearer, Peter standing up to the authorities, etc. So this is not a word study about bravery, but looking for what the Bible says that will enable us to be brave.

Today people think it is brave to admit publicly that they are LGBTQ-XYZ, or support abortion, or to rail on the MAGA crowd. How is it brave to make an announcement that you know will be met with cheers and acclamation from the liberal press and the academic and political communities? Real bravery is to say something you know will be met with outrage and ridicule, or even physical assault.

Admonitions to bravery in the Bible are most often seen in being told not to fear.

Josh. 1:5-9 – “... as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage; ... Have not I 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.”

That command to Joshua was in expectation of physical wars against the Canaanites, but God also warned Jeremiah and Ezekiel not to fear to speak the word of the LORD to people who would not want to hear it.

Jer. 1:8 – “Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.”

Ezek. 2:6 – “And thou, son of man, be not afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house.”

Pastors and teachers today should also take that to heart. Anyone who is afraid to speak what God has shown them, because they know it will be rejected, will have God to answer to. The real danger is that they will become those who “tickle the ears” of their congregations, or the watchman who did not sound the alarm.

It is significant that we are to be brave, not out of mere mental determination, but because God is with us. It is this faith that allows us not to fear, or at least to overcome those fears.

Bravery is not bravado. Many men have brave mouths but then wither under pressure. Many brave acts have been done by men who perhaps did not feel brave, like the men attacking Trenton with George Washington, or the Civil War, or especially those who stormed the beaches on D-Day. Bravery is much more than feelings of confidence. In fact, I would guess that many brave actions have been done by men who did not feel brave, and perhaps had no confidence that they would even survive.

And Strong

The glory of young men is their strength (Prov. 20:29). It is good for us to cultivate physical strength, for the purpose of general health and for competence in labor, but it is not an end in itself (like the self-worship of body builders). In the song of the schoolboys I believe physical strength really was a part of the meaning, but that it primarily referred to moral and intellectual strength, and to a strength of will, and was therefore an expansion of the concept of bravery. Joshua was told to “be strong and of a good courage”.

God is not impressed with physical strength or numbers. Ps. 33:16-18 – “There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy;” Ps. 147:10-11 – “He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.” He used a mere 300 men with Gideon against the Midianites, instead of 32,000.

God did not choose all the bigger and stronger brothers of David. 1 Sam. 16:7 – “But the LORD said unto Samuel. Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart”. Look at the courage of David in the face of Goliath’s threats. His total confidence was in God .

God often encouraged men to be strong (Moses to Joshua, David to Solomon). But **where does this strength come from?**

- From the knowledge that God is with us.

Dt. 31:6 – “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, not be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.”

Isa. 41:10 – “Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God:I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

- From past experiences with God

1 Sam. 17:37 – “David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.”

- From waiting on God.

Isa. 40:31 – “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Ps. 27:13-4 – “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.”

So God’s command to be strong does not mean mere physical strength, but that which comes from faith, from humble reliance on God, trusting him to deliver us and to give us the strength we need when we need it.

And True

As Christians, we are especially interested in truth. Jesus is absolute Truth, through the Word we have doctrinal truth, and there is truthfulness (to God and man), but I believe that in the schoolboys' song it is referring to being true to our convictions, true to God, true to our country, and is therefore more akin to the idea of faithfulness.

Have we been true to God, to our wives and husbands, to our children, to our employers, to the truth of God's Word, to ourselves, and to the church?

We live in a very different world than I was born into, or what existed in 2000, or even 2020. Our country has become almost unrecognizable, and is continually getting farther and farther from its constitutional bearings. We don't have to be prophets to see that hard days, even war may soon be upon us, and we can no longer trust in an overpowering military to ward off the Chinese, or effective police forces to protect us against individual violence, riots, mobs, Chinese and Islamic saboteurs, and Venezuelan gangs of illegal aliens. We have seen the FBI, ATF, and DOJ turned against its own citizens in SWAT attacks, even murders. We have lived very sheltered lives in many ways, but the times may soon be upon us when we will need to prove ourselves to be brave, strong, and true.

In the first verse of the song it says that in our youth we should be praying that God would enable us to be brave and strong and true. There are many ways in which this is applicable as children. In the next verse it says that in our middle age, "when the sky is blue", our prayer should be the same, even though the kinds of bravery, strength, and truth are different from when we were children. But in the last verse it speaks of the "evening of our life, when the night is due". That is, when we have run the course of our lives and death approaches, the question we should ask, which God will answer, is "Was I brave, and strong, and true?

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