



The LORD himself goes before you  
and will be with you; he will never  
leave you nor forsake you. Do not be  
afraid; do not be discouraged.

Deut. 31:8

## Chapter Four

# HE GOES BEFORE US

Read: Acts 9



Anyone familiar with the New Testament would be familiar with Paul, one of the apostles of the early church. Paul (formerly known as Saul) was instrumental in spreading the gospel to the Gentiles, as well as authoring several New Testament Books. What some aren't as familiar with is how Ananias played a major role in Saul's conversion. We don't know much about Ananias other than a brief mention of him in the book of Acts, but in that one chapter we see the power of courageous faith and how necessary it was in fulfilling his mission.

Turning to the Book of Acts we get a glimpse of who Saul was before his conversion. Chapter 9 verse 1 tell us that he was *breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples*. Earlier on, in Chapter 7, he stood by and watched while an angry mob dragged Stephen out of the city and stoned him for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Chapter 8 clearly states that Saul approved of the

violent death that he witnessed. With a mission to destroy the church, Saul went from house to house, dragging both men and women off to prison.

## WILLING TO YIELD

Many want to serve God, but the minute it comes with a cost, we see fewer volunteers. No one wants to step onto a mission field that could cost them their life, yet God asked Ananias to put aside his fear, and to submit to His authority when He asked him to go visit Saul.

If we hope to be used for a mission, we must be willing to yield in submission. Ananias was ready to give himself over to God regardless of what that might cost.

*The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." (Acts 9:11-12)*

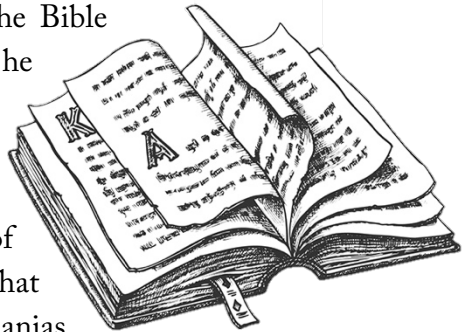
### **DID YOU KNOW**

"STRAIGHT STREET" IS THE ONLY STREET  
MENTIONED BY NAME IN THE BIBLE.

ACCORDING TO WIKIPEDIA, "THE WESTERN HALF  
OF THE STREET, INCLUDING THE MIDHAT PASHA  
SOUQ, IS NOW NAMED 'MIDHAT PASHA STREET,'  
WHILE THE EASTERN HALF, LEADING TO THE BAB  
SHARQI GATE IS NAMED 'BAB SHARQI STREET.'"

(VISIT WIKIPEDIA TO SEE A PHOTO)

Ananias was aware of the danger. The Bible tells us that he had heard the reports, he knew what Paul had done to the believers in Jerusalem, and he knew that Saul was in Damascus for the sole purpose of persecuting followers of Christ. Regardless of how he felt and what fear he might have struggled with, Ananias obeyed God and went to see Saul.



*Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 9:17)*

## HE GOES BEFORE US

What Ananias didn’t know is the same thing that many of us forget when it comes to the challenges we face—that God goes before us to fight the battle, to soften hearts, and pave the way.

Before Joshua led the people of Israel into the Promised land, Moses encouraged him saying,

*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” (Deuteronomy 31:8)*

In Chapter 1 we talked about the twelve spies that Moses sent to explore the land of Canaan, and how ten of them were afraid to return because of what they had seen.

Moses encouraged them saying,

*"Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes." (Deuteronomy 1:29-30)*

This is the same God that went before them through the desert. They saw the cloud that let them by day and the pillar of light that led them through the night. They saw the hand of God work in miraculous ways, and still failed to see His power and strength.

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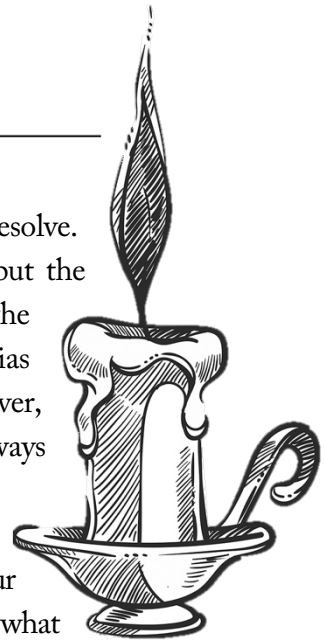
I LEARNED THAT COURAGE WAS NOT THE  
ABSENCE OF FEAR, BUT THE TRIUMPH  
OVER IT. THE BRAVE MAN IS NOT HE WHO  
DOES NOT FEEL AFRAID, BUT HE WHO  
CONQUERS THAT FEAR.

– NELSON MANDELA

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Remember, the problems you face aren't yours to resolve. Yes, we're given a path to walk faithfully through, but the outcome will never depend on our strength alone. In the same way that Esther said, "If I perish, I perish," Ananias knew that following God could cost him his life. However, the rewards that come with following God, will always outweigh the momentary pain that we face.

Every day we make thousands of choices, some of them easy, others not so much. We face giants, we face our fears, and we face trials. Some of them force us to give up what feels good as we choose that which is good. Others move us to step out of our comfort zone to a place of sacrifice as we follow God's will.



People look at courage as though it's the absence of fear, but the fact is that courage is performance in spite of one's fear.

## THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND COURAGE

So, what's the driving force behind courage? Motivation. Let me give you an example. I am terrified of wasps. You won't see me anywhere near a wasp, and if one comes my way, you can bet I'll be running in the opposite direction. On the same note, something happens to me when it comes to the ones that I love. I would hunt down a wasp and kill it before I'd let one bite my grandbabies. Love motivates me to face my greatest fears. It's the same motivation that a father has when he runs into a burning building to save his baby's life, and as believers, we are motivated by a deep love for God.

Elisabeth Elliott is well-known among Evangelical Christians, as one of the bravest souls of our generation. Several years after her husband risked his life, and was killed at the hands of Huaorani warriors, she returned to Ecuador with her young daughter to complete the mission her husband had started. Because of her courageous faith, she was instrumental in leading many of them to the Lord. I think one of the best quotes that sums up her courage is this:

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WHEN OBEDIENCE TO GOD CONTRADICTS  
WHAT I THINK WILL GIVE ME PLEASURE,  
LET ME ASK MYSELF IF I LOVE HIM.

– ELISABETH ELLIOT

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“I think that’s a question we all need to ask when it comes to facing our fears. Is our love for God greater than the fear that’s holding us back? Imagine a scale where the thing you fear is on one side and your love for God is on the other. Which way is it tipping?

If it’s tipping in favor of fear, maybe it’s time to ask yourself if your understanding of God might be skewed.

The Bible says,

*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7, KJV)*

### **DID YOU KNOW**

THE ORIGINAL WORD USED FOR “POWER” IN 2 TIMOTHY 1:7 WAS “DYNAMIS,” WHICH IS WHERE OUR WORD FOR “DYNAMITE” COMES FROM. IT’S MORE THAN SIMPLY POWERFUL, IT’S INCREDIBLY POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE.

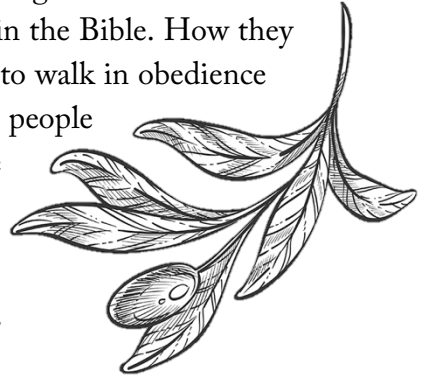
The fear that Paul is talking about is intimidation. It means that we lack assurance in what God can do. That’s where it’s important once again, that the scale is tipping in God’s favor. Ask yourself which is bigger, your problem, or God’s ability to solve it.

Courageous faith is a combination of love and trust. It means we both love God, and we trust God. It’s a faith that enables us to step out of our comfort zone when the Spirit moves us to do so.

You see, God doesn’t need us to accomplish His will, He’s fully capable of doing that on His own. What He wants is the opportunity to work through His people. He desires fellowship with

us; therefore, He calls us to be His hands and His feet. Not by our strength alone, but by His mighty Spirit that works through us.

It's not our ability He desires, it's our obedience, and so we're often led to places we'd never dream of stepping into. Consider the courageous men and women we read about in the Bible. How they were ready and willing to give up their lives to walk in obedience to God's will. God didn't choose these people because of their strength or their power, He chose them because He desired to use them for His honor and glory.



## THE DECEPTION OF COMFORT

We all struggle with courage. There's the one voice that tells us to do what *is right*, and then there's another voice, that tells us to do what *feels right*.

"Take the easy road," it says. "Walk away before you get hurt."

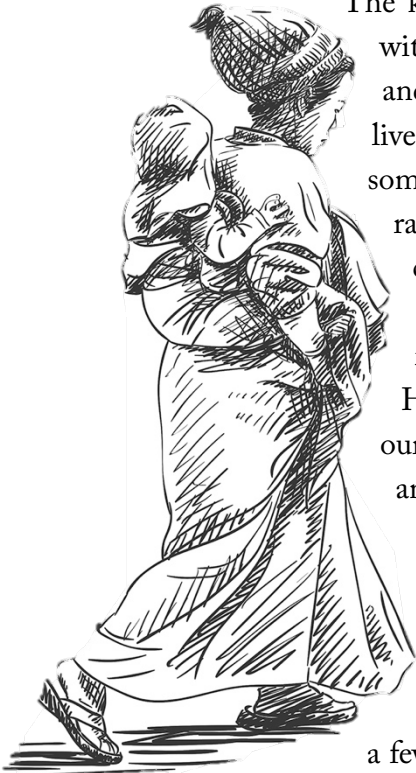
"Don't share your faith, or you might lose a friend."

"If you speak up, you'll look like a fool."

We've heard that voice throughout life. The same voice that tells us to eat that third cupcake. The same voice that tells us to stay in bed when we know that we need to get up. The voice that would rather binge Netflix than go for a walk.

It's almost like we have two brains, one based on fact, and the other on feelings. The Bible describes them by using the terms the "spirit" and "flesh," saying:

*For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. (Galatians 5:17)*



The key to one's courage, is keeping in step with the spirit. For it is through the Spirit and by the Spirit that we are equipped to live victorious lives. It's a challenge, and some days it's a knee-knocking, pulse-racing, experience, but it is the path to the cross that leads us to Christlikeness.

The Spirit leads us in paths of righteousness, but if we hope to follow His lead, we must be willing to surrender our lives to God's will, and to sacrifice anything that stands in the way.

Don't be drawn in by the deception of comfort. Sometimes the greatest blessings in life are just outside the comfort zone. The fear of rejection, the fear of failure, and the fear of pain are just a few of the walls that lock us in and hold us

back from moving forward in life.

As I got to thinking about this today, I was reminded of those who gave up the comforts of home to follow the Lord:

*But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God." (Ruth 1:16)*

*By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed, and went, even though he did not know where he was going. (Hebrews 11:8)*

*[Moses] chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead to his reward. (Hebrews 11:25-26)*

Although it is completely irrational at times, we follow our emotions instead of following faith. And what do we miss in the process? The opportunity to be blessed in ways we might never imagine. And so, it's important to get past that wall, or at least be willing to when we know that we should.

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MAN CANNOT DISCOVER NEW OCEANS  
UNLESS HE HAS THE COURAGE TO  
LOSE SIGHT OF THE SHORE.  
— LORD CHESTERFIELD

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The Christian life is one of transformation—a readiness to leave sin behind, with an onward motion to the goal ahead. And, as long as we're in the flesh, we are fighting an ongoing battle.

We take our cue from Christ Who knelt to pray on the night He was betrayed, saying, “Not my will but thine be done.”

We don't slip into holiness like a comfy recliner. It's more like climbing a mountain through rocky terrain. And by the fruit of the almighty Spirit of God working in us and through us we fight the good fight. We press on to the goal. We crucify the flesh. We cast

aside anything that weighs us down. We bring our bodies into subjection. We count all things as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.

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## PAUSE REFLECT

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Fill in the spaces:

The LORD is my light and my

\_\_\_\_\_ whom shall I fear? The LORD is the

\_\_\_\_\_ of my life—of whom shall I be

afraid? (Psalm 27:1)

In what ways was Paul persecuting the Christians?  
(See Acts Chapter 9 & 8:3)

What was the driving force behind Ananias courage?

What does the word submission mean according to Dictionary.com?

What are some of the walls that lock us in and hold us back from moving forward in life?

In this chapter, we looked at five people who left their comfort zone to follow the Lord. Who were they?

Courageous faith is a combination of two things, what are they?

Before Joshua led the Israelites into The Promised Land, Moses encouraged him by telling him three things about God. What were they?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Surely God is  
my salvation;  
I will trust  
and not be  
afraid.  
The LORD,  
the LORD  
himself, is my  
strength and  
my defense;  
He has become  
my salvation.

Isaiah 12:2

