

Captains Courageous

Our Struggle to Be Vulnerable

July 21, 2024

Today we're scrutinizing our struggle to be vulnerable in order to offer the love we desire.



Ever feel more affectionate toward pets than people? Why is that?

I was sitting in the back last Sunday when Noah quoted the last contestant standing – and starving – on the TV show “Alone”, who said, “Everyone should be so hungry, that they enjoy sucking the eyeball out of a rabbit.” And we all gave a collective groan of revulsion. Two ladies were cringing next to me, so I said, “At least he said rabbit and not bunny”. But why did we react the way we did? Because bunnies are cute (although that one’s a real Bible thumper); and we consider ‘em as pets. And **we relate to pets in a far more open, honest, and vulnerable manner, than we do with people.** But why? Well, those hairy little mammals – the pets – so obviously **need us**, and **depend on us**, and **don’t hold our flaws against us**, and dare I say, **unconditionally love us.** And most of all, they just **don’t judge us.** Except for cats. And I’m just gonna say it: I hate ... being judged.

I went to Hawaii about 25 pounds ago. And I bought a bottle of water at an ABC store. I spent a buck more cuz I liked the dark blue bottle. It looked cool, and it was a vacation splurge. But when I went to pay, the cashier says, in front of everyone, “Why you buyin’ the expensive water?” I smiled and said, “I just like it.” And she says, “You know it’s all the same.” I said, “I know.” And she looks at it and says, disapprovingly, “Well ... okay then.”

I left, offended, determined to never shop there again. Why? **Cuz that’s all it takes!** We can be so petty. But petty is merely the symptom; **fear of disapproval, rejection, and judgment is the problem.** The next day, I wanted to go back, put a blue bottle on the counter, say, “It’s ritzy water guy. Ring me up.” And slide her a nickel and say, “Here’s a little something for you.” But I didn’t. Because, fear. And because of fear, we so often refuse to step out to make the very connections we so desperately desire. Except with pets. Because, unlike pets, **people make us feel unacceptable and unworthy.** Why do you suppose they do that? They don’t mean to, mind you. Just as you don’t mean to make them feel that way. But, you do. How else could we all feel this way about them – unless, we’re all part of them too? When you think about it, she was just looking out for me, at her own expense of losing that extra dollar. And I was judging her. And rejecting her help. And punishing her by avoiding her. So, **why do you suppose we do that?** We don’t mean to, mind you, I mean, most of the time. **It’s just that we mostly don’t mean not to.**

If I wanted to love her as I love myself, I would’ve gone back, bought a regular water, and said, “You’re right. They’re all the same. I should’ve listened to you.” And we would’ve been instant friends. And she would’ve then been glad to see me return, rather than glad I stayed away.



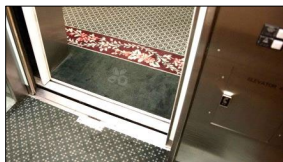
But that takes humility and effort and practice and grace. Lots of grace. Cuz in case you haven't noticed, *people in general can be fairly unlovable.* They're lovable *in theory.* But *practically speaking, it takes fierce determination, which takes powerful motivation,* which can only come from the *only One* who is called, "the *Captain of their salvation*", who said:

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another. [Because] By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love" – John 13:34-35 NIV

This is your *Captain* speaking! And He's saying, it's *your turn* to be the *captain.* Because:

By *this* the children of *God* and the children of the *devil* are *obvious:* anyone who does not *practice righteousness* is *not* of *God,* nor the one who does not [practice] *love ... [In fact] We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love ... [And] He who does not love [still] abides in death.* – 1 John 3:10, 14 NAS

Noah *boiled down* his *point* last week, to this: **Do hard things.** Well, I'm *following that up* with *this: Do nice things.* Because it's *literally, spiritually,* a matter of (*abiding in*) *life and death.* So, **how often do you step out and offer the compassion that you desire?** It takes *very little effort,* but *quite a bit of boldness* to risk *opening up* without *knowing* if you'll be *rejected.*



*Same trip. Cramped elevator. Going up. Doors open. Man steps out. Looks confused. Awkwardly scurries back in. Head down. Doors close. Nobody says anything. Why would they? But I guess I'm the captain, so I said, to no one in particular, "I got out on the wrong floor, turned back too late, just as the doors shut. Felt like an idiot." Awkward guy says, "I just did that a minute ago." And a woman in the back says, "Me too." We could've made T-shirts! We were a club! We said goodbye as we left. Cuz, **we all long to belong.** And that's *all it takes.* "Them" just need a *captain.**



Last Sunday, Aaron called himself the *Cruise Director.* I *like* that. We *might* have to *get* him a *hat!* And it *reminded* me of an *analogy* I really *like:* **This planet of ours is sailing around the sun, through the darkness of space down here, like a big ol' cruise ship.**

And we choose to relate to this world as one of three travelers: the entitled passenger: the lowly deckhand; or the courageous captain. *Entitled passengers complain and fuss* when they're not being *served or attended to,* to their *satisfaction.* Like *me* at *ABC.* *Lowly deckhands live life* with their *head down,* without any *power or authority.* But *courageous captains stride the deck of planet earth,* with *all authority* – with *no sense of superiority* – *watching for ways to encourage and strengthen and care for their passengers and crew.* Even if it *means* going *down* with the *ship* for their *salvation.* So, **which mostly are you: captain, passenger, or crew?** Word of *advice:* be the *captain.* **This is your planet. So own it.** God's *called, commissioned, and commanded* you. So:

Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you ... for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power [so there'll be no lowly deckhands] and [the fearless] love [of a courageous captain] and self-control. [So there'll be no entitled fussing or fits] – 2 Timothy 1:6-7 ESV

Therefore, as God's *chosen people, holy* and [being] *dearly loved, [yourselves]* *clothe yourselves with [the Captain's uniform of] compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other [cuz He knows what we're like] and forgive whatever grievances you may have ... as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on [fearless] love, which binds them all together ... [because by this, you'll]* Let the *peace of Christ [actually] rule in your hearts* – Colossians 3:12-15 NIV

And **when the peace from the dear love of Christ rules in us, it inspires and empowers us.** “But I just need more courage.” No. You don't. It's in you. Don't deceive yourself. Because:

There is no fear in love. But perfect [Captain Jesus] love drives out fear – 1 John 4:18 NIV



If you're at a campfire, among *strangers*, and you see a *toddler falling into the flames*, would *shyness or embarrassment hold you back from springing into action?* Of course not. Cuz **in that moment, you're the captain.** And *shyness can't hold a candle to boldness when pure love is involved.* So, be *honest: we don't need more courage, we need more love.*



Because *pure Jesus-likeness love, is the only motivation that'll inspire and empower the fierce determination required, for the vulnerable boldness required, for offering the true love required of every courageous captain!* And **we'll only choose to be vulnerable to the degree that our identity – our sense of self-worth – is founded on God's love,** and grounded in His Word, and *not contingent on the temperamental approval of mere mortals* – or, as I like to call 'them': *nose breathers!* So:



Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he? – Isaiah 2:22 ESV

Instead remember, and highly regard, the One who put it there in the first place ... literally.

The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. – Genesis 2:7 ESV



So take a breath and watch for ways to care for the creatures traveling with you on this *brief journey through the darkness down here.* Sacrifice a little bit of self for the sake of “*fanning into flame the gift of God, which is in you*” for the sake of those around you. Stride the deck without fear of judgment. **Fear is infectious, but courage is contagious!**



The first place I went gray, was my chest. And for reasons of *pure vanity*, I decided to get waxed for our trip. So I'm sitting in a tiny waiting room at Screamin' Eve's, on one of two chairs, when a woman, a bit older, enters, avoids eye contact, and sits in silence ... three inches away.

After a couple long minutes of awkwardness, it's too late to simply say hello. So, I turn and say, “I'm going to Hawaii, so I'm waxing the grey hair off my chest.” Too which she replies, pointing: “I have a mustache.” Because, **fear is infectious, but courage is contagious!** Nothing more said. No need.

We both *breathed* a *sigh* of *relief*, because **we connected. Related. Encouraged. Comforted. And that's all it took!** We were suddenly *soul siblings*. **Someone just had to go first. And that's the responsibility and duty of the captain.** But *think* about it, she's *there* because her *mustache* (which was *barely visible*) was *embarrassing* to *her*. And yet, she was *happy* – *relieved* even – to *point* it out to *me*! *Why?* Because, **when you open up to them, they open up to you.** Because, **we're just waiting for a chance to confess our secrets.** In fact, **if you rarely feel accept-ed, you're probably not perceived as accept-ing.**



You've likely heard that **every human heart has a God-shaped hole, that can only be filled with Christ.** But did you know **there's a human-shaped hole in every soul, that can only be filled with Christlikeness?** And *like* it or *not*, **we can only close it up by opening up to those among us.** Which requires *vulnerability*. Which requires *courage*. Which requires an *intense sense of significance* that can *only* come from the *perfect love* of our *Creator* and *Savior*. The Lord has made *so much* of our own *healing* down here, *contingent* on our *own compassion* and *care* and *openness* to those around us.

Therefore *confess* your *sins* to *each other* [**practice being open with your faults and flaws and fears**] and *pray* for *each other* so that *you* may be *healed*. – James 5:16 NIV

Show some courage and show us your weaknesses! Be *vulnerable*. Be the *captain*. Because, **vulnerability isn't weakness, it's the force that joins us and heals us.** The *enemy* has a *vested interest*, and a *diabolical scheme*, in keeping this ol' world *discouraged* and *depressed* and *isolated* and *afraid* of *relating* to *you* as *freely* and *openly* as they *do* with their *pets*. So, **how often do you offer the approval you desire vs. the judgment you despise?**



I was eating breakfast in *Waikiki*, and to my *surprise*, the *pancakes* were *perfect*. Never *knew* I *never had* *perfect* pancakes *till* I had *these*. The *air bubbles*. The *salted, whipped butter*, and *coconut syrup*. *Birds* were *literally singing* above. And as I *finished*, a *cheerful little man* in *checkered pants*, *danced* through the *room*, saying *hi* and *bye* to *each table*, and *laughing* as he *left*.

And I thought, he's *gotta* be the *one* who *made* my *pancakes*; because, only that *intensity of joy* could produce *something* like *this*. So, I quickly *paid*, and *asked* who *made* my *pancakes*. And I was *told*: "The *weirdo* who just *left*." I *ran* a *couple blocks* before I *found* those *checkered-pants*; and I *pointed* toward the *cafe*, and said, "You *made* the *pancakes*!" And he *hesitantly* said, "Yes?" And I said, "They were *perfection*!" And I *shook* his *hand*, left a *\$20 bill* in it, said "Thank you," and *turned* and *jogged* away. And he yells out, "Wow! You're *welcome*!" And *did* a *little dance*. He was a *little weird*; but, who am I to *judge*?! Leave *that* to the *passengers*. That's not *us*. **We wear the Captain's uniform of compassion and kindness and encouragement.** So this week, take *charge* of this *ship*. *Smile* and say *hi* to *strangers*. If they *don't respond*, you get a *point*. If they *respond* in a *negative way*, you get *ten points*. Try it. Cuz **you'll know you're the captain when scoring points is more satisfying than fussing or pouting.** This is *what* I want for our *church*. I mean, we already *have* the *ship*! So, *be* the *captain*! And *not* just *any* ol' *captain*; **be the kind of captain that only the joy of the Lord could produce.**