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## Following Jesus

### Part 5 – Gives Me a Brave Heart for a Broken World

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As you know, we are cranking along in a really great series called *Following Jesus*. I'm fortunate enough to get to carry the baton today. The title of the message is *Following Jesus Gives Me a Brave Heart for a Broken World*. Before we get started, I just really wanted to communicate to you guys that I'm just grateful for this opportunity. I love teaching the Bible and every time I step foot on this stage, I'm just so humbled to get to work that out and to serve our church family in that way. So, before we even get started, I just want you to know that I'm grateful.

This morning, we are really going to focus on answering one big question and the question is this: "How do we grow in godly bravery?" We are going to emphasize the concept of godly bravery because if we are honest, most acts of bravery that happen in our culture are happening because of boys trying to impress a girl; am I right? It happens in my home to this day. I impressed my wife about 11 years ago. She married me and I've been trying to impress her ever since. In fact, if you were to hang around our home for very long, you would think that she might be a judge in a Mr. Universe body building competition because I just try and impress her every chance I get. "Can I help you with that peanut butter jar?" as I flex while opening it. She's not impressed, but I will never cease to try.

Yesterday, I thought I was doing good. I was feeling pretty good and all of the sudden I hear my name screamed from the laundry room. For those of you that know my wife, you know that she is like Mary Poppins with an attitude. So, I was sensing a tinge of attitude when I heard my name. I cautiously walked around the corner into the laundry room. There was a pile of wet laundry that had been emptied out of the washer with ink stains all over it.

She said, "Somebody left a pen in the laundry."

I said, "You know, babe, Belle and Lulu love to draw. It could have been them."

Then she pulls out my shirt with the pen still attached to it. I thought surely, with all that jostling going on, it would jar free, but it did not. I was busted. It was a good dose of humility and you know a spoon full of sugar makes the humble pie go down.

Today, we are not talking about those kinds of acts of bravery. We are talking about a godly bravery. It's important that we understand what I mean by that. I want to tell you a story to kind of set the stage.

Two weeks ago, I went to work out with two of my buddies, Richard and John Scott. We worked out and on our way back, we were having a good conversation. Both these guys happen to be African American fellows.

Richard looks over at me and he asks me, "Shay, how do you feel, as a leader and a communicator, about everything that's going on in our country in regards to the racial tension and social injustice?"

At the time, I think the most recent incident was a video that was released of an African American man with his hands up who was shot in the back and died. I was really honest with him. Ashley and I just don't watch much news. I don't know if that's right or wrong, but we just don't watch much news. Really our understanding of what's going on is, in large part, just talking to people.

I was just honest with Richard and I said, "To be honest with you, I'm just kind of removed from it. I'm really focused on what's in front of me. I feel like I'm face to face with young men that are fighting with pornography and sexual addiction and that is really where my focus is at on most days. I don't really know. How do you feel about it?"

Richard goes on to tell me that last night, he got to the point where he was such a nervous wreck over everything that is happening in our country that he broke down in tears. As I watched my brother in pain, my heart softened towards him. I heard his heart and then I hopped out of the vehicle after apologizing to him for being insensitive. I wasn't even intentional enough to think about how he and John were feeling with all the stuff that was going on.

I walked into my office and I called my buddy, Ricky, who is another African American leader in our community, and I said, "Ricky, I just had this conversation with Richard and I just wanted to call and see how you're doing."

Ricky broke down in tears on the phone with a broken heart. At the end of our conversation, he just said, "Shay, you just don't know how much this means to me."

I just kind of sat there dumbfounded. All I did was make a call and ask him how he was doing. Yet the conversation that took place was so meaningful to him. I felt my heart grow in tenderness towards this situation.

In a moment, we are going to talk about the context of our broken world, but it's important to understand, before we even dive into the topic, that you can't bravely respond to a broken world without having heart ties to it, without being emotionally connected to everything that's going on. So, as a church body and as followers of Jesus, we have to engage with our African American friends and other minorities and ask them "How are you feeling right now?" We've got to go to police officers that are working the beats and say, "What are you feeling right now as you go to work today?" What will happen is our heart will be connected to our brothers and sisters and it will put us in a position where we can respond in a way that makes a difference.

Today, that's really what we are going to look at. Here's our context. Our context is a broken world. In Romans 8, Paul lays out what this looks like. In Verse 22 he says, ***For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.*** So the word picture he is using is really referring back to the curse. When Adam and Eve sinned and chose disobedience, with disobedience came the curse.

One of the curses for women is that pain will be greatly increased in childbirth. After five kids, I'm becoming an expert in labor pains. After the first service, Mary Poppins reminded me, "You're not the expert; I'm the expert." But from what I've observed, as you approach the delivery of a child, labor pains and contracts increase in both frequency and intensity, until ultimately there is... God is so good. Even in the hard lessons he teaches us, at the end of childbirth, you're left with a great blessing. We know that life is a gift. But, on the road there, it's tough going.

Paul is saying that our creation is subject to the same futility; it is cursed as well. As we move towards Jesus coming back, which is the ultimate blessing that we wait for and hope for, these labor pains, these contractions are going to intensify both in frequency and in the pain attached to it. That's the context that you and I are living in.

He goes on in Romans 1 and he begins talking about man in the midst of this context. ***28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful...***

So, we look at our Earth and it is hopelessly broken and the people that inhabit it are even worse. That's our context. So, when we look at this question, it kind of adds weight to what we are addressing: "How do we grow in godly bravery?" If you look at the measure of the brokenness of this world, it is absolutely vital that the people of God rise up and respond with brave hearts.

I've laid out four points. I want to be careful to say that these four points are not going to give you a guaranteed result. I think sometimes we make the mistake of following four-step or seven step-plans to a guaranteed result. I just don't know that that's how God works. The Holy Spirit is too wily and our Creator is too creative to put God into a box like that. But, I will tell you that these four biblical principles will set us in a trajectory and send us down a path that will cultivate godly bravery.

### **1. Growing in godly bravery begins with our posture before God.**

That word *posture* talks about how we present ourselves before God. James 4 says this: ***7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*** This word *submit* is the Greek word *hupotasso*. It's a military term which means to come under the authority of. We look at Jesus, as followers of Jesus, and that's what this series is about. It's about following Jesus. If we are going to follow Jesus as believers in Christ, we are going to step underneath his authority because he paves the way in all things.

As we look at his life, as we walk through these steps, you are going to see that Jesus was the ultimate example of godly bravery. When he laid aside his strength in being God and he took on the humanness of man, the way that he found his bravery is the same way that you and I find ours. He is our ultimate example.

James 4 goes on to say, ***10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*** As I've grown in my faith and have really been attracted to humility and having a desire to grow in it, what I've realized, as I've studied the scriptures, is that humility is a choice. If you look at the way it's phrased: "Humble yourselves..." That is in action step for you and me. It's a choice that we get to make on a daily basis.

I've got to be honest with you. This week, I have been struggling a little bit. I've had to choose humility in several different occasions and God is always good. If you're going to stand up here and preach on humility, he is going to give you a dose of it before hand. I should have known better, but I couldn't get around the point. It's just the right thing. As we make these decisions of humility, the reality is that many times it can be a painful process. What we know is that when we do choose humility, the product of humility is an amazing thing. We get to see God's goodness in it. Humility itself is a bridge into intimacy with God.

We have a lot of folks that work construction in our church. If you're going to go and build a house, you've got to collect all the supplies you need and bring them to the worksite. You've got to bring the lumber. You've got to bring the shingles and the joists. You've got to bring nails and screws. You've got to bring the electrical components and the plumbing pieces and the HVAC system. And if you bring all of those supplies, you can build what you are after.

I want to tell you today that God wants to build humility into us as a church. As God goes to work to develop our bravery, he brings all the supplies that are needed except for one thing. That means that you and I have a responsibility in this. There is one piece of the puzzle that he leaves on us. He says, "You've got to bring this to the construction site."

David informs us what that is in Psalm 51. ***17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit...***

A couple of months ago, a buddy of mine that lives down in Dallas... He goes to a really awesome church down in the Dallas area. We got to hang out and he told me a story of how he was sitting at In and Out Burger with some friends and this lady came in. She was dressed for the night life. They watched her walk in the door and walk straight into the bathroom. Right behind her, a guy walked in and followed her into the women's bathroom.

They heard a bunch of screams coming from the women's bathroom. The girls that were with my friend stood up and ran to the women's bathroom. As they approached the door, this man came barging out of the women's bathroom door and then headed out of In and Out Burger. They go in and find this woman and she is obviously upset. They brought her out and had her sit down with them and they bought her dinner.

Come to find out, this woman was a prostitute and it was her pimp that followed her into that bathroom and slapped her around. As they sat down and they heard this woman's story, she began to explain that as a teenager, she was kidnapped and put into the sex slave trade in the United States of America.

The folks sitting with her are awesome godly people. They heard her out and they began to share the love and hope of Jesus with her. They explained that this church has amazing resources available to them. They could have pulled her out of that lifestyle that night. They could have set her up in a home where she would be safe and cared for and rehabilitated and fed. They could give her a job and make sure that she was protected from her pimp. With that option on the table, she declined and she walked out the door and walked back into the lifestyle that she had been living in.

As you hear this story, there are really two roles that take place. There is the role of the hero or a savior and then there is the role of the prostitute or the whore. What I want to ask you to do is place yourself in that story and ask yourself what you would have done differently. As we place ourselves in that story, I find myself... I think the kind of the natural place we put ourselves is in the seat of the hero or the savior. But if we look at this scenario a little bit more sober-minded, in view of our brokenness and our hopelessness apart from Christ, it would probably be more accurate to put ourselves in the seat of the prostitute because every time we choose any lover besides God, we are prostituting ourselves; we're cheating on the one true God. I am not even close to saying this woman was prideful or arrogant or anything like that, but she sat across from the opportunity to be saved, and so do you and I on a daily basis. The only thing that stands between us and that saving grace is a broken and contrite spirit. No matter what's holding us back... Whether it's shame or fear or pride or addiction, it doesn't matter what it is. The wall that stands between us and the forgiveness that Jesus offers us can be broken down when we choose humility in our lives.

There is a one-time event in everybody's life when they make a commitment to follow Jesus, ready to give Him their life. In that act of humility, we are saved. But as followers of Jesus, we have the daily, maybe even the momentary decisions to make where we choose humility. We recognize our brokenness and our desperate need for a savior. What that does is free God up to take hold of our lives. It's the seed-bed of faith and of bravery in our lives.

## **2. Godly bravery is matured in pursuit of Jesus.**

When I say pursuit, I'm talking about a relational pursuit. To have a good relationship, there has to be two active sides that are diving into that relationship. Many of you have probably been in a one-sided relationship and it doesn't work very good, does it? A healthy relationship consists of two sides that are pursuing each other. We've got a responsibility to pursue the Lord and in that pursuit, he will mature that godly bravery in our heart.

One of the things I love doing with young people is taking them caving, spelunking. How many of you guys grew up in the Ozarks? You guys are blessed. I grew up in the cornfields of Iowa and Illinois and I'm here to tell that I'm glad I did because I look at them as a great point of reference because I just so appreciate the beauty of the Ozarks.

One of the neat things about the Ozarks is that they are full of caves systems. There happens to be a cave that is south of here about an hour and a half, just over the boarder of Arkansas that we will take kids to in the summer. One of my favorite things to do is to take those kiddoes. It doesn't matter how brave you are or what you've been through in your life, when you stand on the outside of a cave and look in, it kind of makes you nervous like, *What am I walking into?* Your only saving grace is a triple A battery strapped to your head. That's what's going to help you.

This particular cave, when you start to go back in it, very quickly closes down on you. To really get into the cave system, you've got to work your way up a tunnel and then the tunnel will leave you in a really precarious position. There is a 15" by 15" square that will get you into the cave system, but you've got to crawl through it first. We call it the cereal box. I weigh 180 pounds. I've seen some big boys squeeze their way through there, but even at a 180 pounds, when I get my body through there and then the cereal box meets my hips... I guess I have wide hips. I don't know if you've noticed. But when it hits my hips, I'm thinking, *Oh my gosh, this would be a horrible way to die! Halfway in and halfway out! This is awful!*

But you squeeze through there and you overcome the fear and the anxiety and as soon as you get through there, the cave opens up and you are amazed. You are in the bowels of the earth. As you go deeper and deeper, there are so many neat facets to it and a lot of uncomfortable ones as well. The path will narrow down to where you're walking side by side through water dripping down on your head and water up around your knees. There are other points where you're sliding through mud with the roof of the cave touching your back. Oh yeah! God is so creative and so awesome. You hike back into this thing for about an hour and when you get to the back, it opens up into a crystal room. The very back of the cave system is the brilliant crystal room with stalactites and stalagmite and these crystals growing on the side of the wall and you're just thinking to yourself, *This is amazing!*

I just think the caving story is an accurate example of what it's like to pursue a relationship with God. As you do that, if you're willing to pursue God, he is going to put you in uncomfortable situations because he's going to force you to get honest with yourself to be vulnerable. He's going to expose things in your life and it's going to be a painful process to peel them off of you. Additions, insecurities, things that are hidden from your view. As you crawl through that cave of intimacy with God, it's going to scrape off your flesh, but the beauty of the process is you're going to experience these moments where you come into a crystal room and you're just thinking to yourself *This is the most amazing way to live!* Walking with God is an adventure, but it takes a certain amount of humility and trust to say, "God, I'm willing to dive into you and I'm going to deal with whatever you bring to the surface, no matter how uncomfortable it gets because I believe in the product."

The scripture says this in 1 Corinthians 2 **9 ...but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.**

So, when we enter into a relationship with Christ, we are given a gift and the gift is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes and it dwells in the life of believers and it acts as a guide for us. To think that in this

process, the Holy Spirit has the ability to search all things, even the depths of God. You and I can explore the depths of God only to the extent that we are willing to go. This lifetime, you can walk as intimately with God as you want. It all falls on you. It's our responsibility to dive into that relationship. When we do that, just like navigating our way through a cave, it is going to be an exciting adventure. There is no better way to live. As we overcome these nooks and crannies and these cereal boxes, this godly bravery that was just a seed that could poke itself out here and there begins to expand itself. And the deeper you go, the greater that godly bravery becomes and it begins to spill out into all facets of your life and it impacts this broken world.

Hebrews 11 says this. ***6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*** There is a promise attached to our pursuit of God and the promise is that if you are willing to chase after him, you are going to get to experience the glory of crystal room after crystal room. That's what it is to walk with God on this great adventure.

### **3. Godly bravery flows through prayer.**

Last February, we did a series called *Pray Like Jesus*. Jesus gives us a model prayer in Matthew 6 and we studied that throughout the course of five weeks. It was such an awesome series as our church kind of banded together and learned to pray in a more efficient and right way. We began to lean on God more intensely through our prayer life.

In Ephesians 6, Paul kind of sets the context that we've been talking about and then he walks through the armor of God. The context is this in Verse 12: ***For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.***

In other words, he not saying that the hardships and the things that you deal with in life aren't important, but what he is saying is there is a greater battle that's taking place just beyond the curtain of our senses. It's the battle for eternity and it's the one that matters most. It's a battle for souls. That's where our focus ought to lie, not on that which is seen, but that which is unseen. For that which is seen is temporary and that which is unseen is eternal. He gives us that context and he walks through the armor of God: the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, the sandals of peace, the sword of the Spirit. Essentially, he is showing us, as believers, this is how we get strapped up to go to war.

Then in Ephesians 6: 18, he says, ***With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints...***

As I was pondering this passage of scripture, I was thinking about the fact that Paul goes through this process of explaining how we get equipped for battle, getting strapped up, and as soon as we are strapped up, he then puts the emphasis on prayer. As I pondered this, it kind of came to me that when I was in high school, we would go through football practice all week long. We'd study film and then we'd go out on the field and execute in the days to follow and then on Friday, we would come in the and get

strapped up, get all of our gear on. Right before we would run out of the locker room, our coach would call us in. This was not a godly program of any kind. In fact, my brother reminded me of this. I went to Washington High School and our mascot was the Demons, the Washington Demons. Oh my gosh, right? So it was not a godly school. But what we would do before every football game, before we ran out, was take a knee and say the Lord's Prayer. Then coach would rally us in and go "Now let's go beep, beep, and beep. I'm like what? Did that just happen? It struck me as so funny this week. It makes sense because no matter what battle we're running into, even if it's a high school football game, you're nervous, you're scared. I feel like the only thing I know to do is pray to a higher power of some kind to help me.

We know, as Christians, that we don't get strapped throughout the week to go to battle one time on a Friday night. When Paul walks through the armor of God, he is saying you put this on and you keep it on and you make sure you're strapped up tight at all times. That's because our battle isn't a one-time event; it's constant. It's an unrelenting battle and that's why he says to pray at all times. He says to pray in the Spirit. How do you pray in the Spirit? The Spirit is given to us to guide us and help us. So we ask ourselves the question: "How do you learn to pray?"

A guy named Leonard Ravenhill... I just love his teaching on prayer. This is his answer to "How do you learn to pray?"

*"Well, how do you learn to swim? Do you sit in a chair with your feet up drinking Coke learning to swim? No. You get down and you struggle. That's how you learn to pray."*

As we are following Jesus, I think about his prayer life. The night of his betrayal, when we went into the garden and he struggled, he knew what he was facing, he knew the measure of brutality that was upon him. Jesus, on the eve of battle, took a knee and put his face to the ground and he prayed, "God, give me the bravery to follow through this plan for redemption."

Leonard goes on to say, *"Prayer is our strength. Prayer generates strength; it generates vision; it generates power, and the devil will drive you away from the prayer closet more than anything."*

#### **4. Godly passion provides unending reservoirs of godly bravery.**

I believe that passion is birthed out of humility and intimacy with God and prayer is the conduit through which it flows. Here in a season of your life where you're sitting there and you're just struggling with apathy, with a lack of drive, with a lack of passion, I believe that your way out of that, number one, is a broken and contrite spirit and a healthy pursuit of the Lord. Those two things combined, God is going to go to work in your heart and he is going to birth passions out of some of the greatest pains in your life. He's going to equip you with a bravery that can impact the people around you. As we walk intimately with him, as we pray constantly, that passion will flow out of us.

Again, following Jesus' example, if we look at his life and we see how he responded to the people around him, we look at Matthew 9. Preceding this verse, Jesus had basically been going out through the countryside and he was healing people, loving on people, delivering people. He comes to this place



where there is just a mob that has surrounded him. The scripture picks up here and it says, ***36 Seeing the people , He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."***

Jesus was so good with people because he was with them. He was rubbing elbows with them. He was well acquainted with their grief and their suffering. The religious people looked down on him because he spent time with tax gatherers and sinners and prostitutes. Yet, we see an example of a man that saw beyond race, beyond gender, beyond age, beyond health, and he connected with people on an emotional and compassionate level. Our responsibility as the church of Jesus Christ, is to go out into this world and engage with people. God will ignite the passion. God will provide the opportunities. God will provide the bravery. But, we've got to be willing to be intentional and engage with people. He says "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."

So, what do we do? You can't possibly take on every social injustice. It's impossible, it's not realistic, but one of the mottos of Woodland Hills Family Church is that we do for one what we can't do for all.

I saw this illustration this week and I just thought it was so profound. You can take an apple and you can split this apple in half and anybody can count the seeds in the apple, but only God can count the apples in a seed. So, when you find yourself overwhelmed and feeling like you can't make a difference, I'd ask you to remember the God that you serve. There is no telling what he can do through one act of kindness. There's no telling what he can do just with you simply sidling up next to somebody and asking them, "How are you doing with this?"

With that, friends, let's pray that God would take this message and put it into action through this church body.

Father God, we thank you for today and I just want to thank you, Jesus, for being an example of showing us how to have a brave heart for this broken world. I'd ask, God, that our church family would be stirred by this message, that the Holy Spirit would sear it into our hearts, God, and that we would be a people that would choose humility on a daily basis. I pray that we would pursue you with a whole heart and that we would pray constantly and that we would share our thoughts with you, God, and that you would birth a godly passion in us to love people well.

It's in Jesus name I pray... Amen.