



The Courage to Hide

Scripture reading Acts 17:10

“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.”

The year was around 900 B.C. The terror of the wicked king Ahab reached new heights when his reprehensible spouse, Jezebel, condemned all the prophets of God and enshrined Baal as the god of the land. 1 Kings 18 recounts the heroics of a mole in the palace named, Obadiah. When the queen ordered the death of the prophets, the well-connected spy subverted her order and provided refuge for the innocent prophets, sparing their lives.

28 centuries later, another man provided safety for God’s chosen people. His name was Raoul Wallenberg. Raoul was born in Sweden in 1912. During the events of World War 2, as the evil actions of Adolf Eichmann and the third reich became exposed, Raoul used all his energy to save lives. Hungarian Jews were being shipped by the freight load to Auschwitz. Their destination was their demise. Wallenberg used his diplomatic posture to give thousands of Jews in Hungary the privilege of Swedish privilege citizenship. He would board trains with cars full of would be victims and distribute citizenship papers, traversing moving box cars to spread life. Once, German guards shot over his head as he stood on the tracks to stop the victims from impending doom. All who held his pamphlets lived. 400,000 Jews travelled those railways to death. Raoul saved 97,000 lives from that fateful journey.

Sometimes God calls on his children to stand and boldly proclaim truth. Other times, He calls us to hide. In Thessalonica, Jason payed a fine and delayed the guards from capturing the missionaries so that others could scurry them away in the night.

Obadiah, Raoul and Jason all demonstrated courage. They all loved their Savior. All fought another day, because they had the courage to hide.



Walking with an Officer

Scripture reading Acts 17:11

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

Nellis Air Force Base is the home for the demonstration team known as the Thunderbirds. Each year, the Air Force shows their skill by hosting an airshow for the entire community at Nellis. My friend Brad had recently trusted Christ when he invited our family to attend the show as his guest. Brad was in his 30’s and had recently been awarded the rank of Major. We rode into base together; Brad wore his green fatigues and I wore the awkward amusement of one who was geeking out over seeing so many GI JOES. We parked and walked to the place where we would view the show. It surprised me how often older men in their 40’s and 50’s would stop and salute my young friend. His rank was higher and therefore merited their attention. The concept of rank fell flat on this civilian, but the airmen and service members on that base were keenly aware the entire time.

The Bible does not often make comparisons between people. There is a general theme of the depravity of the human condition throughout Scripture, but in this place the Holy Spirit does make comparison. He refers to the people of Berea as “More noble.” Nobility is a designation of rank. It regards one higher than another. The Bereans earned this moniker by two actions. First, their willingness to learn and second, the desire to verify their learning.

God desires for our lives to model the Bereans. An attitude of cynicism is not of God, but neither is a blind acceptance of convictions. Believers must search the Scriptures. This produces nobility.



Just the Facts, Ma'am

Scripture reading Acts 17:12

“Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.”

In 2015, BuzzFeed published an article relaying some of the most popular TV sayings of all time:

“Survey says,”

“Rut-roh,”

“Marcia, Marcia, Marcia,”

“What'chu talkin' 'bout, Willis?”

Most of these quotes are easily identifiable, but one didn't make the list. In the 1960's, Joe Friday's Dragnet character stubbornly repeated the phrase, “Just the facts.” The TV detective had a knack for clearing the clutter of the investigation and highlighting the most important elements - the facts.

In Berea, “just the facts,” could have been attributed to both women and men. These “honourable” people cared little for emotion or political expediency. They focused their attention on the facts. It's easy to be distracted. Feelings or stories of pain and loss often steal attention from the facts. Anecdotes and tradition can become sources rather than data. Political expediency also draws attention from factual conclusions. None of these factors entered into the decision making process of the Bereans. The women looked at the truth of Scriptures and came to the conclusion that Jesus is Lord. The men arrived at the same endpoint, too.

Have you allowed your attention to yield to a source that is not driven by data? Everyone does. In 2019, the United States consumed almost \$5 billion worth of ice cream. Meanwhile, broccoli farms had an ambitious goal of reaching \$100 million in sales according to [statistic.com](https://www.statistic.com). Americans prefer ice cream to broccoli 49/1! The point of this statistic is to demonstrate how easily we allow ourselves to be distracted. Dietary choices fail in comparison to the need of eternal security. Important life choices should always focus on “Just the facts”.



Living in Your Head, Rent Free

Scripture reading Acts 17:13

“But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.”

Paul had a way with people. It appears from Scripture that this man, once a Pharisee of Pharisees, had a combative nature. He probably had a sharp tongue and the ability to publicly dismantle the arguments of anyone who would combat his assertions. Rather than improving the dialogue, the mood of the mob took a violent approach to silencing the distasteful arguments from Scripture of the Messiah and Christ’s claims. Certain people have the gift of stirring up others without even trying. They live rent-free in their heads.

Paul had fled in the night from Thessalonica and was enjoying the products of his labor in a new town when those “Lewd fellows of a baser sort” appeared yet again to rage in their hatred of the missionary. These vengeful men travelled 46 miles to Berea after Paul, leaving their homes, occupations, and routines for the express purpose of disrupting the missionaries and their ministry. The mob reveals such insecurity in their villainy! Paul gave facts. The mob promoted fear. Paul shared Jesus. The mob showed Judaism. Paul stood with truth. The mob rested in emotion. The unbelievers plotted and schemed for the glory of lost relevance. Envy stole their judgment and Paul had become the focus of their lives.

How easily are we subjected to the same danger? Some people rehearse the pain of a lost relationship for years and seek to destroy the ones who inflicted the sorrow. Others spend their lives attempting to demonstrate that their poor choice was valid, hosting imaginary quarrels in their minds with their opponents. All the while, their enemy is living rent-free in their heads. Avoid the natural temptation to battle a war or prove a point that is already lost. The envious and unforgiving nature of the unbelievers were on full display in Berea. Do not allow it to be seen in your life.



Excuses

Scripture reading Acts 17:13

“But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.”

“Everyone is doing it.” Teenagers feel the pressure to adopt abnormal social behaviors all for the sake of fitting in. Don’t take my word for it, just Google, “cool jeans”. The tears, holes, and rips would make some blush, but only to those who do not know what is cool. Young people are not the only vulnerable group to the pull of peer pressure. In the 1950’s, Solomon Asch conducted an experiment to gauge the attraction of peer pressure. The test revealed charts with dramatically different graphs. The graphs were shown to sample groups, with all but one member of each group being a paid actor. In 75% of the cases, the entire group conformed to the same response, while only 25% maintained their facts based approach to reporting.

People often feel excuses have merit based upon subjective standards, but the Word of God never bends. A few examples of compromised standards include the following:

- Herd immunity - calculates God’s approach will or will not be determined based upon the vast number of people participating in an activity.
- Commonality - understands the nature of good and bad people and eases the conscience based upon the shared virtues of the good.
- Moral plurality - suggests all people have faults and those faults do not define, but rather offer an excuse for morally ambiguous behavior.

God’s Word reminds us that none of these excuses align with reporting to God. Each of us have an appointed time when we will stand individually before the Lord and give an account for our lives and actions. No excuses will stand before the Holy God on that day. The individual actions of the person and their reaction to God’s calling on their lives will be the standard. Never allow the excuses of present circumstances or social norms to determine your relationship to the Word of God.



At the Speed of Trust

Scripture reading Acts 17:14

“And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.”

Trust is a precious commodity. Business gurus of the last generation developed team builders and trust workshops to engage their teams in activities designed to produce stronger bonds of trust. Perhaps the most familiar of these activities is the “Trust fall”. The trust fall encourages one individual to fall backwards into the arms of a coworker or group of teammates, believing they will hold them up rather than allowing them to fall. (YouTube “trust fall fails” for hours of violent humor at the expense of naive participants.)

Trust is a valuable and difficult asset to build and is easily lost when spent poorly. When a relationship is strongest there is much trust. When trust erodes, the value of that relationship is nonexistent. Trust was necessary for Paul to advance the gospel. The independent apostle needed others on many occasions. In the passage above, he needed the brethren. He was in a foreign land and the youngest converts were now caretakers of his wellbeing. Not only did he need to trust the new believers, but he also had to believe his partner and young intern would follow all the necessary steps to ordain a pastor, establish a church, and direct the new work until their return sometime in the future. Paul was forced to trust his team and fellow believers.

The ability to share responsibility and give oneself into the care of another is difficult. Trust does not come easy. Do your actions build trust or erode it? Who are the people you trust? Are their actions worthy of your trust, or have they slipped into the circle of trust by smoother means? The church of God moves fastest and strongest when trust is present. Be a trustworthy individual and be willing to give your trust to someone else.