

Character Trait of “Courage”

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The Character Trait for the month of April, 2013 in the City of Opelika is “Courage.” The Cowardly Lion wanted it and went to see the “Wizard of Oz” to get it! And, when the public talks of courage these days, the deeds of our soldiers, police officers, fire fighters and other “first responders” comes up – as they should! Of course, what the Cowardly Lion didn’t realize until the end of his extraordinary adventure was that COURAGE dwelled within him all along! He was just too overcome by (and focused on) his fears to allow himself to recognize its presence in his life. We all have courage dwelling within us. We just need to recognize it, nurture it, and cultivate it!

Merriam Webster’s Dictionary defines courage as “the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.” As Mark Twain once put it, “Courage is not the absence of fear; courage is the mastery of fear.” Courage is the determination we make to take action, or take a stance, *in spite of* uncertainties in order to do the right thing!

Not every courageous step we take will be evident or identifiable to others. Some of those steps we take on our way to cultivating courage into our lives will be “small ones.” For young children it might be something as simple as walking into a “dark room” in spite of their fear of what they cannot see, or getting up to recite a poem in front of others. For teens, choosing *not* to do something just because “everyone else is doing it” is often a courageous choice. For many adults, courage comes from stepping “outside of the box” to pursue that proverbial road less traveled and dreaming big, instead of settling for what others have defined as best for us.

So how can one go about strengthening the character trait of courage? Start by knowing what your convictions are and then live by them unwaveringly. Unfortunately, we live in an era where society seems to say that there is no absolute right or wrong; so if it feels good, do it! Those who mindlessly follow that principle are often shocked and disheartened when negative consequences happen. And the tendency is to say, “It wasn’t my fault!”

Doing what is right isn’t always easy or popular; but it *is* always right! As former Indianapolis Colts Coach Tony Dungy says, in his book *Un Common*, “pay attention to your internal compass.” That still small voice inside of you that Coach talks of – when listened to – can help hold you close to what you know is right, and keep you true to your convictions.

As researchers Hannah, Sweeney & Lester state, “There are many forms of courage; the courage to be yourself, the courage to stand up for your beliefs, physical courage, moral courage, and social courage.” When folks cultivate this vital characteristic, we develop the ability to do such things as speaking up for ourselves or others when it is appropriate. We learn that following the crowd isn’t always right – and we have the “fortitude of spirit” not to do that when

the voice inside us says not to! We learn that goals we set *can be met* and *achievements can be reached* when we have the courage to persevere.

Having courage arms us all with the ability to get beyond our fears and experience life to the fullest! It allows us to dream big, or stand strong, or go after those things we want to learn or try, because the words “I just can’t do it!” are not a part of our thinking patterns.

With courage in our lives “success” will *never* be defined by whether we actually achieved a goal or a dream; and “failure” will not be defined as “I tried, but didn’t succeed”. The only definition which will ever be given to “failure”, by those who have incorporated courage into their lives is this: “I didn’t try at all.”

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