

Book of Acts Series - Part 23 | Courage to Live

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon emphasizes the importance of courage to live and the need for encouragement in times of discouragement and guilt.

Duration: 31:24

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 20:24, Acts 20:32, Romans 15:4, 2 Corinthians 1:20, Ephesians 6:10, Hebrews 10:24-25

Topics: "Book Of Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of courage in facing discouragements and disappointments in life. He shares the story of a pastor who faced opposition and criticism while preaching, yet continued to minister with courage. The preacher also highlights the need for encouragement, especially when overwhelmed by guilt from sin. He references the story of Paul and Silas being beaten and imprisoned, but still finding the courage to continue their mission. Overall, the message encourages listeners to have courage, seek encouragement, and trust in God's presence and faithfulness.

Transcript

We've been doing a study in the book of Acts. We left off in Acts 16 last week, where Paul was in the city of Philippi. He's now traveling with a man named Silas, but he's got Dr. Luke with him who wrote the book of Acts.

He's got Timothy, he's got his little posse together, his team. But what happened in Philippi? Bad, right? He started ministering at a river to some women. Lydia got converted and said, come to my house and stay there.

And then God was making converts, building the church. There had been no Christian church. This was the first witness in Europe of the gospel.

This is, we're talking Northern Greece. And now we find out that some damsel of divination, a fortune telling girl who is possessed by an evil spirit, making a lot of money for her bosses. She's following them around.

Paul stops, performs an exorcism in the name of Christ. She's set free. But the people who were making money off of her go ballistic.

They stir up trouble and get Paul thrown in prison. But before he gets thrown in prison, he gets scourged, or sometimes the Bible just says beaten. But that was 40 minus one, 39 hits, lashes, either with, in this case, a wooden rod, where strong men were taken full swings, or a whip with pieces of lead on the end to make maximum damage.

Paul and Silas took 39 of those and then were thrown in, not to the outer prison, to the inner prison. Darkness, no air, no light, no anything. No ventilation, no light, no food, laying there with vermin all around probably.

And at midnight, they started to what? Praise God. So we learned about the power of praising God and that we should praise God at all times, shouldn't we? Then what happens is God sends an earthquake. They're set free miraculously.

The jailer thinks that they've escaped, is ready to kill himself because he knows any jailer who let the inmates escape punishable by death, he's about to kill himself. Paul yells out, no, don't kill yourself. We're all here.

Be cool. And then the man cries out, what must I do to be saved? Because he knows anybody who can praise God have to get in a beating at midnight and then he just knew by the circumstances that Paul was talking about was Lord. Paul leads him to Christ, goes to his house.

The jailer who had thrown him down into that pit now is washing his wounds. And so that he won't get in trouble, they all go back to the prison. What a picture, you can't even make this story up.

Imagine after he takes care of his wounds, he says, we gotta go back to prison now. Paul says, come on, let's go back because we don't want you to get in trouble. Amazing.

So now what happens is this. When it was daylight, the magistrates who had ordered the beating sent their officers to the jailer with the order, release those men. The jailer told Paul, the magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released.

Now you can leave, go in peace. But Paul said to the officers, they beat us publicly without a trial? You see, they were Roman citizens and it was punishable by death if you beat, scourged. That's the same beating Jesus took before Calvary.

If you beat someone who was a citizen without a proper trial, you could be punished by death. So now Paul uses his citizenship, which he heretofore hadn't, and says, wait a minute, even though we're Roman citizens, they threw us into prison and now do they want us to get out of here quietly? No, let them come themselves and escort us out. The officers reported this to the magistrates and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed.

They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. And after Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, that's where they were staying, where they met with the brothers and sisters, those are the Christians, and encouraged them and then they left. So notice here that Paul does this a couple times, where he uses his citizenship in the Roman Empire and says, no, no, we're not gonna leave like you're gonna get rid of us.

Let them know that they beat somebody illegally who's a Roman citizen and now they're in hot water. They can come and apologize and then we'll leave. So they come and just say, yo, please get out of town, just

leave, because they're a reminder of the trouble that they could get in.

And Paul and Silas go back to Lydia's house, they're not leaving yet, and why'd they go back there? For just one reason, they're gonna go now travel 100 miles by foot to a place called Thessalonica where we get our first and second Thessalonians. They're gonna start another church, but before they travel that 100 miles on foot, even though they took a beating, they go to Lydia's house to encourage the brothers and sisters. Now this is a theme you see over and over in the book of Acts and in the New Testament.

The value, the importance, the priority of encouraging your fellow believers. You would think Paul would go and sit down and say, could you please give me some food, some arroz con pollo, something that I can sit and eat, because I'm the one who took a beating. Do you guys wanna just talk to me and maybe encourage me? No, no, Paul's not thinking about that.

Paul says, no, I don't know when I'll see you again, so let me encourage you. We don't know how long that took, but he taught, he spoke words, he prayed for only one reason, to encourage them. It wasn't about him, it was about them.

You see that over and over again in the early church. The leaders were not dictators and superstars and megastars and arrogant people that everyone had to come around and worship, oh, there's this, there's the apostle, there's pastor so and so. No, no, it was, what can we do for you? We're here to encourage you.

I know, but Paul, yo, look at your back. Those guys were taking full swings. I know, I know, it's cool, but how you doing? I don't know when I'm gonna see you again, so how you doing? Come on, let me talk to you.

Let me tell you some of the words of our Lord, what he said, I gotta, because I don't know if I'll see you when you're new as Christians, I gotta talk to you. Now, there's three words that are so important here. Courage, discouraged, encourage.

Do you notice what they all have, the root there is courage. It takes courage to live. Some wise man said, to face discouragements, to face disappointments, and to still keep on living, that's courage, because a lot of people quit.

They give up. The society is littered with people who dropped out because they lost courage to live. I'm not talking about courage of getting beat in the back and thrown in prison or getting even tossed out of a shelter and get put in a nasty one in the Bronx.

I'm just talking that to live every day and be what God wants you to be. All these altos and tenors and over there are the sopranos. You need courage every single day to serve Jesus Christ.

The society around us is hostile. America is becoming, from the White House to the Congress to the Supreme Court, everywhere, to the mayor, the new mayor, you just read all the comments. It's all hostile to Christianity and the values that are in the Bible.

It's all. I just heard from someone the other day who told me, driving this week where I was speaking, and they said, you know what's gonna happen now? All the Christian colleges, he said, I see it coming. This was an educator, he says, I see it coming.

All the Christian schools are gonna lose their ability to function. I said, how, what are you talking about? They said, oh, no, no, no, just wait. They're just biding their time.

The government's gonna step in and say, what's your position on this issue, moral issue or sexual issue, sexual orientation issue? What's your view on that? What, oh, you practice the Bible? You believe in the Bible? Fine, no more government loans for anybody going there. Oh, yeah, that can happen. Yeah, you're a hate monger.

You're judgmental. No, the Bible, no, we don't get out of here with that. Are we not heading that way? The Board of Ed, all the things that are going on in school.

So it takes courage to live. It takes courage to be what God wants you to be. When you're younger, you don't think about that.

You know, someone who's helped build the Brooklyn Tabernacle is sitting here, as Carol said, my friend, evangelist Nikki Cruz, who has traveled around the world for decades, bringing the good news of Jesus, former gang leader here in Brooklyn. I live right downtown here, near South Elliott. I lived around the same time on South Portland, right off of Fulton Street.

So Nikki and his wife, they have four children. You know what courage it takes, what inner strength it takes to keep getting on those airplanes and leaving your family, to go to a strange place to preach the gospel, to then go to another place and then to come home and see your family and your body says, just lay down and rest, and someone says, no, you made a commitment, you gotta go there. You know what courage that takes? Paul mentions it, he said, you know, in 2 Corinthians, one of the trials in my life, I've been in travels often.

God keeps pushing me going, just keeps going, go ahead, go, you gotta spread it someplace else, you gotta tell other people about Jesus. You know what courage that takes? You know what inner strength that takes? So I just wanna talk about that for a few seconds because see, courage to live, the boldness to keep going on has to be maintained by being encouraged or you lose your courage. Encourage, build up the courage.

Discourage is when people lose their courage and they drop out in one way or another. So Paul, knowing how life works, knowing that people secretly quit and give up the faith or give up what God wanted them to do or stop serving the Lord or get distracted or get down in the dumps, have a pity party. Listen, the list is endless, but there's all different ways that the manifestation occurs, but it all has its root in we lose our courage to keep living.

Like my mom who's here, who's gonna be 99 next month. My dad, I just, I don't know how this came to me. I shared it with Carol yesterday.

I don't know where I got this, just flying back early, early, early yesterday morning from speaking in Okeechobee, Florida. I was as far away from downtown Brooklyn as you could possibly get in Okeechobee, Florida. I thought of this.

I was working, I wasn't married yet. I was working in the city for an airline, Midtown 42nd. My dad was working in the Pan Am building above Grand Central and he had been drinking since I was 13, so this is like 14 years later, but he still had his job somehow because my mother kept nursing him on the weekends when he would go on a binge.

And the night before, I said to my dad, I'm gonna meet you, let me take you to lunch. So I meet my dad on 3rd Avenue around 44th, 45th. I think the place is still there, it's called Blarneystone.

It's a Irish pub, but in the back, they have sandwiches and all that. And I meet him at 12 o'clock and as he's already waiting for me and when I sit down, I look at him and my heart sunk and the tears rushed to my eyes. He was dead drunk in a suit, went to work.

My dad, I couldn't look at him, I couldn't eat, I was sick, that's my dad. He's drunk, what did the coworkers think? Well, they canned him soon afterward, they fired him. But my mother, what kind of courage did she have to have to keep going with that? Because her relatives said, no, toss him out in the street, let him go in the street or let him go, they said.

No, just break up the marriage or separate. And she said, no, Nick will end up in the street. He'll end up in the street, I gotta fight for this.

You know what courage it takes every day to get up and face that or someone with a handicapped child or I mean, just come on, we all have our challenges, don't we? And it takes courage to every day get up and do what you're supposed to do. So Paul, knowing that, he stopped not to get sympathy for himself, but he stopped to give encouragement to others. And I wonder, again, this is a theme throughout the Bible, it's nothing new, but I wanna say it in a new way to you.

When was the last time you just like stopped and said, who can I encourage today? Stop thinking about yourself for about like five minutes if it's possible for us. And just say, who can I encourage? Who's going through it? Or whoever I meet, let me think about their life, what they're going through, let me help them. So Paul did that because for one reason, they had an uncertain future.

Some people have an uncertain future like the couple last week living in a shelter when they came to church. What was their future? Tell me their future. You know your future, you know where you live, you know where you go to job, you know what's gonna happen.

Nikki has a house in Colorado Springs, right? I have an apartment near here, I know where I'm sleeping every night, but how about that couple? Uncertain future. Now these people were new Christians and they just saw Paul get a beat down for being a Christian. So now how are they gonna live? They got families, they got children, and what's gonna happen to their future? They don't know.

And that can discourage you when you don't know what's gonna happen. It takes courage every day to get up when you don't know what's gonna happen. So Paul, knowing that, said, no, I wanna encourage them.

I wanna encourage them. Because it takes courage to keep going. Now look, guys, I commit you to the Lord, he's gonna be with you.

Well, what's gonna happen now? I don't know what's gonna happen now, but I wanna encourage you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Come on, let's pray, he would tell them, and all of that.

Yeah, let's put our hands together, say amen to that. Well, you say, that ain't nothing. No, that is something.

That's how people keep going, because someone encourages them. How about the discouragement that comes from disappointment and personal pain? How about that? How about people who get so wounded,

they can't go on? And if someone doesn't encourage them, they don't go on. How about this 12-year-old girl who took her own life, bullied by two other girls in her school? And now they're going after the parents.

Have you been following, some of you have been following that case? A preteen or barely 13 years old or whatever, she took her life, why? Because someone had a gun at her head? No, because she had a terminal disease? No, she couldn't take the pain. Don't you get it? Folks are going through stuff. And if you saw her in school, you'd never know what she was going through until it was too late.

She said, I'm checking out. She ended her life. We had a pastor here visiting a couple years ago, acquaintance of mine, pastor's in another city, has a church of like 200, 250 people.

He told me that, you know, he's doing his best. He's not a perfect pastor. Who is? I'm far from one.

But it is what it is. You do your best. But one family in the church that was influential, got a burr under their saddle that they were gonna make trouble for this pastor.

So they started to behind the scenes, bad mouth them and talk to other members of the congregation. And then one day as he stands up to preach, they're passing a petition in the church while he's preaching, signing, let's get rid of him. Would you, could you preach? Tell me if you could preach.

Nikki, could you preach? I know what Nikki would do. Let's not go there. We're not, Nikki would do, that would be a whole other thing.

There would be the end of that petition. That petition would end. That's why Nikki's an evangelist, not a pastor.

So how do you preach? How do you preach and minister when in front of you, they're passing it while you're preaching? They're passing, get rid of this guy, he's no good. Takes courage. That's why Paul said, no, don't talk about my back.

Don't talk about the prison. Let's talk about you. How can I encourage you? How about the times when we need encouragement because we're overwhelmed by guilt from our sins as Christians? You know, Christians sin.

I know that's a memo you might not have gotten, but I'm gonna send it to you now. Christians sin. And when we sin, when we're walking with the Lord, sin bothers us.

If you're not bothered by sin, you're most likely not a born-again Christian because when the Holy Spirit comes to live in you, which is what happens when you're a believer, the Holy Spirit starts to react and convict and is wounded and grieved and quenched when we start dabbling in things we shouldn't. Saying things, going places, watching things. And sometimes there's a fall, a huge mistake, and then guilt comes in, and then the devil, even though we believe in Jesus, the devil uses our mess up to come in.

He impersonates the Holy Spirit, and he says, you're no good. You'll never be any good. It's over.

God doesn't love you anymore. What a joker you are. What a mess you are.

Here you go to church all those years, and you said that or you did that, and now you're feeling overwhelmed by condemnation. And you can quote to me, there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. I got that.

I know that. And that's the verse we have to all stand on. But some people, the devil blocks that verse from them.

Come on, how many know what I'm talking about? And he comes in with just oceans of guilt, and you just, you don't wanna get up in the morning. You don't wanna go and function. Those people need encouragement.

Who's gonna encourage him except for the body of Christ? Would you tell me? Now you say, well, wait a minute. The Bible says God is the God of all encouragement or the God of all comfort. Second Corinthians chapter one.

The Father of mercy is the God of all comfort who comforts us in all of our trouble. Yes, you can many times get direct encouragement from the Lord, that's true. In prayer, reading the word, but some people get so knocked down, God has to send somebody to them.

And for the most part, he hardly ever uses angels. He uses people like you and me. He sends us on a mission of encouragement.

We learned about that with Barnabas, didn't we? Paul's first traveling companion who was older in the Lord than Paul. His name means son of encouragement. His name was Joseph, but they called him Barnabas.

He encouraged so many people, they said, yo, that's Barnabas, son of encouragement. Guy is always encouraging people. I wonder how many Christians right now in America today are in churches that people would call them Barnabas or the female counterpart, Barnabuses, whatever.

The point being, most of it for us is all about, oh you, no one knows the trouble I've seen. No, and the other people are going through like that girl. How could a girl 12 or 13 commit suicide from being? See, because people can take your heart out.

People are so nasty, they can go for your soul. They just rip it out if they could. Am I right or wrong? Yeah, they're instruments of Satan.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. But I have come, Jesus said, that you might have what? Life and have it more abundantly. But listen, one of the reasons Paul went was because guilt can overwhelm you.

Or you can get tired of waiting, waiting for that husband or wife that you've been trusting God to send by. No, that's not a joke. Did you know that a lot of people who are holding on to God know they should marry a Christian? They get discouraged and they split the faith and then they just marry anybody.

Oh, it's gonna come back to bite them. Don't be unequally yoked, but don't you get it? They lost their courage. Brothers and sisters, don't you get it? There are battles in life.

Forget the Gulf War, forget all these things. That's war of a certain kind, but this is the war for your soul. All they can take over in these other wars, World War II, Korean War, Civil War, all these wars, all they can take is your body.

All they can do is kill your body. But the wars that we fight every day, it's like for your soul. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against what? Principalities and powers.

Well, what happens if you're wrestling and a guy trips you and puts his leg behind you and now is pushing you down? Who's there to pick you up? Who's there? That's why Paul keeps saying in the Bible, you know, encourage each other. Every day, Hebrews says. And Paul over and over again is talking about encouragement, encouragement.

One of the prophets, God says, comfort, comfort my people, comfort, encourage them. Oh yeah, but pastor, they're not what they ought to be. They're, you know, they don't live like Christian lives like they used to.

All right, I got that. But what's gonna help them? Discouragement, condemnation, you correcting them or you encouraging them? It's amazing how we treat people who we say we love not like we treat our kids. We're always trying to encourage our kids.

If we're good parents. No, get up. You made a mistake, now get up.

Come on, you can do this. But for other people, we throw them in the trash bin of society, not Paul. Did you know this overwhelming sense of guilt that happened in Corinth where Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, in the first letter he wrote to them, there was a guy sleeping with his stepmother.

And Paul says, you haven't dealt with that. You gotta deal with that. And they did.

Paul told them that you have to deal with that. Sin in the church like that, you have to deal with it. You can't let it go.

It's like leaven, it'll spread. So then in the second letter, he says, now listen, I know you did what I asked you to do. Now, check this out, he says.

You go now and comfort that brother because we know we're not ignorant of Satan's devices. He's gonna be overwhelmed by sorrow. Because when you mess up, you wanna quit sometimes.

You're not saying amen, but I know it's true for you like it is for me. Or as I said, you get tired of waiting. Tired of waiting, holding on, holding on for a job, for a spouse, just holding on for that open door for ministry, whatever the thing is that God has you going through.

You're waiting, you're waiting. We went through two and a half years of waiting for my daughter Chrissy to come back from God. Don't you think, don't you think I battled discouragement? Come on, I didn't wanna come here to church on a Sunday.

Tell you the truth. One Sunday, my father-in-law got on the phone and said, you will go. I said, I can't.

He said, you will go. In the name of the Lord, get up in the car and go to church and minister. And when I got there, you think anybody knew what I was going through? No, because we hide that stuff.

But the battles are inside. Let me give you one last one. The Bible says, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, so let's encourage each other, put on the full armor of God so that we'll be able to stand in the day of evil.

You know, there are people right now here that could be in a fight of temptation and assault from Satan. They wanna live for God, but Satan's got them where they're vulnerable and he's coming on big time strong. And they're weakening and he's giving rationalizations to their mind.

Give in to that sin, give in to that, do your own thing. No one's perfect anyway. He's got a thousand lies.

In fact, when Satan speaks, he lies. That's his native tongue. Who's gonna encourage those people who are fighting? Who's gonna encourage them? Who's gonna come next to someone and say, come on, we're all made of flesh, but I'm gonna pray for you.

And I wanna tell you this verse, he's able to keep us from falling. He's able to keep us from falling. Now listen, wait, the enemy's not gonna plant that verse in anyone's mind.

And some people aren't walking in tune with the Lord. They need encouragement from a human being. So I just wanna leave that with you, not only that you might need encouragement because I will encourage you.

I'm not much of a preacher or a pastor, but I will encourage you today. I will encourage you. Just like we try to encourage those, what were we doing there praying for people without a job? We try to encourage their faith.

Because faith, it increases and decreases. Faith isn't like this. Don't you know from your own life? Is your faith always like this? How many have had times where your faith is just like huge? Come on, right? You just believe God.

How many have seen it wane where you're not sure the sun'll come up the next morning? So let me close this way. First, to all of us. Should we not pray and say, God, help us to encourage people? Help us to make our conversations and our interactions not about us and what we're going through, but make us spiritually sensitive so that when we are with someone, you know, maybe you can show us so we can speak words.

Let's speak the word of God to people instead of just talking smack. Let's say the word of God to people. Let's tell them the promises of God.

God is able. You know what the Lord made real to me this morning? And give them a verse. Give them something.

Give them food. They're starving. No, pastor, they look good.

I know my friends. You have no idea what people are going through. No one knows what everyone's going through.

Am I right or wrong? Oh, listen, you don't think we've counseled enough people to know stuff is going on that you could never even imagine? Battles to destroy, ruin. So I want to be an instrument of encouragement. How many are with me? Say amen.

No, let's make it more formal. How many, starting today, by the grace of God, you want to be an encourager of other people? Come on. How many, thinking back in your life, have been encouraged by somebody else? Lift up your hand.

By a sermon, by a word, by a song, by the choir? Hasn't somebody ever encouraged you? I've been encouraged by all kinds of people, you know? I get a text from Nikki some months ago. Jim was thinking about you today and prayed for you. What do you think that does for me? That God would lay me on his heart and that he would be praying for me.

That's an encouragement. It focuses you back on God. Let's close our eyes, shall we? If you're here today and you're like at the end of the rope, I don't care if there's just one of you, but you came in here today with mucho problemas, muchos problemas, lots of problems, lots of stuff going on in your life that nobody knows about, and you just need God to wrap his arms around you, and you need a believer to just maybe put his hand on your shoulder and just say, come on, we're gonna make this together.

We're gonna do this thing. We're gonna find courage to live out the life God wants you to live. I'd like you from the balcony or downstairs, just walk up to the front and say, pastor, that was for me.

I know God wants to encourage me today. You've already encouraged me today, but I want God to know I need encouragement today. I wanna fight the good fight, but it takes strength.

That's it, come down from the balcony. Come down right from downstairs here. Just get out of your seat and come up.

We'll pray for you. No one else moving, no one else moving. Just stand right there.

Father God, I thank you that you are encouraging our brothers and sisters this morning. We speak words of encouragement to them. I speak three things to them today.

God will help you. God will help you. I say to you, hold on, for you shall see the glory of God.

He will not only help you, but if you will hold on, you will see the glory of God. And lastly, I say to you in the name of the Lord, God, even Jesus Christ, will have the last word in your situation. Not the bill collectors, not society, not your family.

Jesus will have the last word. Lord, I thank you that your house is not just a house of prayer, but it's a house of encouragement. I pray that every time I preach and the choir sings or anyone else preaches, every service across the street with the children, I pray everyone will leave encouraged, not discouraged.

Even when you convict us of sin, the minute you do us, you then encourage us. Because we have to leave strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Thank you for the love that we have one for another.

Thank you for your promises that are yay and amen in Christ Jesus. We ask your blessing on us. Grant us peace and encouragement all day long.

In Jesus' name, and everyone said. Amen. Everyone turn around and hug a bunch of people.

Come on, no handshakes. Hug somebody, say something encouraging.

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