

Courageous Steps – Keynote, Linda Arnold

LWML Eastern District Keynote - June 2020

Walk by Faith - 2 Corinthians 5:6-7

How very different are the times in which we are living. For so long I have anticipated meeting my LWML Eastern District sisters and exchanging warm hugs. And standing before you to share this keynote message. What follows is my best rendering of what I would have spoken with you face to face. While we may have been caught unaware by the pandemic, it is comforting to know that God is surprised by nothing.

My husband, Clay, and I have a lovely home near the corn and soy fields west of Chicago. Our backyard opens to the Bartlett prairie, wetland, and lake. We are never bored with the changing flora and fauna. We have been blessed with three adult children and four almost adult grandchildren.

Over the past year, we have learned what it is to be retired together. This new chapter in our lives involves extended travel with our 26 foot camper and serving to help plant a new worship site for our congregation. Those of you who have made this journey understand the joys and challenges of more time with a spouse. We are enjoying the moments and understand full well that not everyone has this opportunity.

President Susan shared with me your convention theme last year. My mind set to work immediately, praying about, and pondering what sort of a keynote message would complement “Walk by Faith.” My ruminations led to the truth that it takes courage to walk by faith. In 2 Timothy 1:7 we are assured that we are equipped to do this. *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.* Thus guided, I settled on the theme, Courageous Steps.

My original vision for this message has shifted dramatically since that time with the advent of COVID19. However, God knew that in June 2020, we would very much need to be reminded of our call to take Courageous Steps.

Let’s begin with prayer.

Dear Father God, we come with thankful hearts to you, our changeless Lord. Help us to keep our eyes on you, Jesus, as we navigate uncharted waters. Bless us now as we explore your

call on our lives to step out courageously because we walk by faith in you. Keep us firmly on the path that you provide. Amen.

Definitions are always a good starting point to ensure that we are all “singing from the same songbook.” What does it mean to be courageous?

Michael S. Hyatt, an American author and leadership guru says, “courage is the willingness to act in spite of fear.”

Merriam-Webster says this adjective describes someone who exhibits mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/courage>

Wow! Have you seen any of that going on during the pandemic?

Looking further, the word “steps” is defined as a course or way, as series of actions, processes, or measures taken to achieve a goal. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/step>

Therefore, Courageous Steps can be described as *exhibiting mental/moral strength while venturing/persevering/withstanding danger/fear/difficulty to achieve a goal*. These words may conjure up a vision of Wonder Woman. Or perhaps the Proverbs 31 woman comes to mind. And the Bible tells us that God equips and calls us to this. Do any of you feel like Wonder Woman? Me neither.

However, God provides several examples in His Word to reassure us that even women with feet of clay respond to the call for courageous steps.

Jael was the wife of Heber the Kenite. In Judges 4 we learn that Heber had left his allegiance with the Israelite army to take sides with Sisera, commander of the Canaanite army. Sisera was cruel and oppressed the Israelites. God commanded the Israelites to go to battle with the Canaanite army. Despite the choice of her husband, Jael remained faithful in her heart to the Lord and his people. The Israelites went up against the army of Sisera. As the battle raged in favor of the Israelites, Sisera slipped away to escape certain demise. Jael encouraged him to hide in her tent and hid him under a blanket. Exhausted, Sisera soon fell asleep. Jael seized the opportunity to drive a tent peg into his head. Brutal! Her action put an end to the battle and gave

the victory to the Lord. **Strength under very dangerous circumstances?** Yes! Courageous steps? Definitely.

Our sister, Hannah, lived in the hill country of Ephraim about 970 BC and was the wife of a Levite priest, Elkanah. They were faithful in worship and sacrifice to the Lord. Hannah desperately wanted to have a baby, but she was infertile. Conception was thought to be a sign of God's blessing. Although he loved Hannah, Elkanah took a second wife, Peninnah, who bore him children to ensure the continuation of his family. Hannah's heart was deeply grieved as year after year she failed to conceive. She faced the teasing and derision of Peninnah. She went repeatedly to the temple, weeping and praying aloud for a child. She promised that her first child would be given back to the Lord's work. Wait! What? She was willing to give up the child she so desperately wanted? In addition, although she believed that she was not blessed by God, she continued to trust him, praying fervently for his blessing. **Perseverance in the face of fear and difficulty.** Now that is a courageous step!

The example of discerning and beautiful Abigail is one of my personal favorites. 1 Samuel 25 tells us that she was married to a very wealthy, but brutish, and evil man named Nabal. They lived in the desert of Paran that extends far south into the Sinai Peninsula. During those days, David and his army were on the run from King Saul and his forces. They were staying in the same region near Nabal and had provided protection for his shepherds and flocks without demand for payment.

When a feast day arrived, David sent his men to ask for provisions. Nabal treated them shamefully, sending them away empty-handed. David became enraged and prepared to attack the ungracious Nabal. When Abigail learned of his intent, she secretly prepared generous gifts of cattle, sheep, wine, parched grain, raisins, and figs. She delivered these to David, apologizing for her husband's bad behavior. She humbly sought peace. **Strength while dealing with clear danger.** She saved her husband and household. What courage that must have demanded.

It is not difficult to find secular examples of women taking courageous steps. A quick Google search brings up quite a few. The following three women are outstanding in this arena.

Malala Yousifazi was fifteen years old when she defied the Taliban in Pakistan. She demanded that girls be allowed to receive an education. In 2012, a Taliban gunman retaliated by

shooting her in the head as she was returning from school. Miraculously, she survived and went on to continue her advocacy from the safer distance of the UK. Although she was still a target of the Taliban, she persisted in speaking out about the importance of education and was the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014. Malala clearly exhibits mental/moral strength while venturing/persevering/withstanding danger/fear/difficulty to achieve a goal.

<https://www.biography.com/activist/malala-yousafzai>

Harriet Tubman was born a slave. After escaping from captivity, her deep religious beliefs motivated her to rescue family and friends. She is one of the better known conductors of the Underground Railroad, credited with guiding over 300 slaves north to freedom.

Harriet served during the Civil War as a nurse, cook, laundress, spy, and scout. This young woman used her harsh circumstances to bring about change. Although she was illiterate her entire life, she raised funds to open schools for African Americans and delivered speeches in support of Women's rights. She was strong morally and mentally in the face of fear and constant danger towards the goal of abolishing slavery. Definitely, courageous steps! <http://www.harriet-tubman.org/short-biography/>

Nancy Wake was 16 years old when she left home to become a journalist. Before the outbreak of World War II, she worked in New York, London, and finally Paris. After Germany invaded France, she chose to remain behind enemy lines. She served as a courier for the French resistance and quickly became the most-wanted person in France. The Gestapo price on her head was 5 million francs! She had to make her escape to Spain then on to England. Once in England, she joined the British secret service and parachuted back into occupied France. She is best known for leading a force of 7,000 resistance fighters against the Nazis. *She stayed the course despite extreme danger.* Her courageous steps saved the lives of thousands and helped shift the outcome of that terrible war. <https://www.inc.com/bill-murphy-jr/12-fearless-role-models-for-courageous-girls.html>

So, what does it look like for you and me? Consider with me for a few moments how God has provided opportunities for you to take courageous steps along his path.

When I was a young mother of three children, my first husband deserted us. My little ones were newborn, two and four years of age. Overnight, my secure at-home-mama role

became a nightmare. How would I manage to keep a roof over their heads and food in their bellies? And what about health insurance? The cost of childcare ruled out any minimum wage job for which I could qualify. With no previous experience with the ways of welfare and food pantries, I ventured forth to do what I had to do. Winter was on the way and the heating oil tank was empty. Bargaining with utility companies and receiving constant calls from collectors was *frightening*. Gathering necessary documents for a visit to the welfare office was *overwhelming*. Standing in line at the local food pantry was *humiliating*. But God enable me to take those courageous steps. He provided me with the strength to persevere toward my goal of providing for my children. Remembering his provision strengthens me for my next courageous steps.

Chances are, you are stronger than you appear. I am pretty certain that you have taken courageous steps without recognizing the feat. When have you faced down fear to do what was needed? Take some time to journal about that experience. It will provide strength for your future calls to action.

Of course, we are not *required* to take courageous steps during our earthly life. Jesus has fully paid our sin debt. Eternal life with him in heaven is ours when we believe in him and his redeeming work. That is a sure thing.

Why, then, should we endeavor to exhibit mental/moral strength while venturing/persevering/withstanding danger/fear/difficulty to achieve a goal?

The most important reason is that we have been called and equipped for such actions. *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. 2 Timothy 1:7 NLT.* Ephesians 2:10 tells us that we have been created for such things. *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Are we guaranteed success? Not always. Sometimes it is the simple act of taking the step that is more important than success. Writer and artist, Mary Anne Radmacher, says it this way. “Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, “I will try again tomorrow.”

The second reason we should take courageous steps is that it is contagious. Our actions are likely to excite similar emotions or conduct in others. We will influence them by our

boldness. They will be encouraged by our moral strength. And our actions will move others to act.

A simple example of this is “paying it forward.” The story goes that an individual making a food purchase at a drive-up window asked to pay for the order of the people in the car behind him. A rather bold move in my opinion since he did not know them. The result? That behavior was repeated for more than an hour in that drive-up line.

Have you ever been at an event when there was silence after the performance? Until one person started to clap. Thus influenced, the entire audience expressed their appreciation with clapping.

Imagine what would happen if every woman in the LWML Eastern district took courageous steps. Will you commit with me to act on the opportunities that God provides? May we all be bold influencers for the Lord as we walk by faith!

Dear Lord, in fervent gratitude for the Savior’s dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have; and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us. Amen.