MINDSET & SUCCESS

Courage Is Calling

by Ryan Holiday

Fear stops good people from doing brave things. Holiday tours great lives - Nightingale, Grant, de Gaulle - to show how courage actually works.

BEST POINTS FROM THE BOOK

01 **Courage is not the absence of fear. It is doing the right thing while afraid.**

For Holiday there is only one kind of courage: putting yourself on the line. Faulkner's version, quoted in the book: be scared - you can't help that - but don't be afraid.

02 **The call you refuse does not go away. It just gets more expensive.**

Florence Nightingale heard her call at sixteen and let family and society silence it for sixteen years - then went to Crimea anyway and rebuilt nursing. Delay is not escape.

03 **Defeat fear with logic. Interrogate it before you obey it.**

Pericles calmed soldiers panicking at thunder by smashing two rocks together - same noise, explained. Fear inflates in the dark; facts shrink it.

04 **The threat is almost never as big as it sounds.**

A young Ulysses S. Grant, shaking at a night full of wolf howls, found just two wolves - and later found a feared enemy camp deserted: the enemy had feared him as much as he feared them.

05 **Fear is showing you something. Hesitation often points at the right move.**

Theodore Roosevelt caught himself hesitating to invite Booker T. Washington to dinner - and the shame of that hesitation is exactly what made him send the invitation.

06 **Asking for help is a brave act, not a weak one.**

Marcus Aurelius: don't be ashamed to need help - like a wounded soldier who needs a comrade to pull him up the wall. Unasked, your fears stay untested and your help never arrives.

07 **You rarely need lasting bravery. You need a few seconds of it.**

Sending the message, standing up, making the call - most courage is seconds long. Kennedy's quick calls after King's 1960 arrest helped win a presidency; Nixon's hesitation helped lose one.

08 **Preparation makes you brave. Train before the moment comes.**

Epictetus greeted hard moments with: this is what I trained for. Small brave reps, done daily, are how courage becomes a habit instead of a hope.

09 **Agency is taken, not given.**

Nobody is coming to certify that you're ready. Believing nothing can be done makes it true - Holiday calls that an 'effective truth,' and it is fear's favorite trick.

10 **Courage is contagious. One person going first changes the math for everyone.**

De Gaulle reached London in 1940 a junior general with no army, no money, and no authority - and broadcast anyway. He acted alone until he was no longer alone.

11 **Bold is not rash. Courage calculates; recklessness just jumps.**

Holiday pairs courage with wisdom on purpose: the brave person prepares, picks the moment, and knows when to stay and when to go. Gambling is not bravery.

12 **Heroism is courage spent on someone else.**

The book's top rung: in Ramadi in 2008, two Marines stepped toward a truck bomb and spent their last six seconds saving about 150 men. Prisoner of war James Stockdale had a motto for it: 'Unity over Self.'

THE BOOK, IN SHORT

Ryan Holiday opens his Stoic Virtues series - four books on the cardinal virtues - with the one he calls the most foundational: courage. The book opens with Hercules at the crossroads, choosing the hard road of virtue over the easy road of comfort, and Holiday's point is that this choice is ours every day. His definition is plain: courage is risk - doing the thing others cannot or will not do. Unlike money or talent, courage is renewable and lives in everyone. Yet it stays rare for one reason: fear.

Part I, Fear, studies the enemy. Fear - phobos to the Greeks, who built temples to it the better to know it - rarely looks like terror; it looks like prudence, bad timing, and other people's opinions. Florence Nightingale heard her call at sixteen and suppressed it for sixteen years under family pressure. Pericles answered his soldiers' terror of thunder with two rocks and simple logic, and a young Ulysses S. Grant learned that a night of howling wolves was two wolves - and that the enemy across the hill was usually as frightened as he was.

Part II, Courage, is about answering: preparation that makes you brave before the moment arrives, the few seconds most brave acts actually last, and courage practiced until it is a habit. Charles de Gaulle, a junior general with nothing, refused France's surrender by radio from London and acted alone until he was no longer alone. When Martin Luther King Jr. was jailed in 1960, Kennedy made

the calls Nixon was afraid to make - and Holiday uses the contrast to show what seconds of courage, and seconds of cowardice, are worth.

Part III, The Heroic, raises courage to its highest form: risk taken for other people. The 300 Spartans at Thermopylae, James Stockdale mutilating himself rather than be used as propaganda and risking his life for fellow prisoners, two young Marines giving their lives in six seconds at a Ramadi checkpoint, Maya Moore walking away from basketball at her peak to free a wrongfully imprisoned man. The book's final words ask the question the whole tour has been building toward: What will it be? Can you be brave? Who and what will you be brave for? The world wants to know.

DO THIS WEEK

This week, write down the calls you've been refusing - the conversation, application, apology, or ask you've been calling 'bad timing.' Pick the smallest one and give it its few seconds of courage today: send it, say it, or book it while you're still afraid. Then keep the rep daily - one small brave act each day - so the habit is trained before a moment arrives that really tests it.

By Ryan Holiday, first published September 2021 (Portfolio). Courage Is Calling: Fortune Favors the Brave is book one of his Stoic Virtues series on the four cardinal virtues. Read it when fear is making your choices and you need proof, from real lives, that acting scared still counts.