

Wednesday 18th November Caroline Watkins

You make me brave

Good morning, and welcome to Father's house devotional for Wednesday the 18th of November. I hope that you're all doing well and it's been a good week so far.

So, okay. The interesting thing about doing these devotions is sometimes the choice of what you say. I know that when I was thinking about today, I felt like a part of me wanted to go back to the previous one I'd done, because sometimes when you do 15 minutes, it seems really short and you want to kind of unpack a bit more what you've talked about before. Then I really felt the Holy Spirit speaking to me about a particular subject, so I'm going to talk about and I've entitled it 'You make me brave', which some of you will know is from a song, it's the title of a song from Bethel, which I've been really enjoying recently. But I just really felt God speak to me and before I start, I have so appreciated listening to all of the different devotions that we've had. It's just such been such a really helpful thing. And I hope you've all found it helpful. I have just picked out so much stuff from different people and I won't name check them all, because I'll miss somebody, but it's been so good and God has really used them to speak to me in my journey.

So for me, today, a couple of Mondays' ago, just before lockdown, we were praying together in the office, on a Monday morning, and I had a picture. And God often uses a picture for me to speak to me, because it's almost like that whole thing of a picture speaks a 1000 words. It's like when He uses a picture to speak to me like that, it's often that I understand it in my head, but it like has an emotional response as well in my heart. And so I pretty much always know what He's getting at when I have the picture. So for me, the picture was, if any of you know the children's book, *The Gruffalo*, the picture for me was the little mouse and the Gruffalo walking behind. So for anybody, if people know the book, they'll know the story. But if very briefly, just for that little snapshot picture, in the story, the mouse is walking along, towards the end of the book, walking along a path, and he is met by different creatures who would eat him. So like a snake or an owl or a fox, and they all scuttle away from him, afraid of him. And he's walking around thinking, Oh, why are they afraid of me, but not realising that the Gruffalo is walking right behind him, who is this big monster, you know, with big teeth and there's a whole description of what the Gruffalo looks like. And straight away, I knew that what God was saying to me is, you may feel small and insignificant and I am small and insignificant in the sense of the big wide world, but I am with you, I am with you. And actually, when God is on your side, what have you got to fear? So that was my instant kind of knowing that's what He was saying to me.

And of course, the it's a bit like the song *You make me brave*, both of those sort of echo that scripture in Romans eight, verse 31, which says, 'If God is for us, who can be against us', and it's that sense of you've got a very big God on your side. And so I've been really, over the last few weeks sensing a call to my heart to be brave, to step out, to take risks, so anyway. So I think that's the reason I'm talking about this morning, because I think that's not just for me, I think it is a bit of a season for that and a bit of a time for that for all of us. And so that's my encouragement, I want to encourage you. So as soon as we talk about being brave, we have to kind of stop and think what does that really mean. I know this is really obvious, but like when you think about bravery and courage, so often the first thing you think about is people like the emergency services don't you, like the police and the fire brigade and people going in or soldiers going into very scary, physically dangerous situations or something very visible, I suppose. Not just physical but visible bravery. Even perhaps, for you, you might think, well, people are very brave to go on mission trips to other countries, you know, travelling, meeting new people.

So bravery takes lots of forms. But often we think of it as a very sort of physical thing. A bit like if you think about that Joshua scripture, where God talks to him several times about being strong: He says, 'Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid, don't be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go'. And that was spoken into Joshua's life to encourage him in what God had called him to. So just as a real small thing, I'm not saying that we can go anywhere, do anything, do our own thing and God will be like,

yeah, I'm backing you. It's like we're going where God wants us to. And we can know that God's with us. So I mean I'm conscious that in the New Testament, Paul talks about our fight not being in the physical realm, he talks a bit about it being spiritual. And I suppose that's the place that I want to come to with this, bravery is often a very invisible thing to each other, we don't know what each other needs to be brave about with the Lord. And I'm going to name check now, but one of the bravest people I know is my sister, and I know she's my sister. But I've watched her and her journey with the Lord and she's a very brave person, you might not see that from the outside, but I know that in the things that she's worked on with the Lord, she's been really brave. So I've thought of four areas that are things that God might be calling us to be brave in.

So the first one is being brave enough to be ourselves. Now, I don't need to say lots about that because Helen Baddeley did a couple of really good devotionals about being yourself. And God created you as an individual and unique, so that embracing the person that we're called to be, and that sounds easy doesn't it, I mean we say all these things trip off our tongue. But I think we're so conscious. I think there's an inbuilt need in us to belong. And that's put there by God, because we are not meant to be individuals in the sense of going it alone. We're individuals in that we're unique, but we are unique together in the body of Christ. And we're never, we're always meant to belong. But sometimes it's like, don't you find the enemy twists the best things. And so one twist of that is that we, we can be convinced by the enemy that we won't belong, unless we are like everybody else, or we try to make ourselves acceptable by doing things we think other people wouldn't have to do, or in the way other people want us to do them. Or I think there's two things we either try and fit in and squash ourselves, or we try and hide ourselves; so we hide who we are. So that kind of first one about being brave enough to be ourselves. That's quite a biggie.

But I think the second one plays into it. So my second one is a bit of what Andrew was talking about on Sunday, being brave enough to let God into every area of our heart. Now I know we bang on about the healed heart, but it's because actually, flipping back to being ourselves, you can't be yourself unless somehow you find who you are in God. And a lot of the reason we don't find who we are in God is because we've got all this junk and stuff, and just all the things that kind of hinder us and stop us being fully who we are. Andrew was talking on Sunday – and it was so good, I mean, if you missed it, the audio is up on the website, so I would really encourage you to check it out – and he was talking about it being a real time for God dealing with our hearts. But when God knocks on the door and we have to be willing to open it and that is a little bit scary, isn't it? Because it's like, you know sometimes when you're carrying something around in your heart, you're sort of half aware that if you even let God go there, it might be a bit painful. So that's the bravery bit. The bravery bit is trusting God and opening up. And we are absolutely surrounded by people who have demonstrated that so well, for us. You know, I think of Mike talking about discouragement. I think about Alistair and his devotionals, and how vulnerable and open he was and talking about his journey. Even George this week talking about his journey, we've got so many people just demonstrating how to do that.

So I'm conscious of time going on, so number three. So tip one was being able to be ourselves, two is letting God into our heart, three being brave enough to actually expect that God will work in me and through me. That takes a bit of like, I mean, I'm calling it bravery; I suppose Faith is the other word, but that kind of thing. Each of us is called into a relationship with him. No exceptions. I don't want to hear any arguments. Each of us is called into intimate relationship with Him. And then out of that, we are going to be a blessing to those around us if we're walking with Him by the Spirit, we are going to be a blessing to those around us and I think back to Janice's talk about His faithfulness and us being faithful and she talked about the talents and being able to use what God has given you. That takes bravery, because if you think about that in the story, he buried it in the ground because he was afraid. So it takes a bit of bravery to go Yeah, I'm going to use what God's given me.

And the fourth one really quickly, is if you do all this, you do have to be brave enough to know and accept that if you venture out, you'll probably make mistakes, and fail and fall flat on your face occasionally. And that is, okay. It is okay. It's okay. It's okay. It's like, really, honestly, I don't know how we all look when we're doing our devotionals. But every time you do it, you think I could make complete twit of myself. And so

there is a 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained' kind of feeling about it, you have to trust that if I fail miserably, that everybody around me will still love me, that it will be okay and that I can pick myself up and get on and go again. And that is so for every area of our lives. So I feel like I need to speak fast, because I've got so many more notes. But so what do we need? So the primary thing we need is this confidence and security that comes from knowing God's love and faithfulness, which is why we all talk about it so much. Because if you don't know, know, know that God loves you, He's faithful, He's for you, He won't leave you, He won't forsake you, He won't abandon you. If you don't know all those things. If you don't know you're loved for who you are, you're going to be working or doing things because you're trying to get His attention. And that is a recipe for failure, or not even failure, but just hurt and disaster, you have to, you have to, the best way is to know that He loves you and then to do it out of that. Also we need to be obedient, because there is always going to be a point when God's going: step out the boat, come on, come on, now is the time to talk to that person in the supermarket. Now is the time to ring that person up and say, 'Look, I've been thinking about you how you doing, sorry, I haven't rung you for ages', or just anything, it's not huge things. It's the small things sometimes that take the most bravery.

And I really want to get to this before I stop. What really, really, really helps us in this, is an atmosphere that draws us out, say, this is something that we can contribute to. So it's important for the leadership to create an atmosphere where we can be who we are, and we can venture and try things and do things and get loved and supported. But it's not just the leadership it involves all of us, all of us can be like a real family. If you think about a family that's working well, the kids don't worry about trying stuff out and having a go and getting it wrong, because they're loved. And so we need to be like that for each other, we need to kind of spot things in each other. And say, I see that in you it's really great, well done, you know, go for it. And not just to do that, because that can seem a bit like it's all lip service, almost going 'well done, you did a good job'. I don't mean that, I mean creating this atmosphere where when we get it slightly wrong, it doesn't matter and nobody goes, 'Well, you failed', but they go, 'Well, that didn't quite work well. But, you know, this was great, or that was great', or, you know, and just to be really encouraged. And I think if we can all create that, so leadership downwards, everybody can create this atmosphere. And I know that Andrew and George are already doing this, because I experienced it. But if we can create and Carolyn and Helen, if we create this atmosphere, honestly, it will revolutionise us as a people because, I just get so excited in my spirit, I'm so, so excited, right at this moment, because I think if we can all be doing the things that God is calling us to do and I'm not talking about big things. I'm just talking about all the everyday little things that God speaks into your heart and says, you know, 'do this, go there, think about this person', just all those led by the Spirit things. If we can be brave enough to do those things and not worry about rejection or failure because we know we're loved, then, oh my goodness, what could God do through us? I just feel so excited about the possibility.

And I know that I'm going over time and I need to be really cheeky and keep going. But I just think that we need to know that God is for us and not against us. We need to have that written so large in our hearts and I think that's why we will never stop saying the same things, that God loves you. And even if it seems a bit like, of course, yes He does, there's a difference between going, 'Oh yes, I know God loves me', to going, 'I know, I know, I know God loves me and right in my heart. Knowing those things, taking... my sister's talked about this, Helen's talked about this, taking Him at His word, taking that scripture and actually Simon Venn, -like fleshing out the word- so good the other day, I had to go away and read it, though, because, man that Simon manages to pack so much into his devotions, that you have to go away and think about it. But that fleshing out the word, that kind of making it real for you, not just the fact that it says it in the word, but that you know that He's for you, and not against you.

And last one, God's really been teaching me about seeing each person as precious and valuable to God. So it doesn't matter what they have to be brave about, because we don't always know what people need to be brave about, right? Some people need to be brave just to get out of bed in the morning. Honestly, let's be real, some people who struggle, it's brave, just to get out of bed and function. So we should never write anybody else off or presume that we know what anybody else is going through. We have to love people and get close enough to them, between us all, to know those things about them to know that if it's important to say 'well done, for getting out of bed', and eating all day and functioning, that is good.

Honestly, it's not about things that we do, it's about our own individual journeys. And so, the world is very quick to write people off, really quick to write people off if they don't seem to be making it. And I think that we don't always realise that the enemy sort of kind of tempts us to do the same things to ourselves, first and foremost; but then to other people as well. So sometimes I know, with all of this stuff about our heart, people go, 'Oh, it's so inward looking', but I think you have to start with you. So if you're tempted to write yourself off, you'll be tempted to write other people off too. If you can understand how much God loves you, and that you have a purpose, and that God is for you and not against you; actually, the outflow of that is you will understand that about everybody else too, because you would be... we cannot know that about ourselves and not project that onto other people too. So for getting it for ourselves, we need to get it for everybody else too, we need to get to the fact that however you might look at somebody on the outside and where they're at, what they might be doing, or what they might be saying, God loves them. And they are precious, and you might be part of their journey.

And it's not that we never, ever say anything, I think the Word talks about rebuking, doesn't it? It's not that we constantly sugar-coat everything. But if we create an atmosphere for each other, where we know we're loved, then even the things where we have to say, mate, I think you got that wrong, we can cope with it, because we know we're loved. I'm going on, I'm sorry, but I'm just so excited about this, because I really think this is a season for all of us. I mean, for Father's house at Shaftesbury or if you're listening in from elsewhere, I'm trusting that you're listening in for a reason. I think for all of us, this is a season when God is calling us out. I mean the words of the song 'You make me brave', It says 'You make me brave, You call me out beyond the shore into the waves. No fear can hinder now the love that makes me brave. No fear can hinder now the promises you made', and I am convinced that that is a call for all of us. That He's calling us out in deeper... and it's weird, isn't it? Because on one level in the physical we're locked down because of what's going on. I don't think in the spirit we're locked down at all. I think in the spirit there's just such a room for Yeah, Mike's telling me I might have to do a part two, so I'm taking that as I had better stop!

Yeah, I bless you all so much and I bless you to be brave enough to kind of hear that call from God as to what it is that He's saying to you. Bye

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