

VIRTUE 18

GALLANTRY

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

—Isaiah 41:10

For I am the LORD your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, “Do not fear; I will help you.”

—Isaiah 41:13

Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God: and let the LORD do that which is good in his sight.

—1 Chronicles 19:13

G*allantry* is one of those rich words that has two meanings. And it so happens that both meanings are spot-on for the training of true knights. The first meaning of the word is essentially “dashing courage” or “heroic bravery.” The second meaning of the word is “noble-minded behavior” or giving “courtly attention to women.”⁴³

In days of old, knights displayed both sides of gallantry when they rode straight at each other in a jousting match and then right after the match brought a rose to their favorite lady in the audience. How's that for a picture of gallantry? Knocking your opponent off his horse and then offering a rose to a lady, all within the same five minutes?

One of the few historians of the fifteenth century to record the traits of knighthood, Ramon Lull, said this about courage: "A knight who is in battle with his Lord, who for lack of courage flees from battle when he should give aid, because he more redoubts or fears the torment or peril more than his courage uses not the office of knighthood." It is safe to assume that gallantry is one of the fundamental aspects of knighthood.⁴⁴

Gallantry is one of the most difficult lessons for a knight to learn because when he attacks his target in wrath or with pride, he may win or lose. But if he wins, he has lost already because the subtle deadly sin of pride will creep under his skin and forge the way he thinks about his next battle. When he conquers a target in such a way—breaking through his opponent's strike, knocking his opponent off his horse in a jousting match—he will start to build up self-reliance, self-will, and self-pride. Then, in his next match, he will likely approach it in much the same way, only to "get knocked off his high horse" as assured by Proverbs 16:18: "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

Herein lies a challenge for all knights that is perhaps the most difficult to win—going forth in pride and self-will versus going forth with confidence in the Lord but trusting also in the natural skill that God has given him. Then, when he wins, all the glory is in the Lord, both for the instance of that victory, as well as the God-given skill that took him through it.

Without a proper and healthy level of gallantry that is grounded in Christ (and not in himself), a knight's game will be off center. Let's work through a few examples.

GALLANTRY IN USING THE SWORD

I enjoy meeting with a group of young men to practice medieval combat skills (we call them “knight nights”). One of the practices we enjoy is cutting tatami mats with medieval swords. Tatami mats are Japanese mats made of reeds. These are then soaked in water, rolled, and set upright on a stand as a cutting target. Watching people cut is amazing. Most of the time you can tell if a swordsman is going to make a clean cut all the way through the mat or if he is going to slice off just part and leave a section of the mat dangling by a few threads (which just taunts and annoys the swordsman).

How can you tell if a swordsman is going to “go clean” even before he swings? It is all in the wind-up, the focus, and the determination. These things, more than physical strength, will define the result of the cut. Swordsmen who go clean have determined in their minds to go clean even before they swing the sword. The best way to describe this is that the successful swordsman does not even see or focus on the mat; they are cutting *through* the mat. The mat *just happens to be in the way of their swing*—a swing that is kept in perfect form *all the way through the slice*. The blade does not move or fold when it hits the mat. The power of the swing does not change. If these steps are done, the mat stands no chance. However, if the swordsman focuses on the mat and expects the mat to respond or push back when struck by the sword, his blade angle will change, his power will reduce, and the mat will win.

These concepts parallel life in so many ways. Can you see the analogy at work, home, and school? Succeeding in a project occurs by confidently moving through the process with internal will and determination—with gallantry. Do not focus on getting the work finished. This will happen automatically if you commit yourself fully to the process.

GALLANTRY IN SPORTS

I enjoy playing tennis with my good friend, Gary. One time, he crushed me in the first two sets. My shots were going long, serves were not coming in strong, and my game was not marked by will

or determination. Then, on the third set, I decided to put my full heart, body, and mind into the game. Rather than hitting shots just to get them over the net, I began hitting *through* the ball, and my game completely changed. I took the set and destroyed my racquet in the process. The tempo and will to win I had in the third set was unlike the first two, and it helped me play to the best of my God-given ability, which resulted in a win.

GALLANTRY IN TOURNAMENT COMPETITION

Consider an example from knightly tournaments that involved jousting. Put simply, the knight who won a jousting match was the one who refused to veer away from their opponent at the last second. The lances held by each knight in a jousting tournament were exactly the same size. Both knights had shields and wore full plate mail armor. But the knight who leaned back or tried to avert his opponent at the last second was likely the one who ended up on the ground. The knight who won was most likely the one who *engaged* the battle and *leaned into the process*—regardless of whether it meant their demise or their victory.

GALLANTRY IN BATTLE

The Bible is filled with tales of gallantry. We have David versus Goliath (1 Samuel 17), David's three mighty warriors who broke through enemy lines just to bring him back a canteen of water (2 Samuel 23:26), and Gideon who defeated the Midianites even after God reduced his army from tens of thousands to just three hundred.

Many warriors of old espoused the quality of gallantry. One of the reasons the Vikings were so incredibly courageous in battle is because they believed they were invincible until their appointed time to die in battle. So, in each hand-to-hand, weapon-against-weapon situation, they believed it was their opponent's day to die unless their opponent had their "lucky number." They also believed that warriors

who died in battle were carried off by fierce goddess warriors known as the Valkyries to Viking heaven, Valhalla, where they would enjoy an eternal feast. These two beliefs—destiny and reward—gave them unprecedented assurance in battle.

Some of this gallantry and determination is represented in the Viking movie *The 13th Warrior* (1999). One of the scenes in the movie shows a Viking warrior who challenged a local villager to a sword duel to demonstrate that the village was not prepared for a forthcoming battle. When one of the other Viking warriors protested the battle to the Viking chieftain, saying, “Stop this fight now! He is going to get killed!” the chieftain simply replied, “That is possible,” and then allowed the fight to continue. He did this because the purpose of having the duel (showing the villagers they were not prepared for a battle) was more important than the safety of the individual swordsman in the duel.

Another scene from the movie shows the Viking warriors heading out to track down and fight the opposing tribe that was battling with the tribe they were defending. When mounting up on horses and heading out, one of the (newer) Viking warriors asks one of the seasoned warriors, “Have we anything resembling a plan?” To this the seasoned warrior simply replies, “Ride till we find them, and kill them all.” The determination to win the battle and head out of camp was the necessary first act of courage to start the process of winning the war.

I am sure this same attitude has actually preceded many warriors in real battles. True knights believe in *principles over circumstances*. Sure, planning is necessary before taking on a major challenge in life (indeed we are instructed by Proverbs 20:18, “Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance”), but it takes courage and gallantry to “saddle up and go find the bad guys.”

Even more modern stories exist of gallantry in the midst of battle. Wyatt Earp was arguably one of the most well-known gunfighters/lawmen in history. In the famous Gunfight at the OK Corral, a little-known fact shows just how brave and intentional he was, particularly during the gunfight itself.

While giving sworn testimony about his involvement in the gunfight, Wyatt offered this background regarding three of the gang members who opposed him and two other lawmen during the fight: “I heard of John Ringo shooting a man down in cold blood near Camp Thomas. I was satisfied that Frank and Tom McLaury killed and robbed Mexicans in Skeleton Canyon about three or four months ago, and I naturally kept my eyes open and did not intend that any of the gang should get the drop on me if I could help it.”

Wyatt knew who the best gunfighters were. He took that knowledge into the gunfight and acted on it in such a way that demonstrated gallantry beyond levels that many today would in such a fight. Wyatt’s testimony explains his involvement in the gunfight against these three opponents:

I saw that Billy Clanton and Frank and Tom McLaury had their hands by their sides; Frank McLaury and Billy Clanton’s six-shooters were in plain sight. Virgil said, “Throw up your hands; I have come to disarm you!” Billy Clanton and Frank McLaury laid their hands on their six-shooters. Virgil said, “Hold, I don’t mean that! I have come to disarm you!” Then Billy Clanton and Frank McLaury commenced to draw their pistols. At the same time, Tom McLaury threw his hand to his right hip, throwing his coat open like this [showing how] and jumped behind his horse.

I had my pistol in my overcoat pocket, where I had put it when Behan told us he had disarmed the other parties. When I saw Billy Clanton and Frank McLaury draw their pistols, I drew my pistol. Billy Clanton leveled his pistol at me, but I did not aim at him. I knew that Frank McLaury had the reputation of being a good shot and a dangerous man, and I aimed at Frank McLaury. The first two shots were

fired by Billy Clanton and myself, he shooting at me, and I shooting at Frank McLaury. I don't know which was fired first. We fired almost together. The fight then became general.⁴⁵

While Wyatt saw Billy Clanton level his pistol directly at him, he directed his aim at Frank McLaury, whom he knew to be a better gunfighter. Sometimes in life we need to do the same—intentionally aim at one threat while another is pointed right at us. Fortunately for Wyatt, Billy missed; Wyatt did not.

Sometimes such gallantry and determination is needed in a knight's life along with inner will. It may not need to be as reckless as these examples, but sometimes it does.

THE SOURCE OF GALLANTRY

As Christians in spiritual battle, we have the same type of assurance the Vikings had in physical battle—destiny and reward—but ours is even better because *it is real*. As Christians, we can be assured through our battles in life because our destiny and reward are sealed: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Living under such a reality gives us strength and courage beyond what the world can give. In short, we can have confidence because, in death or in life, we are the Lord's.

In the movie *First Knight* (1995), Sir Lancelot wins a sword duel by knocking the sword out of his opponent's hand. Both embarrassed and impressed, his opponent asks, “How did you do that? Was that a trick?” “No,” replies Lancelot, “It was no trick—that's how I fight.” His opponent replies, “Can I do it? Tell me. I can learn.” To this, Lancelot says: “You have to study your opponent, how he moves, so you know what he's going to do before he does it.” His opponent, now turned into Lancelot's student, confidently says, “I can do that.” Lancelot adds, “You have to know that one moment in every fight, whether you win or lose, and you have to know how to wait for it.” Feeling that this was yet another lesson he could learn, his

opponent replies, "I can do that." Then Lancelot adds a final criteria, "And you have to not care whether you live or die," to which his opponent does not reply. He was not prepared to make that level of full commitment, so he was not likely to achieve the same ability in fighting as his teacher.

Put simply, a knight cannot reach his full potential and calling in life unless he is completely sold out. He will never be brave enough to accomplish his maximum purpose and calling unless he is in *all the way*. This is the only way that knights of old could live up to the command of the Order, which required a knight to "never turn his back upon a foe." The source of true gallantry is full commitment to Christ.

REFLECT

He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.

—Proverbs 2:7-8

I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

—Psalm 18:1-2

If we would endeavor like men of courage to stand in the battle, surely we should feel the favorable assistance of God from Heaven. For He who gives us occasion to fight, to the end we may get the victory, is ready to succor those that fight manfully, and do trust in His grace.⁴⁶

—Thomas à Kempis

If you want to find true bravery, look for it where you see faith, hope, charity, justice, strength, loyalty, and other noble virtues. By these qualities the heart of a noble Knight is guarded from wickedness, treachery, and from the enemies of knighthood.⁴⁷

—Ramon Lull

I do not fear their soldiers; my way lies open. If there are soldiers on the road, I have my Lord with me, who will make a road for me to reach the Dauphin. I was born for this.⁴⁸

—Joan of Arc to Henri Le Royer

RESPOND

1. In what area of your life do you need more gallantry?
2. How could life actually be easier if we were more gallant?
3. How will you be more successful in life if you are fully committed?
4. What is the difference between being brave based on your own confidence and being confident through being filled with the Lord's spirit and direction?
5. How can we be certain that our gallantry is not based in our own abilities but based on the Lord instead (see Zechariah 4:6)?

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