

**Text:** [Luke 5:17-25](#)  
**Date:** January 23, 2022  
**Title:** Courage Series Week 3 > “The Fortitude of Courage”  
**Theme:** Fortitude is the difference between courage and compromise – it’s what’s required when the change we seek meets resistance.

1

So, now is about the time to ask: how are those New Year’s resolutions working out?

Now may be good time to check in because we’re kind of at that moment where we’re at the 3-week mark, and these new behaviors we’re trying to cultivate don’t feel so new anymore

And the call of the way things *used* to be feels a lot stronger

Do you remember a few years ago, when the notion that it takes 21 days to form a new habit was all the rage?

Actually, it’s [not 100% true](#) – additional research shows that it can vary based on a number of factors,

generally new habits require anywhere from two months to almost a year to take root

I suspect, though, if you are like me, and you made some resolutions, you are asking yourself right about now: do I want to keep going with this? Because you’ve probably already bumped up against some resistance coming from various quarters – especially within yourself

Kate and I have been going to the gym and trying to pay attention to our diet – a pretty standard thing people do in the New Year

I was going strong for a couple weeks, but this week has felt much more difficult

And yesterday, in front of one of those gym mirrors, I had kind of a moment I don’t like the mirrors, I’m not a guy who stands in front of them

But yesterday someone was using the machine I wanted to use

So I picked up a barbell instead

And as I watched myself do the exercises, I thought: well, there are things I see here that make me happy

And there are other things that make me frustrated and annoyed

## 2

That's kind of the nature of progress, isn't it?  
It's slow, it's uneven, it feels like you're fighting hard to make even an inch  
of headway  
And sometimes you can't help but wonder if it's worth it

Today I want to talk about the fortitude of courage  
Which is, basically, the courage to endure in the face of resistance and  
adversity

Fortitude is what we need to overcome the inertia of the way things are  
Picture it this way: imagine the status quo as a big ol' rubber band wrapped  
around us  
So that when we deviate by trying to do something new or different, the  
elastic pull yanking us back is incredibly strong

And to do the new thing:  
whether that thing is a new personal habit, a change in a long-established  
organization, or a movement for justice,  
we will need to endure long enough to overcome the inertia and resistance  
– we need to have the strength to break, or at least stretch, the  
rubber band

That's fortitude.  
Because when we don't have the courage to endure, you know what we'll  
do instead?  
We'll compromise, and the rubber band will snap back.  
We'll give up on something important instead of fighting for the change we  
want to see.

## 3

I pray for each of us that in our hour of greatest need, we'll have friends like  
the ones in today's story  
These guys picked up a man's bed  
Carried him across town – maybe further  
And literally tore the roof off a stranger's house in order to bring him to  
Jesus

I know it seems extreme, and it is  
And no, I have no idea whether they made any repairs after

But one can only assume that this willingness to endure the difficulty  
The fortitude to persist and not give up  
Arose because they believed with their whole hearts in what COULD be  
They had heard the stories and believed that Jesus was able to do the  
things people said  
And if that were the case, they weren't about to let a crowd of people stop  
them from bringing their friend to be healed

So they used an outside stair – a common feature of first-century  
Palestinian homes – to reach the roof  
And then removed the layers of clay and sticks and logs to create a hole  
big enough for lowering their friend

I don't think I would have done that  
Now, if you asked the homeowner, he'd probably say: "And that's a good  
thing. Those guys trashed my house."  
But if you asked the paralyzed man, I imagine you'd get a different  
perspective:  
"Well, I guess if you were in charge I wouldn't have met Jesus.  
And I wouldn't have gotten well."  
Fair point.

One thing I hate doing more than just about anything is fighting a crowd.  
So chances are, I would have shown up and been like:  
"There's too many people here. I'm sorry, man. Maybe we can wait and try  
to catch him when he's leaving?"

See, the amount of hardship most of us are actually willing to endure in  
order to see something change is pretty small.  
Or, maybe that's not *quite* accurate.

It's not that we're *unwilling* to endure the hardship  
It's just that we don't know how.  
We lack the fortitude courage requires because we assume it begins and  
ends with us.  
Spoiler alert: this is church. It doesn't.

We don't bail because the stress of change is too great  
We bail because we don't believe WE have what it takes to endure

And I'll be honest: so long as that's our mindset, we're right  
WE don't have what it takes  
But I know someone who does, and who is willing to share it with everyone  
who asks, everyone who believes, everyone who trusts

#### 4

We can't rely on our own reserves, they're just not enough  
Not to make the personal changes we need to make  
And certainly not to make the changes we want to see in the world

I can't tell you how many times I've sat with people in my office to talk  
about ways their life was not working for them  
About things that needed to happen  
We'll spend time getting clear on the changes and they're like, "yeah, I  
need to do that" – maybe even have a plan for first steps

And then you meet with them a year later, and nothing is different  
Same problems

Why?

Because when things got difficult, when the changes started to strain either  
themselves or their relationships,  
it was easier to revert to the way things were  
And so the rubber band snapped back

There was courage to start, but not the fortitude to finish  
What happened instead was compromise

It's an old story, even in the Church  
Did you know that the Methodist Church in the US was originally founded  
on a very strong anti-slavery stance?  
But literally within about 20 years of our founding, we already found  
ourselves beginning to back away from that position  
And making allowances to try and keep the peace between the northern  
and southern wings of the church  
To prevent a split, even though such a split was ultimately unavoidable

We knew the change we wanted to see in the world, but we lacked the  
fortitude to see the change through,  
to endure through the discomfort and the conflict of being different

Now the church is at a similar crossroads as we may be approaching –  
COVID-dependent, of course – a General Conference in late summer  
of this year

The biggest item on the agenda is whether the church will split over the  
celebration of same-sex weddings and the ordination of LGBTQ+  
clergy

It was about two years ago that our congregation voted to become a  
Reconciling Congregation – to adopt a statement of welcome for our  
LGBTQ+ siblings and to pledge ourselves to ongoing work to become  
an inclusive church for all people

COVID kind of sidelined that effort for the past two years

And I know it's hard for us to contemplate during a time when we already  
feel like the pandemic has hit us hard, when worship attendance is  
down

It's an anxious time

We all probably know someone who has left the church over our decision

But to have taken the vote is not the ultimate measure of our courage  
Instead, we have to look at our fortitude in following through  
So we've convened a team to help guide us through those next steps  
And if you'd like to be part of that, please let me know

## 5

Because it's not enough to have the courage to begin  
It's not enough to carry your friend in the Savior's general direction  
True courage is in the persistence  
In the fortitude it takes to tear the roof off to get to Jesus

To have the kind of faith that doesn't trust in its own reserves  
But instead trusts God to grant what's needed  
The friends trusted that when they brought someone in need to Jesus,  
he could help, and would help

We endure because of who God is  
Not who we are  
Belief in God's power and God's character is the source of our fortitude,  
the source of our courage to keep going, even when things get hard

That's true when it comes to changes in our own lives  
That's true when it comes to changes in the church  
That's true when it comes to changes in the world

Fortitude – the fortitude that comes from trusting God –  
That's the difference between courage and compromise

Amen.

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