

Moral Courage in Good Times and Bad

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11-12 Grade Category, First Place

"You say we could lose our lives for this child. I would consider that the greatest honor that could come to my family." -Corrie ten Boom (ten Boom 99)

Moral courage is neither a term easily defined nor an action seen every day. The common definition is doing what one believes to be morally right despite the consequences. But I believe it can be extended further than this. Moral courage is not simply doing what is morally right; it is doing this without exception. A person who demonstrates pure moral courage acts on that sense of morality in all situations, when it is comfortable and when it is incredibly daunting.

The ten Boom family was the epitome of such courage. The ten Booms were a part of the Dutch Reformed Church, and held a solid belief in a fundamental tenant of their religion: the equality of all human beings before God (USHMM 1). This belief did not dim upon the rise of the Nazis and the increased persecution of Jews; if anything, it grew stronger. Acting according to this simple belief, the ten Booms came to the rescue of any Jew in need. Two nephews worked in the resistance cells and various other family members hid young men from the Nazis, sparing them from forced labor and shipment to concentration camps (USHMM 1). If they could not aid a person directly, they helped that person contact people who could. Corrie herself, along with her father, Casper, and her sister, Betsie, hid Jews in the family home and worked with resistance members who assisted them (USHMM 1).

These heroic and morally courageous deeds would not go unpunished, however. In March 1944, Carrie and nearly 30 other members of the ten Boom family were arrested by the Gestapo (USHMM 1). Corrie, Casper, and Betsie remained in prison until Casper died and the

sisters were sent to an internment camp in June of that same year. Two months later, the two were sent to Ravensbrück. After three months of fighting for survival in the camp, Betsie died. Corrie was released a short time later in December 1944 (USHMM 1).

Upon taking in Jewish refugees, the ten Booms were risking everything—their extensive family, their livelihoods, and, ultimately, each of their own lives. But to them, resistance and rescue was not a matter of choice. As true believers in the principles of their religion, they felt that doing all they could to resist the Nazis and help the Jews was a duty. They are examples of human beings with true moral courage who did not only demonstrate it when times were easy, but also when times were tough and very dangerous.

Throughout my life, I have done my best to possess moral courage, though nothing I have done can even begin to compare to the laudable acts demonstrated by the ten Booms. A particular instance of what I believe to be a small act of moral courage does come to mind, however.

As a junior, I took a Literature of the Holocaust course, in which we not only studied the Holocaust, but also other past and present genocides, specifically the one that has been occurring for seven years in Darfur, Sudan. The plight of the Sudanese particularly resonated with me, and I decided that I needed to do something.

I created a petition that would be distributed around the school for students and teachers to sign. It was eventually sent to Nebraska Representative Jeff Fortenberry to make him more aware that ordinary people do care about the situation and want him to make the issue a priority.

I did everything I could to get this petition noticed, from making an announcement over the intercom, to coming into classes to inform my peers about the genocide. Needless to say, some students expressed large amounts of skepticism about my idea. One student in particular asked me what I intended to accomplish by sending this petition. After answering

him, he responded by stating that if I was going to take action, I should do something big or not do anything at all.

Though I respect that student's opinion, I think he overlooked something very important: Every large movement begins with a small act of moral courage. Moral courage is not necessarily being the leader of a massive revolution; it can be small, simple steps that help even one person.

Anyone striving to be a morally courageous person can most certainly look to the ten Booms as an example. The Holocaust brought out the worst in a lot of people, whether they were members of the Nazi party, or bystanders who neglected to take action. However, it also brought out the best in a very small group of people, the ten Booms included, demonstrating the incredible capacity for moral courage that can be possessed by a single human being.

Bibliography

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Corrie ten Boom. (2009, May 4). *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. Retrieved February, 2010, from <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10006914>