

Defining courage

Psychology



Courage is more than just a physical act. It is a state of character that relies on inner resources. These resources function in a way that they react best under difficult circumstances. For this reason, by its very nature, courage cannot come easily. Instead, it must be developed with a mind for what might happen as a result of practicing courage. Without an understanding of what it means to pay the price for an act of courage, the person practicing it will be acting out of ignorance, which is not at all the same thing.

There are two primary types of courage. Physical and moral courage. Physical courage is the act of placing one's self in direct physical jeopardy. An example of this would be if a soldier saw a hand grenade thrown into the trench beside him and he dove on the grenade before it exploded in order to save the lives of his buddies. This is the kind of courage you most often see portrayed in action movies. The hero is determined to reach his or her goal through some extraordinary physical action or sacrifice. Moral courage is not so spectacular.

It does not occur so dramatically, but in many ways it can be far more important. Moral courage often revolves around difficult choices, often involving ethical dilemmas. A person might be tempted to take a twenty dollar bill a cashier mistakenly hands them when in fact they are only supposed to have five dollars in change. If the person takes that money then they are committing an ethical violation. If, however, they choose the right thing, they are practicing courage of a strong nature. Courage is considered differently by different people.

Many people perceive courage as an act of foolishness. Most of these people will say that acts of courage are actually designed merely to achieve social

popularity. This is a criticism many of the senators make against King Leonidas in the new movie *The 300*. They link courage to pride and a desire to inflict one's will on someone else. However, real courage is not interested in the rewards of the action taken. Instead, it is humble and reflects a desire to positively affect the circumstances, not advance themselves socially or politically.

Another way of understanding courage is by acknowledging its opposite, which in the case of courage becomes cowardice. Cowardice is deeply concerned with fulfilling self-interest. It revolves around the ego and does not take into account the needs of others. Cowardly people are often afraid of the price that will have to be paid if they decide to do the right thing. They are often lazy and underdeveloped. Their commitment to the easy way out is indicative of an overall tendency to evade those things that comprise a life lived well. Few people desire contact with a person who has gone down the road of cowardice.

There is an infectious quality to someone who does not take the more difficult road if it begs to be taken. Courage, however, has a magnetic quality. People admire strength, honor and commitment. They intuit the deeply felt wisdom of someone willing to suffer in order to remain bound to a code. It is ironic that those who seek fame and fortune the least are actually the ones most likely to achieve it. The courage wins them a reward that is a spit in the face of all the cowards who have trod the broader path, not knowing the easy way is paved with crumbling stone.