

On Moral Courage - Part 1

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Chief of Air Force Chaplains*

Chaplain Richardson delivered a two part address during the 2011 Pentecostal Holiness Chaplain Conference. We requested a copy of this important teaching. Chaplain Richardson graciously obliged and provided his lecture notes. Although not a complete transcript, we are delighted to publish the essence of his comments here. Please note that several of the following paragraphs are comprised of outline bullets collapsed together.

I read a story of a pastor who was called to be a chaplain. He had no military background. Three times he said, "No, Lord." At the same time, a military commander [a captain, a good guy, with a great reputation] needed a chaplain. When he heard about this pastor, he sent a couple guys from the unit. At a commander's call a few days later, with the unit's families present, the commander welcomed the new chaplain with these words: Acts 10:33.

Later on, when Peter was challenged for his "military ministry" he said, "This is a 'God-Thing'— Shame on us if we don't preach the gospel...." Acts 11. Peter had moral courage. He stood up for what was right. That seems strange to say because Peter sure didn't start off that way. Something happened to Peter. Something changed him. On the day of Pentecost, Peter – along with all the other disciples - was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with a double portion of Moral Courage.

Moral courage isn't something you're born with It's not something you work for, study for, grow into -or borrow in case of emergency. Moral Courage is a God-thing. It's something you're anointed with at the crisis points and decision points of life. Moral Courage is: Jacob refusing to let go of the angel at Peniel. Joseph refusing Potiphar's wife. Daniel refusing to stop praying. The 3 Hebrew boys refusing to bow down to idols. Nehemiah refusing to quit even though he was attacked from every side. The Prophet Nathan refusing to be silent. Elijah refusing to count the odds (450 to 1). Elisha refusing to be intimidated by rank when he met General Naaman.

Moral Courage is Jeremiah in prison. When King Zedekiah wanted to hear the truth, he went to the prison to visit Jeremiah. He said, "Is there a word from the Lord?" [I.e., "I've heard from the JAGs, from Mental Health, Safety, operations, personnel, SG community, etc – but, is there a word from the Lord?"] For Jeremiah, it could have been a "Get out of jail free" card, but he said, "There is a word from the Lord: you will be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon."

If we are going to serve God in the military, if we are going to be faithful to our calling, then moral courage has to be more than a chaplain bumper sticker. It must be the spiritual motivator that determines the way we live and minister.

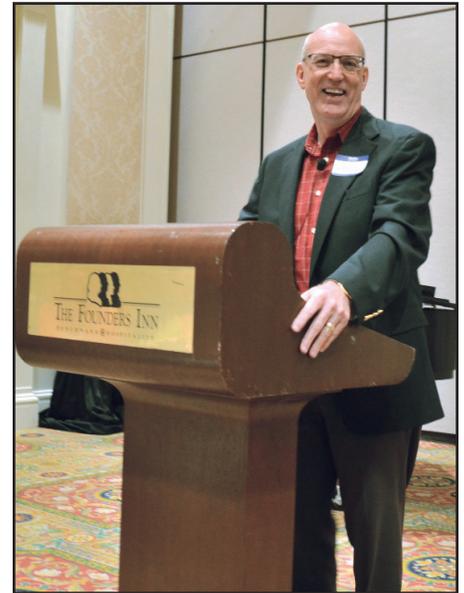
But, where does moral courage come from? How do we get moral courage? Moral courage comes from the same source as all spiritual gifts. It comes from the altar of God. It is the by-product of prayer; it is the result of time spent in the presence of God. Moral courage comes from those quiet moments when you're all alone with God.

Even though I'm the Chief of Chaplains, I can't grant moral courage to anyone. I can't anoint anyone with the Holy Spirit. I can't put a spiritual fire in anyone's belly. Those things come at the altar on our knees.

Each of us has to decide – on our own - how we will serve and live for God in the military. Each of us has to decide what it means to be "as wise as serpents, as harmless as doves." Each of us has to decide whether or not we will put God first and what that means. Each of us has to decide when and for what reason we will compromise, and when we will fall on our sword.

Our integrity is not negotiable. Our commitment to preach the Word of God and hold fast to our ordination vows is not negotiable. Our pledge to "Support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic..." is not negotiable.

For a military chaplain, moral courage means remembering your calling when



*Major General Cecil R. Richardson,
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about moral courage.*

you're down and out--when you're tired and overwhelmed and you want to give up; it also means remembering your calling when people pin medals on you, and promote you, and tell you how wonderful to you are.

Moral courage means being a person of faith in every circumstance; not apologizing for shedding a tear in chapel; not apologizing for lifting up a holy hand unto God in sincere worship.

Moral courage means setting the example by putting your family first, before everything except God.

Moral courage means never surrendering the moral high ground, but setting the example in authenticity, integrity, and maturity; it means offering precision-guided, independently-targeted words of grace to those who are hurting for hope, empty inside and longing for a simple word of encouragement; it means opposing hate-mongering groups that operate under the guise of religious freedom and try to force people of faith to hide their religion.

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Moral courage means by-passing the easy answers and tackling head-on the tough questions Warriors ask. Questions like: "What does God think about my killing the enemy?" "What about civilian casualties?" "How can God allow children to suffer?" "If God is good, why is there so much evil in the world?"

Moral courage sometimes means stepping into the prophetic role. It's Samuel saying to Saul "You're not the man." It's Nathan saying to David, "You are the man!" It's Isaiah saying to God, "I'm the man. Here am I. Send me."

Sooner or later moral courage for you will mean telling the boss what he/she doesn't want to hear. It was true for Moses when he confronted Pharaoh. It was true for Jeremiah. It was true for Nathan. It was true for the Apostle Paul. And it will be true to you too.

For the chaplain, moral courage means putting your finger in the Bible and speaking the truth - no matter what. [When you have to decide between being politically correct or eternally correct, choose eternally correct every time!]

The history of the Chaplain Corps is the account of faithful men and women who devoted their very lives to serving God in uniform. They lived out their faith, and they set the standard in moral and ethical conduct. God forbid we should do any less!

During a Wednesday evening banquet, the IPHC chaplains presented a special gift to Chaplain Richardson. The Divine Servant is a replica of the sculpture by Max Greiner, Jr. It depicts Jesus washing Peter's feet. This unique gift was a tribute to Chaplain Richardson's superb example as a servant-leader. Note the special edition of the Holy Bible, New International Version in the slot underneath the sculpture.

