

2007-Where Does True Courage Come From?

By Gary Haugen

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GENERAL SUMMARY: Gary Haugen, successful attorney, is asked by the Department of Justice to go with the United Nations team investigating the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. This is how his life was changed forever. He has founded the International Justice Mission, a human rights organization with offices all over the world, it's focus on dogged legal casework and it's depth of Christian conviction.

KEY WORDS: The Gathering, Gary Haugen, Fred Smith, Mother Teresa, Sean Litton.

INTRODUCTION BY FRED SMITH

Gary Haugen's life took a sharp turn in 1994. The young attorney with degrees from Harvard and the University of Chicago was loaned by the Department of Justice to the United Nations team investigating the genocide in Rwanda. Painstakingly gathering evidence from the sites of massacres and the stories of victims, Haugen confronted the power of evil and the reality of lawlessness. When he came home from Rwanda he founded International Justice Mission, an organization nearly unique among human rights agencies for its focus on dogged legal casework and it's depth of Christian conviction. During the past decade IJM has played a major role in "awakening American Christians to global injustice and, more importantly, to the opportunity we have to bring justice to the oppressed." I visited IJM's work in 2 cities in India and in Zambia, and I can attest to the powerful presence for justice they represent in the lives of people who have no other recourse.

Years ago when I first heard Gary speak I remember thinking how profoundly he expressed the gospel's call to justice and mercy and humility. I cannot think of another person more capable and prepared by God to speak to a new generation of young people who want to rush out and do something good but are soon overwhelmed by the reality of evil and what Gary has called the "paralysis of despair."

I cannot think of another person more capable and prepared by God to take the message of evangelism and weld it to a life that makes others say, in the words of Zachariah, as we heard at the beginning of this weekend, "Let us go with you because we have heard that God is with you."

Please welcome our friend, Gary Haugen, this morning.

GARY HAUGEN

Well, good morning. It's a great privilege very much for me just to be among so many very, very dear friends. So many of you have been very dear friends to me and you know that. I feel very much at home and grateful and humbled to be here with you. I was telling Andy it is such a special privilege to get to worship with his, hearing his voice. The first time I ever went to Urbana was 1996. It was the year before IJM was actually an organization. I went to go do some seminars on justice at Urbana and there were 20,000 students there and I had 3 seminar spots. I had 9 students at the first, 11 at the second, and 7 students at the third. I was excited that they were there. Andy led the worship there at Urbana. I got to go with my wife. He transported us, helped us by the Holy Spirit, to really be prepared to listen to God. So, it's very special to get to worship led in that same voice this morning.

I do think that Tim and Andy have given us direction to the right goal of these sessions and I think its Change. The nice thing about our God is, as eager as we are for change, He is even more eager for change. But He's such a gentle God He really wants us to ask Him. He really wants for us to say to our Heavenly Father, change me. He does this miraculous thing of actually using words, His Word, to change us, so that's what we're going to seek now. To enter into his word and see if it would change us. But can we take that minute before we do that to ask our Father to take something of these words and actually make us different? So, will you pray with me?

PRAYER GARY HAUGEN

Kind Father, thank you that you love us so much and that you yearn to make us to be more like Jesus, and we want to be more like Jesus. Help us to want it so much that we will let go of those things that may hinder us. May you give us some word from you today that does change us and leave us exiting this place not precisely the same people who came in this morning but those who are changed by the power of your word. Your son Jesus said we could ask you for this, so we are asking you for it in His Holy name, the name of our brother, your son Jesus Christ. Amen.

GARY HAUGEN

I'd like to have us look at a brief passage of scripture. I'm just going to read it for you, then we're going to ask what does this mean? And it will be familiar to you. It's from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 10, Verse 13-16, and it says: "People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth. I tell you the truth. Anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them, and blessed them." So that does this mean? What is Jesus trying to say to us, particularly when he says, you will never enter the Kingdom of God unless we receive it like a child. First we might want to ask, well, what is the Kingdom of God?

I think we first want to establish what the Kingdom of God is NOT. Receiving the Kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching does not simply receiving the salvation of life hereafter. It does include that, of course, but it also means receiving and living IN the Kingdom of God now. As earnest Christians you and I rightly yearn to walk in the way of Jesus, to experience the intimate presence of the almighty God, to live daily lives that are actually completely different because of Jesus. In a word, I think we want to live alive to God. But how do we get to live like that? The answer says by coming to Him like a little child. How does a little child come? There are things about them that are cute and beautiful but, to be honest, a child comes in weakness, vulnerability, and neediness. You come to experience my rule, my presence, my power, my life, Jesus says, when you come in the weakness and vulnerability of a child.

Jesus makes this even more explicit in Matthew 18 where it says, "Jesus called a little child and He had him stand among them, and He said, 'I tell you the truth, unless you change, unless you change and become like the little child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.'" Here where, of course, the whole thing becomes difficult for me and maybe for some of us here. I simply don't like to be weak, vulnerable, and needy. I'm sure this is a very encouraging memory verse for people who are weak, vulnerable, and needy, and I'm jolly glad that Jesus is on their side. But I'd like to believe that I and my peers are really up for a more muscular kind of Christianity.

On the other hand, I've been to Sunday School so Paul does clearly teach in II Corinthians things like, "God's power is made perfect in my weakness. That the power of Christ actually dwells in me in my manifest weakness. That my weakness is actually meant to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from me, and that when I am weak, that is when I am actually strong." Now, in a Bible quiz I can repeat these things as the right answer, no problem. But do I really believe these things? And how might my life be actually completely different if these things were true?

One of the saddest regrets of life I think of having gone on the trip but missed the adventure. One Summer when I was a young boy of about 10 I was camping and hiking with my Dad and my brothers up in Mount Rainier, this massive volcanic dome of rock and glacier that goes 14,000 feet up into the sky outside Seattle. Some of you maybe have been to Mount Rainier. One of the ways I think that my father expressed his love for us is that he would take us to such places and simply walk mile after mile up into the beauty and grandeur into these sacred treasures. My older brothers, of course, they were always the ones racing up ahead up the trail, up to the next dramatic vista, and they'd be leaving me struggling, of course. But my Dad, he would always stay behind me, making me feel like I was setting the pace. I think he was enjoying the sweetness of being with his little boy in the massive quiet of the mountain. We always went further and higher than I really wanted to go, of course. But along the way Dad was the way to steady me over the streams, to act like he needed a rest, to help me over the boulders, and to assure me that I'm almost there.

On this particular Summer day I just didn't want to go on. We had been walking with the other sort of hordes of tourists along the gentle asphalt trails outside the Visitor's Center, admiring and naming the fabulous wildflowers that are in the vast alpine meadow at the base of the mountain. Now, at the top of these meadow trails the paving ends, and there's a large warning signs that indicates that you're now beginning to get on the trail that leads up to the summit. With a text that was undoubtedly drafted by lawyers, (audience laughter) the sign warns of every possible catastrophe that could happen if you went on beyond the sign. At the top of the meadow trails I could see what was in front of us, and I wasn't feeling particularly tired but my little stomach ached as I looked up the massive rock formations and snow fields that just went up and up and up. Now, my Dad suggested that we go up to Camp Mirror which is actually the base camp from which the summiteers go to the top. My brothers, of course, they eagerly accepted and off they were beyond the sign and up the trails. My dad assured me. He said, 'You can make it,' that he would help me, and that the view and the triumph would be more than worth the effort. That it would just simply marvelous to do this thing together. I, however, was thinking that we ought to pay more attention to those lawyers who spent all that time making the sign. (audience laughter) After all, all manners of things could go wrong, right? What if Dad is wrong and I can't make it? It'll be so humiliating to be the one who needs help – again. And what if Dad doesn't even know the way up there? What if it'll be too aggravating for him to help me and he just sort of leaves me and I'm stuck?

So, with all of these mounting anxieties beating within my little chest, I responded really the only way a 10-year-old boy can to such a situation, I just said, "No, that looks boring to me." (audience laughter) Instead, I suggested I'd like to hang out at the Visitor's Center. Indeed, the Paradise Meadow had a huge and magnificent Visitor's Center with exhibits and video displays of the wildflowers and the wildlife, the history of the mountain, the drama of the extraordinary people who had actually climbed the mountain. There was even a wildflower quiz for kids that I thought I could probably win.

My dad tried a few more times to woo me up the mountain, but then after a while he relented and explained that it would be a long day at the Visitor's Center with them climbing the mountain. But eventually he allowed me to go. I scurried back down the back, back into the Visitor's Center, and quickly found myself feeling pretty pleased about myself. The Visitor's Center was warm and comfortable with lots of interesting things to read and to watch. I devoured the information and explored every corner of it. Judging by the crowd, this was really quite the place to be.

As the afternoon stretched on, however, the massive Visitor's Center started to seem awfully small. The warm air started to feel stuffy and the stuffed animals seemed just dead. The inspiring loop videos about the extraordinary people who climbed the mountain (audience laughter) just as weren't as interesting on the 6th and 7th time. They just made me feel like, I wish I was one of those people going up the mountain rather than just watching others. I felt bored, sleepy, and small. And I missed my dad. And I was totally stuck. Totally safe but totally stuck.

After the longest afternoon in my 10-year-old life my dad and my brothers returned, flushed with their triumph. Their faces were red from the cold and their eyes were clear with delight. They were wet from the snow, they were famished, they were dehydrated and nursing scrapes from the rocks and the ice. But on the long drive home they had something else. They had stories and they had a remarkable day with their dad upon the great mountain. I, of course, revealed nothing (audience laughter) insisting that this was my favorite day of the entire vacation. But, truth be told, I went on the trip but I missed the adventure, and 34 years later I still remember the afternoon in the Visitor's Center. Moreover, it's my sense that many of my fellow Christians are starting to suspect that they are stuck at the Visitor's Center. And they are traveling with Jesus but missing the adventure.

In different times and in different ways our heavenly Father offers us a simple proposition: Follow me beyond what you can control, beyond where your own strength and competencies can take you, and beyond what is affirmed or risked by the crowd, and you will experience me and my power and my wisdom and my love. Jesus beckons me to follow him to that place of weakness where I risk the vulnerability of a child so that I might know that my Father is strong and how much he loves me. But, truth be told, I'd rather be an adult. I'd rather be in a place where I could still pull things together if God doesn't show up. Where I risk no ultimate humiliation. Where I don't have to take the shallow breaths of desperation. As a result, my experience of my Heavenly Father is simply impoverished. I just don't get to be with him on the adventure up the mountain if I want to be safe at the Visitor's Center. He says his power is made perfect in my weakness, not in my strength.

Well, does this mean that I have to abandon all the things that I do well? Do I have to let go of my sources of strength? Do I have to let go of my gifts, my passions, my training, my experience? I don't think so. Those are all good things from God. I simply think he wants us to take them all on a more demanding climb where we will actually need his help and where he will actually delight to grant it. My difficulty is this. I would prefer either NOT to desperately have to need help OR I would desperately like his help with things that aren't necessarily part of his Kingdom. They're part of my kingdom. In either case, my Heavenly Father just can't pour himself out because I'm not asking for it in the first case or it wouldn't be good for me in the second. So I'm stuck at the Visitor's Center.

This is why I've so incredibly grateful to God for my experience with International Justice Mission. Because it gives me a continual experience of my weakness in which God is delighted to show his power. As many of you know, I work with this organization called International Justice Mission. We are a collection of Christian lawyers, criminal investigators, social works, and we take on cases of injustice and abuse that are referred to us from Christian ministries serving among the poor. I started as employee number one about 10 years, and now we have about 300 full time staff around the world in 16 different offices. So this journey for me has just been utterly incredible. But by far the most joyful, exhilarating, and life-altering part has been for me the authentic experience of actually knowing God's presence and power. But I've experienced God and I've felt his power ALWAYS in the experience of weakness. This is just my personal testimony.

God has called us at IJM into a battle with actual violence and aggressive evil. A battle that every day my colleagues and I know that we cannot win without Him. In taking on the forces of aggressive evil, we have found a place where we desperately need our Father's help and where He delights to grant it. It's not a resignation of my gifts or passions or training, but it's the deployment of all those endowments to a place that's beyond safety. That's beyond my ability to control the outcome or by ability to actually succeed. A place where God is desperately needed and in a work he delights to engage because it's His work.

My colleague, Michael, found himself in such a place not long ago as he and his IJM colleagues were confronting this man (displays photo on screen). He's actually a powerful and ruthless slave owner who operates a brick factory in South Asia. When some of his slaves ran away including this man named Shivaraj (displays photo on screen), the slave owner sent out thugs to kidnap Shivaraj's relatives from a distant village. The slave owner held them as hostages and savagely beat them as a way to try to force Shivaraj and other escaped slaves to come back. IJM got this case referral. Can you imagine getting such a thing? By the way, there's a man who runs a brick factory run by slaves. Some of the slaves have run away so what the owner has done is kidnap their relatives where he keeps them in a hideaway and beats them all day. Can you help us out?

Over time we attempted a rescue with the local police but in the process of preparation mistakes were made. Mistakes that risked the tipoff of the slave owner. And then risked possible lethal retaliation against the hostages. We were in trouble, honestly. In riding out to attempt the rescue with the team, Michael asked one of his highly-experienced local colleagues what he thought the chances were of success. His colleague pegged the odds he said at about 3%. 3% was the chance of success but then added, 'But with God, 3% can become a majority.' Indeed the God of justice was pleased to move, and by a series of utter miracles God allowed the IJM team to rescue all of the hostages and secure the release of all the slaves. Michael said the expressions of gratitude created perhaps the most overwhelming experience of his life.

You see, my colleague Michael has not resigned his gifts and expertise as a Harvard-trained lawyer who once served at the Department of Justice and then as an Associate Counsel to the President. Rather, he intentionally takes those gifts onto battlefields where he knows he cannot win on his own, and where he believes God is pleased to stand with him. As a result, he gets to experience NOT Michael, he gets to experience God. He doesn't experience God without struggle or without scrapes or without doubts but at the end of the day his cheeks are red and his eyes are clear and he has stories. He has an unforgettable day with his dad upon the mountain.

But, of course, it's not just my IJM colleagues who have these kinds of days nor just people who work with Christian ministries. I have a screenwriter and movie producer friend who has taken his craft into a battle for truth and beauty and authenticity that he cannot win on his own. He has cried out to God in weakness and, as a result, he has a

blockbuster movie but he also has boxes and boxes of heartaches. But he has stories and he has great days with his father upon the mountain.

Likewise, I've seen of mine imprudently give away millions of dollars to the work of God's Kingdom in good days and then seen his business collapse in bad days. But, coming or going, he's just never found in the Visitor's Center. He's on the high mountain as a child but with his father.

Another godly friend is taking a season to care for his elderly father while another has set aside a season to make his wife's academic pursuit the priority of the family. And in each case they are over their heads and they won't make it without God. And that's exactly where they want to be because they actually live their lives as if they believe that God's power will be made perfect in their weakness.

How do we, you and I, find that kind of abundant, heroic life for which we were made? How do we enter into God's Kingdom NOW and experience the authentic power and presence of Him? We do it in weakness. And we're comfortable with, and even boasting in, our weakness because we actually believe that our Heavenly Father is both all loving and all powerful, and that all is well as long as we are with him who never leaves us nor forsakes us.

Accordingly, I can take my gifts and passions and training and strengths beyond the places of safety and control and into a sphere of Kingdom endeavor where I actually NEED God. Perhaps the first indicator that I'm approaching such a place will be seen in my prayer life. You know, Mother Teresa used to say she couldn't imagine doing her work for more than 30 minutes without prayer. Do you and I have a work that we couldn't imagine doing for more than 30 minutes without prayer? If not, perhaps we need a new life's work. Or an old life's work done in a new way.

At IJM we begin every working day with 30 minutes of nothing but silence. For those of you who are donors, I am sorry but you pay us every single day to sit and do absolutely nothing for 30 minutes every day. Thank you for that. Then we all gather again at 11 o'clock to pray each day. We don't do this as a matter of discipline. We do this as a matter of desperation. When you are following your father on the great mountain you want and need to talk with him. It's part of the journey. It's natural. But while I was at the Visitor's Center there were enough things to occupy myself that I didn't really talk to my father all that much. Just the occasional check-in with the father is pretty much adequate.

But I don't think we really want to spend our days at the Visitor's Center, but to get out of the Visitor's Center I have to admit that it's fear and not cleverness that's keeping me there. I need to believe that the father really does know where the joy is. That it's safe to follow him in my own weakness up the mountain. Perhaps then we can know the joy of going on the trip without missing the adventure. Now that sounds great, but when I consider releasing my control over the safe journey and truly commit to following Jesus in his brave journey, it feels scary.

The next question is, What do we do when the will of God is scary? To seek an answer let me go to another story. One of the greatest of this season of my life is that I get to coach peewee football, I mean 7-, 8-, and 9-year-olds. And when I say contact football, I mean they get to put on the helmet and the shoulder pads and the mouth guard and they get to knock each other down. It really is so much fun it seems like it shouldn't be legal but it is. Of course, one of the most fascinating moments of peewee football occurs very early in the season. It's the magic moment when the brand new peewee discovers that contact football is about contact. (audience laughter) A nice word for kids knocking each other down. Now the little peewee has seen football before maybe on TV, so he's tempted to think it's really about a big party in a large stadium. And he's heard the announcers and the color commentators' talk, and he might think that football is about analyzing the plays in a really clever way. Then he comes to his first conditioning practice. This is the part that happens before you get your equipment. He can think it's about running fast and catching the ball, and running sprightly through the orange cones. Finally, oh finally, he's issued his shiny new helmet, shoulder pads, and dazzling jersey. He takes it home to show his family, runs down the street to show off to the kids down the street. At this point he might think that all the excitement is really about the gear; that football is about the uniform. After all of this, the first day of contact practice finally rolls around, and the new peewee finds himself in a series of shocking collisions that seem surprisingly intentional and for which no one is offering an apology. (audience laughter) Shortly there is the magic epiphany when the peewee discovers that contact football is about contact. In such a moment the new peewee is actually forced to make a choice. Does he really want to be a football player or not?

Sometimes peewees need help in clarifying the choice, and I can actually remember the moment when my Mother clarified that choice for me. I was coming home in the car from one of my early contact practices as a new peewee. I told my mom I had enough. I didn't want to go to practice anymore. Knowing a thing or two about her little 8-year-old, my mom simply said, 'Oh.' And after letting me sit for a spell in the absence of enthusiastic affirmation of my decision, she simply said, 'Well, I suppose you could just turn in your uniform and equipment to the coach tomorrow.' This suggestion was, of course, horrifying to me. After all, I loved football. At least, I loved the idea of football, and I looked pretty fabulous in the uniform, too. (audience laughter) I was thinking I could be the kind of football player who wore the uniform without the contact stuff. My mom, however, helped me to see that the contact stuff was precisely what football was about. After encouraging me past the shock of the first few bumps I found that I really was a football player because I truly loved what football was about – the contact. Now, it might have been sweet of my mom to let me avoid the bumps and bruises of the practices and games and just let me maybe hold on to the season and pretend that I was a football player. She could have acted like it was possible to be both a football player and to avoid the contact and to pretend that a choice wasn't necessary. But that would not have been true. Thankfully, she loved me more profoundly than that and, gloriously, she allowed me to discover one of the authentic joys of my childhood. Good parents, I think, help their kids clarify the reality of life's choices, and God is a good parent. He likes and loves us deeply enough to clarify the actual choices of life.

This isn't always easy for me. It's not easy for me to hear but I'm so glad He doesn't withhold the best by failing to tell me the truth, and here is one choice that our Heavenly Father wants us to understand. I think, as Christians and certainly for Christians of this era, I believe, this is the choice of our age. Do I want to be brave or do I want to be safe? Gently, lovingly our Heavenly Father wants us to know that we simply cannot be both. One the one hand, all of us I think do carry a great yearning to be brave. We want to be people of courage. Indeed, what's ugly or less attractive than cowardice? We admire and exalt the courageous. We return again and again to it in literature, in art, and in the cinema to catch even a glimpse of the beauty of a brave heart. Indeed, who wouldn't want to be like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? When an entire empire was just bowing down before the idolater's king, these were the very ones who very calmly looked into Nebuchadnezzar's eyes and said, 'Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. If our God from whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, oh King, let him deliver us. But if not, if not, be it known to you, oh King, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.'" Wow! I would like to be like that.

But, on the other hand, I don't ever want to have to be like that. I don't ever want to be in a situation where I'm looking at like a fiery furnace, right? Where I'd have to be brave. I'd like to be brave but I'd like to be safe. My Heavenly Father, on the other hand, loves me deeply enough to tell me the truth. He tells me I can't be both brave and safe. He wants me to be clear that there's a choice, and he wants me to choose to be brave. Choosing to be brave means choosing NOT to be safe.

What does all this mean? Well, it brings us to the question of, what do we do when the will of God is scary? First we might ask, is the will of God ever supposed to BE scary? I mean, isn't God supposed to take care of me? Isn't he supposed to keep me from danger and make me safe? In fact, aren't I probably OUT of his will if I'm feeling scared? According to Jesus, no. In fact, it turns out that doing God's will in a fallen world is inherently dangerous. Over and over in scripture Jesus teaches us that his disciples will suffer for following him. Of course, we'll avoid a lot of suffering because we're following him. We'll avoid the suffering of guilt, the suffering of self destruction, of addiction, of Hell, but there are other kinds of suffering we will encounter precisely because we ARE following him. And he wants us to be very clear about it.

First Peter says, "Now, who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Keep your conscience clear so that when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it's better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil." So some suffering, clearly, can be God's will. It isn't necessarily the suffering itself that is God's will but rather in a fallen world, following the will of God will generate suffering in our lives. In fact, there are two things that are always that are always the will of God and are ALWAYS dangerous in a fallen world. (1) Telling the truth and (2) Loving needy people. In fact, if my life of following Jesus doesn't feel dangerous I should probably pause and check to see if it's Jesus I'm following. If I'm playing football and nobody is hitting me, I might check to see if I'm actually on the field.

(audience laughter) Doing what Jesus does, which is telling the truth and loving needy people, is inherently unsafe in a fallen world of lies and selfishness.

We have, perhaps, heard more about the dangers of speaking the truth as Christians, so I'd like to focus just for one second on the dangerous activity Jesus invites us to do which is loving needy people. Let's be clear that is what following Jesus is about. Jesus said, All the teaching of the law and the prophets could be summed up in two commands: Love God. Love your neighbor, especially the needy neighbor. In 1 John it says it says we actually can't love the God we can't see if we can't love the neighbor we can see. First John also says that if our neighbor is in need and we don't respond, the love of God isn't actually even IN us. Football is about contact and following Jesus is about loving needy people.

But loving needy people it turns out is not safe. In fact, I generally try to keep neediness away from me. Think about all those people in our families who are most needy and hurting or in our church and fellowship who are hurting the most. Those in our community who are the most needy. Those on the other side of the city who are most vulnerable. Serving them and loving them is uncomfortable. It's messy, it's untidy, it's unsafe, and can be dangerous. Yet, paradoxically, Jesus tells us, this is where the deepest joy is. Based on the experience that my colleagues and I have had at the International Justice Mission, I think it's true. I don't think it's safe but I think it's true. Not only is loving others not safe but, even worse, sometimes it isn't smart. So, sometimes we have to decide, are we going to love or are we going to look smart? Because loving the needy doesn't look smart. And in elite American culture, to be honest, one of our deepest fears is looking like a fool, being unsophisticated, a little naive, a little too earnest. Not only is it not safe and not the smart thing to try to love needy people, but it also doesn't match anybody's image of success. There is no wealth in it. There is no very great regard in it. It doesn't match our prevailing cultural descriptions of success, but it does match our Savior's description of significance.

Jesus Christ says that significance is found in transforming people's lives through love. Sometimes the will of God is scary because he's asking us to choose between a life that looks successful and a life that's actually significant. Between a life that wins the applause of our peers or a life that actually transforms lives of love. Jesus tried to make this very, very clear to his disciples. He says, 'For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.'

My last story is about a colleague of mine. He is another brilliant lawyer named Sean Litton and he calls himself the Mad Scientist of this divine paradox. Hypothesis according to Jesus is this: You find your life when you lose it. So, as a proper mad scientist, Sean decided to experiment upon himself and to throw away his life as a fast track lawyer in an elite national law firm and come work for IJM to open our first office in the Philippines that was helping children who were sexually assaulted, victims of sex trafficking, and illegal detention. Then he decided to experiment on his wife and two children and take them along with him. This is how Sean described the experiment. Listen to this:

"IJM needed to people to go overseas. I was not so afraid of going as I was of coming back. I was at the top of my profession. I could do anything I wanted, and if I went overseas for 3 or 4 years to work for some little Christian group, I was sure I would come back to a crappy job, work with crappy people, live in a crappy house, and wear crappy slacks as I drink my crappy coffee while driving my crappy car. (audience laughter) But I just thought, if I can rescue one child from the unspeakable horror of forced prostitution, it would outweigh any sacrifice I could possibly make. How could any sacrifice I make, how could it possibly compare to the daily abuse and suffering of a child locked in a brothel, forced to serve 4 to 7 customers a day?" It was like math, Sean said. No emotion. "I did not have the faith to believe that God could somehow provide for me and that I might even find joy in it. No, I just expected to be lonely and to suffer, but I signed on to try to save that one child."

And what happened as Sean went to launch from scratch our first office in the Philippines, as he ran our office in Thailand, and then directed our offices throughout Southeast Asia. God actually used Sean and his local colleagues to lead the rescue of hundreds of women and girls from commercial sexual exploitation and to virtually shut down child prostitution in a city that had become a cesspool for children on sale. And all of this power happened through the power of a very great God working through a very common vessel that made a choice between being safe and being brave.

What Sean most vividly remembers is not the hundreds of people his teams have served but rather one hurting girl. As Sean put it, "I looked into the eyes of a 15-year-old girl when I first arrived in the Philippines. A girl who had been brutally raped 2 years previously and no one had done anything to help her. I was able to tell her, 'God loves you. I know he loves you because he sent ME here to help you. I don't know what will happen but I will fight for you.' The man who raped her, the son of a police officer, is now serving a life sentence for that. The 15-year-old girl is now a radiant 20-year-old. She is a woman studying social work in a university and actually heads our Star Witness program which helps children who are victim of sexual assault go through the public justice system. Perhaps most powerfully of all, Sean has left a team of more than 50,000 Filipino advocates, all Filipinos, who are led by all Filipinos, and Sean and all the ex pats have come home and now they are Christ's voice for justice in their own country.

Jesus said this, "If you lose your life, you will find it." Sean tested the proposition and he found that what Jesus said is true, but he said he almost missed it. He said he almost missed it because of 4 things:

- (1) Comfort. What's that? It's the state of contented well being each night. We know what that actually is. It's a nice pillow, it's a couch, it's air conditioning, it's a vanilla latte. So the first thing was comfort.
- (2) Secondly was just security. The freedom from danger.
- (3) Control. The power over circumstances and events to achieve a desired outcome.
- (4) Success. The appearance of wealth and the regard of our peers.

Comfort. Security. Control. Success. These were the 4 things Sean said he had to let go of to get the life that Jesus promised. And what does that life look like? What do you get on the other side of that exchange? Sean said he got 4 things in exchange. He says, you get adventure, you get faith, you get miracles – authentic miracles, and a deep knowledge of Jesus. Now, how many of us don't want that? Don't we want adventure? Don't we want faith? Don't we want miracles? Don't we want a deep knowledge of Jesus? Jesus is telling me that I have to choose. He's saying that I just can't have adventure, miracles, faith, and deep knowledge of him while still holding on to comfort, security, control, and success. It's just math. But this is the expulsive power of a new affect. The expulsive power of an affection for adventure, for miracles, for faith, and for Jesus himself. Jesus invites me to choose what I really want to do.

Where today might you and I might be brave in loving those who are hurting and in need? Is it caring for an elderly parent in the season of life? Do we need some courage there? Or preserving in a hard relationship? Visiting a ministry in the city? Serving vulnerable immigrant neighbors in our own community? Helping out at the local battered women's shelter? Giving away our money with extravagant joy and generosity? Going on a more challenging vision trip overseas? Teaching Sunday School in 6th grade in our own church – what could be scarier than that? (audience laughter) Perhaps I can make room for such things by offloading some of the other fears and anxieties I carry around that don't actually have anything to do with loving other people. They have to do with smaller things.

How do I actually live this life of bravery, love, and significance? Three very simple things I'll say in a sentence each.

- (1) Do less and reflect and pray more. Reflect about the life we're living. About the anxieties we carry. About the life we sense God is calling us to live. That's why we start every day at IJM with 30 minutes of just being quiet.
- (2) Search the promise of scripture and take a risk. Take Christ at his word and see He is true. If you're wrestling with some sort of decision or something to do, just imagine for a moment, am I being brave or am I being safe? In the end it will be a question of whether or not God is trustworthy.
- (3) Embark on a lifelong of spiritual formation and renovation of the heart.

It's not by the sheer will inside that we are brave. It takes reformation of the heart, and God doesn't call us to TRY to be brave, he calls us to TRAIN to be brave. Just a matter of do you want to be brave or do you want to be safe. Jesus wants us to realize that it's a choice, and he wants us to help us make the joyful choice. And I'm so glad that my mom helped me see the truth about the choice it takes to be a real football player. In doing so she provided a path to one of the greatest joys of my childhood and to one that I now pass on to my children. Likewise, this is what Jesus wants us to know. This is what he wants us to know. What does Jesus want us to know? We are so well taken care of by Him that it's actually safe to be brave.

Do you remember what Lucy said in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* when she encounters the lion Aslan for the first time and, because he's a lion she asks, Is he safe? And the answer, of course, is no, he's not safe but he's good. So, as we follow such a lion into the world, it will not be safe but it will be a life that is good. Amen.

FRED SMITH

Let's stand and respond with a song about the one who was brave for us. (music begins)

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