



"Here is one choice that our Father wants us to understand as Christians - and I believe it is the choice of our age. Do we want to be brave or safe? Gently, lovingly - our heavenly Father wants us to know that we simply can't be both."

In Just Courage: God's Great Expedition for the Restless Christian, International Justice Mission President Gary Haugen brings you to the frontlines of the battle against violent oppression with practical action steps and a resonant call to courage.

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 how strong my Father is and how much he loves me.

But truth be told, I would rather be an adult. I'd rather be in a place where I can 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.

And as a result, my experience of my heavenly Father is simply impoverished. If I want to stay safe and warm at the visitor center, I don't get to be with him on the adventure up the mountain. But he says his power is made perfect in my weakness, not in my strength.

Does this mean I need to abandon the things I do well? Do I have to let go of my sources of strength—my gifts, my passions, my training, my expertise? No, I don't think so. Those are good things from God. I think he simply wants us to take them on a more demanding climb, where we will actually need his help, and where he delights to grant it.

My difficulty is I either would prefer not to desperately need his help, or I would desperately like his help with things that aren't necessarily of *his* kingdom. (They are, instead, the things of *my* kingdom.) In both cases, my Father can't pour himself out in power because I'm either not asking for it or it would be bad for me. So I'm stuck at the visitor center.

This is why I am so grateful for my experience with International Justice Mission (IJM)—because it gives me a continual experience of my weakness in which God is delighted to show his power. We are a collection of Christian lawyers, criminal investigators, social workers and advocates. We rescue victims of violence, sexual exploitation, slavery and oppression around the world. I started out as its first employee in 1997, and now we have about three hundred full-time staff around the world, most of whom are nationals working in their own communities in the developing world.

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“God has called us into a battle with violence and aggressive evil that, every day, my colleagues and I know we cannot win without the specific intervention of God. We are forced by our own weakness to beg him for it, and at times we work without a net, apart from his saving hand.”

The journey for me has been incredible, but by far the most joyful, exhilarating and life-altering part has been the authentic experience of God’s presence and power. I have experienced God—and that experience has come in my weakness. God has called us into a battle with violence and aggressive evil that, every day, my colleagues and I *know* we cannot win without the specific intervention of God. We are forced by our own weakness to beg him for it, and at times we work without a net, apart from his saving hand. And we have found him to be real—and his hand to be true and strong—in a way we would never have experienced strapped into our own safety harnesses.

In concrete terms, what does that desperation look like? For me, it means being confronted with a videotape of hundreds of young girls in Cambodia being put on open sale to be raped and abused by sex tourists and foreign pedophiles. It means going into a brothel in Cambodia as part of an undercover investigation and being presented with a dozen girls between the ages of five and ten who are being forced to provide sex to strangers. It means being told by everyone who should know that there is nothing that can be done about it. It means facing death threats for my investigative colleagues, high level police corruption, desperately inadequate aftercare capacities for victims and a hopelessly corrupt court system. It means going to God in honest argument and saying, “Father, we cannot solve this,” and hearing him say, “Do what you know best to do, and watch me with the rest.” In the end it means taking that risky bargain and seeing God do more than I could have hoped or imagined—setting girls free, providing high-quality aftercare, bringing the perpetrators to justice, shutting down the whole nasty operation, training the Cambodian authorities to do this work themselves and seeing the U.S. government willing to pay for it.

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