

Worry to Courage

By Bobby Schuller

Well today we are continuing a series on my new book, *Change Your Thoughts, Change Your World*, which presents the idea that's not original to me, but one that has made a big difference in my life, and that is that if you want a different life, you need different thinking. Very often we war against the circumstances in our life: where we are, how our relationships are doing, where our job is, where our faith is, but we nurture the kind of thinking that got us there. And it is so important that we understand that when we can learn to train ourselves to think differently, not by trying harder, but through certain disciplines, that we can inherit a new future.

It's actually easier to change the way that we think than it is to change the way we behave. And although you can't control every single thought that comes into your mind, you can control what you dwell on.

And so today we want to talk about the importance of we got to learn to love our enemies and learn to care for those who don't care for us, and to have faith in times when things are getting difficult; to be honest, to be brave, that we have to learn that there's a change in our thoughts that has to happen before our behavior changes.

So we're talking about that, and today we're actually going to talk about a very important part of thinking and that is anxiety and courage,

and the importance of courage in our moral life as well as any other aspect of our life, and how without courage we can't really do anything well. In fact that's what Maya Angelou said, this is one of her most famous quotes. She said, "I am convinced that courage is the most important of all virtues because without courage, you cannot practice any other virtue consistently." You agree with that?

I think Marcus Aurelius said something very similar to that, and it's absolutely true that of all the great cardinal virtues, that maybe the greatest is; we would think it's something like love or peace, but perhaps its courage because without courage, all the other ones are impossible. I think today we live in a world that's actually not courageous, but a bit more cowardly, isn't it. All you have to do is go on Twitter or Facebook and see the things that people will say about one another that they wouldn't say to each other's faces. We think things and say things indirectly to our neighbors, but then we deny it when people confront us. And in our lives, we feel easily trapped in the same thing that we hate without taking the courage to make a difference in our lives. This is not a judgment on you, I'm just saying that this is how our world has become, that we're becoming less brave.

And today, I want to present something that is true, and that is that scary stuff is good for us, and that when we do scary things, we actually become less anxious. In fact, this was a point of contention with my publisher. When I put this in the book, they wanted to see original

sources, scientific sources to show that this was true. And it is true. I actually dug them up and showed them that actually we think that to do scary things raises our anxiety, but it doesn't. Doing scary things actually will lower your anxiety. So in other words, when you need to do something scary, whether its confront a person, make peace with a person, or even something like go on a roller coaster or pet a snake or something. That actually doing those things makes you over the long term less anxious and less worried.

So very often we think okay, if I do the scary thing I'm going to feel worried all the time, but it's the opposite. When you withdraw from scary things, however, you get temporary relief but you actually increase your anxiety overall.

And so within every sermon during the series, I want us to have new thoughts that we can inherit, things we can meditate on and the one for today is this: doing intimidating things will give me greater serenity in the long run. I want you to believe that. If you struggle with worry, with sleeping at night over things that you may in your head be like this is silly, why am I worried about this, I want to encourage you that it's good to do what Eleanor Roosevelt told us to do so long ago, and that is do something every day that scares you. That kind of a discipline will actually help you and prepare you for the really big scary things that inevitably will come in life. You'll be ready for it. And so that's good.

One of the stories that we're going to pull from the word today, I'm not going to read directly from it because its four chapters, but today we're going to talk about the story of Jonah, how Jonah teaches us that God's call for us is scary and that that's an okay thing.

So in the book of Jonah, in Jonah, he's asked to go to Nineveh and preach to them that forty more days will come and Nineveh will be overthrown. Now we just hear Nineveh, whatever, it's some random city, but Nineveh was a very scary thing. It was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, and actually the Acadian/Assyrian Empire was this unbelievably evil empire. Actually, it was right up there with the Nazi's and the Mongols as probably will go in the annals of history, maybe it's the worst ever, worse than even those two.

The Acadian/Assyrian Empire lasted 2,500 years. I'm just going to pause there for a dramatic pregnant pause. Twenty five hundred years! When you think about how long that is, that would be like from Alexander the Great until now that imagine that the Macedonian Empire had lasted that long. That was how long the Acadian/Assyrian Empire existed. It stretched across what's today Iraq, parts of Iran and the Levant. It was this massive empire, incredibly powerful, incredibly wealthy, and most importantly incredibly ruthless.

They were known to do things like they would go into a town and they would not just kill everybody by the sword, but they would skin them alive. Then they would take the skins and put them on poles

outside of the city so that anybody who came by would see what happens if you have the Assyrian's as your enemy. They tortured people, impaled people, lit people on fire. They didn't care if you were a child, they didn't care if you were an old person. Everybody died horribly under the sword of the Acadian/Assyrian Empire. And this is how really they established empire. They were the first empire, and almost every empire after them copied that. So you have the Babylonians, the Persians, the Egyptians, the Romans, etc. And almost every great empire, probably every great empire in human history has been ruthless and done this type of thing, and that's how they control their people.

But there's nobody that's ever been worse than the Assyrians. And right at the heart of the Acadian/Assyrian Empire is this city called Nineveh, which in the very, very old world was one of the biggest, most amazing cities ever. In fact, actually there's this incredible account of Xenophon, a general of ten thousand men from Greece who has these mercenaries, and he's fighting for Greece against the Persians, and they lose and they're retreating and running away and they end up going through the desert, this very dramatic story, and they stumble upon these ruins that are unlike anything they had ever seen. They come upon a city that's completely empty, and its half buried in sand. Xenophon says in his account, so this is 400 B.C. Its 200 years after the fall of the Assyrian Empire. He says to them that there was this city with walls higher than I'd ever seen. And these are true, by the way. Fifty feet thick,

a hundred and fifty feet tall. Now there are rumors that actually they used to race horses on top of this wall, that's how thick it was. And he says the perimeter of the city is 18 miles long. Eighteen miles!

And they're looking at this city and it would almost be like imagine we were in the Middle East and you were in the military or something, and you stumbled upon some alien futuristic city that was in ruins, like it had been uncovered under a lake or something. You'd be like what is this? And this is what's happening to Xenophon because he has no idea what this is. And by the way, the locals don't either. They say it's a city called, I think it was Lilas or something like that. And they said oh it was a Midian city. Well that's actually not even true.

They had stumbled upon the two hundred; now it had been devastated two hundred years ago, the ruins of the city of Nineveh. And the reason nobody knew what it was is because Nineveh was so evil, so wicked that when a band of armies, including the Scythians, who are like they predate the Mongols, they were like these horse people with bows and arrows, the Scythians, the Persians, the Babylonians, and a group of all these other nations ganged up on Nineveh, barely won, and when they won, they burned the city to the ground, they destroyed everything, every man, woman and child because they wanted the Assyrians to be gone forever because they were so afraid. And they literally did wipe them out from history. I'm actually surprised how few high schooler's and college

students are ever taught or hear about this important part of human history.

So anyway, that's the city where Jonah's supposed to go. That's what God wants Jonah to do. God says Jonah, I want you to go there to Nineveh where maybe Ashurbanipal is, or these people who like murder, torture in horrific ways their enemy. I want you to go there and walk into the middle of the city and tell them that it's coming under God's judgment.

Speaking of judgment, we judge Jonah a lot, don't we? But that's a scary thing to do! Some Jewish guy just hobbling on into Nineveh. And so what does Jonah do? He says nope, I'm out of here. And gets on a boat and he sails to Tarshish. Now Tarshish is about as.. do we have a map? It's about as far away from Nineveh.. Tarshish is in Spain, okay? It's in Spain, 2,500 miles away. It's like as.. it's the end of the earth. I'm just going to get as far away from Nineveh and God and everything else as I can.

And so Jonah gets on this boat and he sails and he's trying to just get as far away from.. he's scared out of his mind. And all of a sudden this huge storm comes. Everybody's freaking out. It's getting worse and worse and worse. And finally the sailors come down and they're like what is going on? It says they cast lots and I don't even know what this means, but somehow the lots point to Jonah, and they ask Jonah what is this about, and he says yep, the Lord told me to go to Nineveh and I'm just

trying to get out of dodge as fast as possible. He says throw me overboard and everything will be fine.

They do, they throw him overboard, and we don't know what it is, a whale or a fish. And we actually don't know if this is meant to be a historical story. It could be a parable like the Good Samaritan or something, but there are 700,000 creatures in the ocean that you can see with sonar that still haven't been identified, so I like to think it's some like really cool. I like to think it is true and we don't even know what it was.

But anyway, so this thing, whatever it is, swallows Jonah and while he's in the belly of this beast for three days, has this famous prayer to God of repentance and about God's grace and God's love and mercy. And at the end of the story, God has mercy on Jonah and what is God's mercy to Jonah, do you remember? Does He bring him to Tarshish? Does he finish the journey? No. The fish vomits Jonah on the shores of the Assyrian Empire. (BLAH) Go. That's God's mercy! God's mercy is to take Jonah and put him right in front of the scary thing he was called to face. That's God's mercy. I think if Jonah had actually made it to Tarshish he would have spent his whole life feeling afraid. Maybe his whole life feeling regret. Maybe his whole life feeling guilt that he didn't do what he should have done when he was supposed to do it. Can I get an amen?

I think this is so true. I think that this is what God does to us. When we run away from what God asks us to do because we're scared,

don't worry. If you pray, He'll bring you back to the scary thing. That's what God does. That's how good God is!

So Jonah goes to Nineveh, he marches into the city, and actually when you read the prophets in the Old Testament, all of the prophets are very, they almost sound like hip hop lyrics, like everybody's going to die, and you're going down. And they'll go on for chapters about what's going to happen to generations and the fire and the this and the that and storms and winds and curses. And then people never turn, in the Old Testament. They always laugh at God and then they come under judgment, and yet in this story, Jonah says.. and it really stands out to the Jewish and Old Testament reader. He just says one line. He says: forty more days and Nineveh will fall. That's his whole prophecy. It's almost like when you read it, like he walks into the city and he's like (MUMBLES – forty more days and Nineveh will fall). So it's like it almost feels like he barely says it, like he doesn't care. He almost doesn't want anybody to hear him. And then what's even funnier is the response is that the whole city goes into repentance: the king, the people, and not even just the people and the servants and the slaves, but the animals even have to repent and put on sack cloth and fast, and they can't drink water. And so it's like the most successful prophecy ever because God even loves Assyrians. He's good, isn't He? And in this story, they turn and they repent and God relents of His wrath on this evil city.

And what's interesting to me is that it's so clear that Jonah thought he was going to fail and die, and instead, the thing that's even worse happens to him, the people actually repent, which is something he really feared. He wanted them to die. And so there was like all these layers of fear for Jonah, but the funny thing was that God's victory was in the end, that in the end it wasn't really; Jonah was a part of God's plan, and God was going to make it happen no matter what. And I think so often when we see these scary things in our lives, we're always so worried that this is going to happen and that's going to happen, but when the bad things we're afraid of actually happen, part of the freedom that we get is realizing well that actually wasn't so bad. That was actually a little smaller than I thought.

See that's how some of the anxiety gets diminished in our life. When we do scary things is that the things we're most afraid of actually happen sometimes! And then we're able to go oh, that wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. Okay. Maybe you're here today and you're facing a scary surgery. Or maybe you have to patch things up with an ex or a friend or a family member. Maybe God's asking you to wrap things up in your business or to start a business. Maybe there's something that lies before you and you know God wants you to do something but you're putting it off and you're really worried about it. I want you to know that yes, it's scary, but you're not going it alone. God's with you and it'll be okay. Can we get an amen from people that have had to go through scary

things. That it may seem scary but once we cross the bridge it'll be all right.

I just think that God's plan for your life is scary. If it's not a little scary it's probably not from God. God always has these plans that He puts into our lives, and what happens is when we do even these little scary things, we get stretched and we actually feel better after we do them. And even if the scary stuff happens, we end up being okay.

In my book, I tell this story about.. it was like a defining moment for me when I was a kid. I was in 4th or 5th grade. I don't imagine any of you have been to Indian Village in Forest Home, have you? Our church did this a lot when we were kids. I don't think they call it Indian Village anymore. But anyway, it's still there. But they had this thing they called the Blob, and I remember the first year I went, I saw this thing, the Blob, and it was just like this giant inflatable rectangular pillow.. there it is. Okay. The Blob is amazing, first of all, and it functions with the same physics that you would use kind of for a catapult, where you have one guy will sit on the right side of the Blob, and then this guy on the platform on the left will jump and land on the left side of the Blob, and as the air transfers from one side to the other, it shoots the guy on the end into the air. And you can see this guy is like.. he got up there.

So as a kid, we had this thing at our.. you know, things weren't as safe back then in the 80's and early 90's. It was a much better time to be a kid, just to be honest with you. And I'm there and I'm looking at this

Blob thing, and I'm thinking I got to do that. I got to do that. It looks awesome. That looks also scary. What if I belly flop? What if I get a kid and I get launched into the air. And I'm just like all this stuff is going through my mind, and so I'm just like staring at the Blob. I'm like I got to do this, I got to do this, I got to do this. And I just keep talking and keep talking and spinning my wheels, and do I do it? No. I pass and like a whole year goes by and every once in awhile I think about this Blob thing, and was it fun, it would have been cool.

Well the next year, our youth pastor, one of the guys that went with our youth group or children's group, was this guy we called Big Mike. He was a pacific islander. He looked like Maui from Moana. If you got little kids, you know exactly what this guy looks like. And he was awesome. Like all the kids loved him, he was so full of joy and life, and he had all these cool tattoos and he was really Hawaiian and this vibe. He was just a good guy. And like all of us looked up to him.

And I remember same thing, it was next year, I'm standing and I'm looking at this Blob thing again, and kind of scared, kind of wanting to do it, and Mike comes up and he's like you want to go on that Blob, don't you. And I was like yeah I do. He's like you should go on that. I was like I know I should but I don't know. It looks kind of scary. He's like you should do it. He was like come on, let's do it. You should go do it, man. He's like I'll watch, you go do it. I was like okay. All right, I'll go.

So I go and I'm really scared. And I'm like this platform, it doesn't look that high from here, but if you've ever been on top of a platform looking down, it does get scarier. And I'm standing up there looking down, and then all of a sudden I see this little kid at the end of the Blob and he looks back at me terrified, and somehow that made all of my fear go away and I turned into this like wolf. And I'm like yeah! And I jump, and I launched this kid, and it feels so empowering and awesome. And then I kind of like scoot to the end and I'm wondering whose coming up behind me, and then I turn back and its 240 pound Big Mike. And I look back and I'm like oh no. And I'm.. Mike! Keep in mind I'm like 9 or 10, I'm like a little guy. I'm skin and bones Jones. I am just like the littlest.. and I go Mike, no! Mike no! No! And he does this like (SCREAMS) and jumps from the platform, lands, and I'm like Mike no! There was so much, like you feel the wind and the air and I kind of.. I don't really know.. it wasn't a.. I don't think you'd call it a flip; that sounds too elegant. It's kind of like imagine a cat being launched or something like that. It was more a sprawling.. and when I hit the water, it was like a pancake hitting a pan. It was brutal and it hurt. And I was angry and freaked out.

And so let me just say this: everything bad that I was afraid of: a big person coming after me, a big guy, bigger than a fat kid, it was a fat grown up. And getting launched high in the air and belly flopping and all

that stuff, it all happened. All of it. The worst version of everything I was afraid of happened.

And when I got out of the water, how do you think I felt? Yes, I didn't feel more scared, I didn't feel frustrated, I was in pain and laughing. Right?

See that's what happens when we do scary stuff in life is something changes within us, just a little bit. The worry and the fear that I had about this thing I really wanted to do, it went away. And by the way, we just kept doing the Blob all day, right, because now we're not afraid anymore. I had the biggest guy in the group launch me, right? In fact I wanted him to do it again to see if I could get higher.

And this is the change is that we go from worry to desire to do more. Our world gets bigger when we do scary things. Everything seems more possible when we do scary things. Something changes in our thinking and then that changes the rest of our life.

And by the way, I think this is why kids are generally happier than adults is because they don't get a choice – they have to do scary stuff all the time. You may disagree that children are happier than grownups. I found this recent study that said the average child smiles 400 times a day. The average adult smiles 20 times a day. That was disturbing for me. I remember thinking why is that? And I don't really know, but I have a theory and my theory is this that kids have scarier lives than grownups. Think about it: when you're a kid, you have to face bullies,

you have to move to new towns, every year you get a new teacher and a new class, when you get to junior high you get a new like four or five or six teachers, and new students in every class, and you have to deal with puberty and girls or boys. All this stuff is happening in your life as a kid, and you have to face all this stuff. You've got kids pressuring you to go down things on bicycles and throw things and catch things and make things and you do it or you don't do it, but throughout life I just feel like kids experience so much of life.

As we get older and we've got a little more freedom, and we don't have the same support system sometimes as we do as children, maybe we have some money, it's easier for us to withdraw or to make a pattern of withdrawing from uncomfortable things. We're no longer forced every year. Imagine if every single year you got a new job. You just had to get a new one every year. How different life would be. Imagine it would be interesting.

All that to simply say not that we should have rotating jobs or anything like that, but that we should be doing scary stuff. That we should experience life to the fullest and not allow our worries and our fears to keep us from doing what we're called to do. Can I get an amen? There's just something about that that's really good for everybody, for the soul.

Maybe God's asking you today to do something a little bit scary. I want to encourage you to do it if you think it's really from Him. If it is

from Him, things are going to go well. And even if it's not from Him, I think you'll still grow. Faith pleases God, remember.

So, our world expands when we do scary stuff, but our world shrinks when we avoid and withdraw. Our world shrinks when we withdraw from scary things. We experience a temporary relief, like oh I'm so glad I didn't have to do that. But later, we're going to experience regret, smaller world, a world with fewer possibilities as we continue to make a pattern of withdraw. So don't do it. Charge at the thing that you're afraid of.

Last final thought: don't feel like you have to go it alone. Remember the only way I was able to overcome the Blob is to have this guy, this friend, Mike who believed in me and encouraged me to do it. Remember when Jesus sent people out, He didn't send them out one by one. He sent them out two by two. So that all the scary stuff they were asked to do, they did in community. It's good to have friends in your life that are brave and encourage you to do brave things.

I don't like the hero stories that many of us have. I like stories like Lord of the Rings. In Lord of the Rings, you have a guy like Frodo Baggins.. sorry I'm going down the nerd hole here for a second, but you know Frodo has a Gandalf. And then you've got this other guy, Strider, who's a king and he's not able to become a king until these people enter into his life. And so stories like Lord of the Rings, or Star Wars are not about one person, they're about a group of friends that do scary things

together. I don't like the modern stories of the Lone Rangers that have to do scary things all by themselves. Nobody's asking you to do that. God's not asking you to do that, I'm not asking you to do that. I am asking you to do scary things and I'm telling you that if you get good friends in your life that are joyful, loving, compassionate and brave, you're going to do a lot braver things in your life, and you're going to enjoy the victory when you cross that line.

So today I encourage you to do what Eleanor Roosevelt said, and what the word tells us to do, and that is to do something scary every day, even stuff that may not be godly. I mean if there are things in your life that are kind of scary, just go do them; expand your world, expand your thinking. Train yourself. Because as we do little scary things every day, we prepare ourselves to do the really big scary things that come once in a lifetime. And when that happens, we'll be ready. Amen?

You know God's call to your life is scary. Don't be worried. God's going to get you where you need to be. Everything's going to be okay.

So Father, we come to you in Jesus' name, and we thank you that you love us. I pray for everybody here whose facing something scary, or something that they're worried about, maybe something at work, maybe it's something small like they got to do a project for work tomorrow, or maybe for the young people here in college, maybe they have a test or finals, or things like that. Lord, we just pray in Jesus' name that you would give us freedom and the power to charge at these things. And give

us friends, Lord, to help us get there. Fill us with your spirit, and Lord
we love you and we thank you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, and all God's
people said, amen.