OUR GREATEST FEAR IS THE FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN. Our greatest need — in the face of such fear — is the need for courage.

Aristotle believed courage the first of human qualities because it guarantees all the others. If courage devolves into cowardice then all the other virtues devolve into vice. Courage, therefore, is not simply one of the virtues, it is the essence of every virtue at its testing point. “A charity or honesty, or mercy,” C. S. Lewis wrote, “which yields to danger will be chase or honest or merciful only on conditions. Pilate was merciful till it became risky.”

“Risky” is an apt description of our times. Joblessness is high, hirings are low. The cost of living is high, wages are low. Corporate earnings are high, personal earnings are low. Yet, at a time when courage is most needed we find cowardice is high and courage is low. Political promises are many but political deliveries are few. At all levels of society courage is a byword from a bygone day. It is missing in boardrooms filled with greedy yes-men who care for little more than money, in cloakrooms filled with seedy politicians who care for little more than power, and in pray rooms filled with needy pastors who care for little more than affirmation.
And yet, for many, if not most, the recession outside our doors has become a depression inside our doors. The old observation still holds true: a recession is when your neighbor loses his job . . . a depression is when you lose yours.

That is why I’m so delighted to be here today — to encourage you to stay out of the doldrums and face these challenging days with courage. I’m humbled and grateful that Gene Jordan, whom I met at Southlake Focus Group, invited me to speak — sight unseen, so to speak.

We live in uncertain times — times that will either call out of us cowardice or courage . . . just as uncertainty did years ago.

In the first chapter of the book of Joshua, the newly inaugurated leader of the Hebrews faced an uncertain future. As commander-in-chief, Joshua led a rabble without a land and without an army. Standing on the eastern shore of the Jordan River and looking to the west, Joshua saw a lush land “flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 33:3). But there were giants in the land . . . with giant spears and giant clubs. How was Joshua to face these giants since he was leading men, women, and children who only “violence” was sheering sheep.

God knew giants inhabited the land. And He knew giants are a great source of fear in the lives of ordinary people. That why the Lord encouraged Joshua three times to “be strong and courageous!” (Joshua 1:6, 7, 9). Joshua found courage in God’s words and went on to win a great victory and to establish a great nation.
The moral of Joshua’s story? Never forget: giants are no match for God . . . nor for those whom God has called.

We need not, however, reach back into the ancient past to find heroes who stood courageous in the darkening shadows of uncertainty.

On March 4, 1933, a man who had looked into the darkness of the unknown stood on polio stricken, but brace strengthened legs and declared to an uncertain nation facing a depression that “the only thing we have to fear but fear itself.”2 Six years later, on a different continent, another national leader rose in the House of Commons to embolden his countrymen.

Outside, the storms of war may blow and the lands may be lashed with the fury of its gales, but in our own hearts this Sunday morning there is peace.
Our hands may be active, but our consciences are at rest.3

During the summer of 1939, the winds of war were indeed blowing hot across the White Cliffs of Dover. But despite Churchill’s words, hearts and minds were restless. That spring, the Nazis rolled over Czechoslovakia. And by summer’s end, on September 1, Hitler’s army marched on Poland. Two days later, England declared war on Germany.

No one knew what Hitler would do next. Many in Great Britain feared the little mustachioed man would order his jackboots to goose step over the English Channel and invade their homeland. In an effort to ensure that the British kept a stiff upper lip, the Ministry of Information produced a series of three posters. The first read:
Freedom Is in Peril
Defend It with All Your Might

The second poster read:

Your Courage
Your Cheerfulness
Your Resolution
Will Bring Us Victory

And the third poster, which has now become famous, read:

Keep Calm and Carry On

“Keep calm and carry on” — what a great description for courage!

But how do we do keep calm and carry on in a face of uncertainty — of the loss of a job, of the loss of our health, or the loss of a loved one?

Aristotle wrote: “It is by acting in the face of danger and by habituating ourselves to fear or courage that we become either cowardly or courageous.” We are not born courageous. We are made courageous by the actions we take.

The brave feel fear, but act with boldness. The virtue of courage is not in its fearless, but in its the ability to control fear — to make fear a slave and a stimulant to action. Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is the mastery of fear.
The story is told of a general getting ready to ride into battle. He noticed his knees knocking and he said to them: “Knock will you? If you knew where I’m about to take you, you would tremble.”

It is in the general’s spurring his horse that he proves himself courageous.

Aesop told the fable of a group of mice who wanted to secure themselves against the cat. After debating several suggestions, one experienced mouse said,

I think I have hit upon a plan which will ensure our safety in the future, provided you approve and carry it out. It is that we should fasten a bell round the neck of the cat, which will by its tinkling warn us of her approach.

All the mice thought this was an acceptable idea. It was seconded and adopted. Than a wise old mouse rose to his feet and said, “I agree with you all that the plan before us is an admirable one. But may I ask who is going to bell the cat?”

Courage is in the doing, not in the saying.

And what is needed in the doing is the will to act with wisdom — the knowing of what to do and when to do it.

I can pass on some wisdom, but you must find the will — the wherewithal to practice the acts of courage.
The first act of courage is to keep calm — to keep our heads in the swirl of uncertainty; to stare unblinkingly into the void of the unknown. Then, we must carry on. And herein lies the challenge of courage — the actually doing . . . crossing the Jordan into the land of giants.

It is easier to carry on — to practice the acts of courage — if we do three simple things.

First, to carry on we must face reality.
American philosopher Henry David Thoreau wrote: “Be it life or death, we crave only reality.” I’m not sure this is always the case. More often than not, Patrick Henry’s words hit closer to the mark: “It is normal to man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth.”

What is that truth? That life is ruthless and often makes for us the choice between our dreams and the world’s reality. And the reality is that life is difficult.

But difficulties are invitations to courage. Courage cannot be built in the ease and quite of life. Only in the terrible realities of life — of blood, sweat, and tears — does the bulwark of fortitude rise from the brokenness of fortune.

If we fail to see the world as it really is, giving in to denial and pretending our world is better (or worse) than is the case, then we can never create a new and richer reality. Some live in a dream world and some live in the real world. And some turn one into the other.
If we’re to turn our dreams into reality we must live in the real world — facing reality unflinchingly — without letting go of our dreams.

So, what are the realities you face today? Write them down. What are the uncertainties of your world? What giants inhabit the land of your dreams?

To carry on — to practice the acts of courage — we must face reality.

Second, to carry on we must stay focused.

Like Captain Ahab of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* — who was obsessed with harpooning the white whale — during difficult days we must stay focused on our purpose in life — that thing which makes life matter . . . that makes life count for something greater than ourselves . . . that makes us feel that our lives make a difference.

What is your purpose? What is it that gets you out of bed in the morning? What is it that you live for? What is it that you’re willing to die for? Write that down.

We must stay focused on our purpose. We also must stay focused on our dreams.

Once on a trip to the south of France, Winston Churchill sat staring into a fire. He remarked offhanded: “I know why logs spit. I know what it is to be consumed.”

What consumes you? What are your dreams? Seth Godin asks us to . . .

Imagine that the world had no middlemen, no publishers no bosses, no HR folks, no one telling you what you couldn’t do.
If you lived in that world, what would you do?

What *would* you do? Write down your answer to Godin’s question. What are your dreams?

Godin then advises: “Go. Do that.”

And as you go, I say: pray that your dreams will always be greater than your memories.

Stay focused on your purpose. Stay focused on your dreams. And one last thing on this question of focus: stay focused on your God.

In the same book of Joshua, where God told Joshua to be strong — to stand resolute — and courageous — to act with boldness, God promised victory if Joshua would trust in His power — that is the Word of God. If Joshua would only keep God’s Word in his mouth, his mind, and in his manners — being a doer of the Word — then he would see victory, just as God’ promised. But God wasn’t through, He also promised Joshua His presence — that He would be with Joshua as he crossed the Jordan and faced the giants.

What is your purpose in life? What are your dreams? Who is your God? Are these paper swords to strike at giants of stone — at the harsh realities in your life? Of course not! This is the stuff that pours steel into your souls. These are the truths that help you carry on with calmness and courage.
Finally, to carry on we must anticipate victory.

Viktor Frankl survived the Nazi hells that were Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. After his redemption, Frankl became a successful psychiatrist and author. In his book, Man’s Search for Meaning, he wrote:

We who lived in concentration camps remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms — to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.\textsuperscript{11}

You know — and if you didn’t know it before, you’ve come to know it now — that life isn’t fair. Winners don’t always win and losers don’t always lose. But winners always anticipate victory, even in defeat . . . because defeat is not in getting knocked down, but in not getting back up.

In 1976, Ronald Reagan challenged President Gerald Ford for the Republican presidential nomination. When it became apparent that Reagan wouldn’t win the nomination he quoted an old Scotch ballad: “I am hurt but I am not slain — I’ll lay me down and bleed a while and then I will rise up and fight again.”\textsuperscript{12}

You’ve lost your job. You’re hurt. But you’re not slain. The courageous never are. They bleed a while and then rise up and carry on to the eventual victory they anticipate is theirs. Those who fight and win only need courage once. Those who fight and face defeat
need courage twice — to hit the mat with a smile and to rise with that same self smile. These are the ones who make Churchill’s declaration their own:

You ask, What is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory — victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.13

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COURAGE IS THE ABILITY TO REMAIN CALM AND CARRY ON — to face reality, stay focused, and anticipate victory in the midst of uncertainty.

Spanish Ferdinand Magellan possessed this kind of courage. He supposedly wrote:

The sea is dangerous and its storms terrible but these obstacles have never been sufficient reason to remain ashore. . . . Unlike the mediocre, intrepid spirits seek victory over those things that seem impossible . . . it is with an iron will that they embark on the most daring of all endeavors . . . to meet the shadowy future without fear and conquer the unknown.14

These are the courageous ones — the ones who keep calm and carry on.
Purpose: This speech will encourage the audience to practice the acts of courage when faced with the unknown of uncertainty.

Proposition: Keep calm and carry on.

NFW Career Services, North Ft. Worth Baptist Church, Ft. Worth, Texas, October 22, 2012

5. Adapted from Fred Smith, *You and Your Network: Getting the Most Out of Life* (Waco, Tex.: Key Word Books, 1984), 52.


