

**Character – Who Are You When No One Is Looking?**

**Gathering Question** – Share with your group a time when you acted courageously. Did you feel courageous at the time? Of what are you most afraid?

## Courage

Do you sometimes wish you were more like Paul's statement in 2 Timothy 1:7? "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but a spirit of power." We don't want to cave in when difficult circumstances come our way or compromise our convictions in the face of challenges that inevitably come our way. We want to be like Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Elijah and Paul. We want to have courage!

But how do we get there? Do we wave a magic wand and it happens or do we pray and immediately it comes into our lives? Are courageous people just born that way? Are some born fearful?

Actually courageous people are just like you and me. They have learned to grow in courage as they faced crippling fears. They began at some point in their lives to face up to the struggle instead of run from it. God developed in them a staying power that can only come through the refiner's fire.

It's like Peter tells us in I Peter 1:6. "In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and honor and glory when Jesus Christ is revealed." The fires of testing burn off all the impurities and all the extraneous stuff and leave in its place pure faith and devotion to God. Struggles are necessary for spiritual growth and facing them with courage allows God to do his work in your life.

**Read** – Acts 3:11-4:22; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

**Reflect** –

1. As you read 2 Corinthians 5, notice some of the ways that Paul helps us to understand the uncertainties of life here.
2. Why does the life he describes here require courage?
3. Are verses 5-7 comforting and encouraging to you? In what ways?
4. Are you amazed at the courage of Peter and John in the temple? Why? In what ways was it obvious that these men had been with Jesus.
5. What are some specific fears you have been avoiding instead of facing? How are you planning to change?