

# **This Important Kingdom Virtue Has Become Lost on Believers**

Pressure reveals our true character. It is challenge that brings out the colors. It is the worst, not the best, of times that reflect how we truly see both the world and ourselves.

When news began to break about the coronavirus pandemic, chaos ensued in ways we hadn't anticipated. The clawing-at-faces-for-that-last-pack-of-toilet-paper panic-buying forced supermarkets to introduce purchase limits because we couldn't control ourselves. A Singaporean student of Chinese ethnicity was beaten in the streets of London, leaving her with a fractured face. Personal Protective Equipment had to be secured under lock and key in hospitals. Protesters on the Indian Ocean island of Reunion welcomed cruise passengers by hurling abuse and rocks at them. Suicide rates increased. Xenophobia, racism and discrimination reached a boiling point. And by the time George Floyd's murder startled the world, the nation's angst was understandably incessant.

The pandemic and racial injustices instigated a monkey-see, monkey-do approach to facing adversity—hence the looting, the fighting, the domestic violence. The concept of loving our neighbor as ourselves was thrown out with the antibacterial wipes. People were frightened and angry, and we believed no government or law could contain their emotion.

What a stark contrast it was, then, when a 90-year-old woman in Belgium suffering from the coronavirus refused to be placed on a ventilator.

"I've had a good life," she said. "Keep this for the younger patients."

She died two days later. She wasn't just loving; she was noble.

It is the noble ones—the souls who choose to self-sacrifice and selflessly defy the “everyone for themselves” mentality—who keep the world revolving. The ones who reflect God’s character in the toughest of times are the ones who shift cultures. They create progressive and sometimes life-saving momentum.

### **Match Words With Actions**

The actions of Christians are far more potent than their words. But how often do their words match their actions? How often are we honestly known to be a help rather than a hindrance? Some believers feel we are becoming sidelined in the affairs of the world, our doctrine outcast in both classroom and workplace. We are deemed a problem—not an answer to prayer—for much of the public. Outside of policies, law and petitions, it might take a more creative, more personal approach to remain relevant. This includes an intention to act with noble gestures.

The Gospels document the most noble acts the world could have ever witnessed. As Christians, we regularly read these stories and experience the fruitful outcomes of these noble actions. So why are we not all noble? Why are we not all making the hard choice rather than the easy one? Why are there only a few who take our breath away with selfless acts amid the hurdles of our society?

It was this question that obsessed me two years ago. The lost virtue of nobility wooed me back to the gospel after a few years as an atheist. I wanted to know what made these people noble and what hindered my chances of being noble. I looked at the famous nobles, I looked at the unknowns, and between all of them, there were startling similarities in the ones who weren’t just good but great in character, wisdom and nobility.

From Martin Luther King Jr. to Mother Teresa, from Nelson Mandela to Corrie ten Boom, we have written books on those who

led noble lives. And there are countless more nobles whose names never made the papers, whether Aunt Susan or Bob down the road who always looked to help others.

Perhaps there isn't money made in nobility. Perhaps kindness isn't as impressive as power. But those who encountered noble choices were undoubtedly affected by them. Some were even saved by those decisions. The noble do that: They always save the moment.

Perhaps we don't all choose the noble path because we thought the word belonged to the aristocracy—not the excellence of moral beings. Perhaps we believed it was a birthright—not something you can choose to own yourself.

We look at Daniel in the Bible, noting his self-discipline, venturing in courageous trust in God, walking in a wisdom 10 times that of his peers. But we glaze over the choices he personally made to become this. The accounts of his life told me that just because we are surrounded by evil doesn't mean we have to bend to it, react to it or become it. We have an opportunity to rise and reflect Him, no matter what culture we are placed in. The book of Isaiah reminds us that "A noble man, makes noble plans and by noble plans he stands" (see Isa. 32:8, ESV). Daniel intentionally planned, whether in his three devotions a day in prayer to the Lord or in his earnest learning, his stewardship of the prophetic that prepared him to dine with kings. Either way, whatever nightmare terror that was reality in his world became a dream fulfilled in the kingdom. Before any heinous event, Daniel planned how he would respond with bravery, with communal accountability, with trust in something greater to save him from the burning fire, the lion's den, the consistent threat of death. Despite the fact that Daniel outlived three kings, he was not born into this, nor were his descendants important enough to note in the Bible. Daniel's only inheritance came via God Himself. But somewhere between servanthood and his advisory roles with kings, his excellence in wisdom, the choice to rise to a

challenge, astounded the royalty of his nation, through his own diligence and choosing.

In short, we can't excuse our lack of nobility for a lack of gifting. It is acquired, one choice at a time, often amid conflict, often when no one else is watching.

## **Process the Pain**

Perhaps another reason we avoid the noble choice is that it's just too hard. We've often heard the uttered phrase "hurt people hurt people." As a pastor, I was aware that those who came in with the most pain were the ones who also inflicted the most pain—often without realizing it. Until they were willing to go through healing, they'd be looking for the world to change, redeem or resolve their past. Any more hurt that came their way became another reason for them to stay nostalgic in a painful story, evidence to prove that trying wasn't worth it. Survival became a reason to not reach out. To love unconditionally was too vulnerable for them, too vulnerable to forgive someone who did the unthinkable, too vulnerable to love again, too vulnerable to try five times after failing four. When you're maxed out on pain, you do everything you can to survive, not serve.

We are not often taught—even in the church—how to effectively process pain. We are told how to jump over it, Scripture our way through it or hand it over to God, forgetting we must make personal choices to fully co-labor with His desires for us. Even if we're taught to become visionaries, we choose to run toward the vision, ignoring the ownership or responsibilities of our own actions in the journey. Therefore, people repeat what they know. They emulate how their parents responded to pain or numb it with drink, drugs, driven ambition or deflection. They were not taught resilience; they were not taught how to overcome in ways that would place the past in timeout, no longer giving it attention.

Painful events do not equate to everyone becoming ignoble, however. Some developed a resilience to horror. Some stories from the Chibok kidnapping (2015) will prove that.

My friend, Erica Greve, the founder of Unlikely Heroes, has been tirelessly rescuing children of sex trafficking—including five of the escaped girls from Chibok, kidnapped by Boko Haram—for over a decade. Her stories are examples of the true torture innocent people can face. I've met some of these children in three of her safe houses located in the Philippines, Mexico and the U.S. When it comes to the worst-case scenario, there is no competition. Yet somehow, despite the odds, these girls built a resilience that defies textbook expectations of victims of high trauma. The kids are graduating from college, gaining accolades, stronger in character than most, even if they have faced countless periods of sexual abuse. They refuse to look behind them beyond a certain point. They have accepted their stories for what they were—painful, but not tormenting to their eternal spirit.

Observing these children, Greve says: "What I have found is that resilience can be modeled, developed, can be practiced and can be implemented in our lives even in the most difficult circumstances."

So maybe it's acceptance that helps us move past the pain and into more positive outcomes, more loving behavior?

But then we have pride, the refusal to take on humility, to accept that sometimes we are wrong. Pride creates the refusal to listen, to negotiate, to fail. The unwillingness to be taught a better way, a more fruitful way for others voids us of wisdom. So we get stuck in a carousel of arguments, led by stubbornness, resulting in loneliness and isolation. We don't reach out to help; we don't choose to nobly respond in a difficult conflict. We lash out or passively punish; we make power moves, and we forget altogether what we were fighting about.

The poignancy of Martin Luther King Jr. and his civil rights movement was that he challenged the status quo not by increasing violence but by kneeling to the ground, taking the suffering to himself so the generation after him might be free. That was the hope, and yet without taking ownership of our own heartache, our own experiences that could tarnish our noble choices, we take the easier path, rather than the right and therefore harder path.

## **Wake Up and Act**

Not all of humanity is lost. Within this season, some of the flowers do still bloom. Despite what the mainstream media may tell you, the noble stories are rising from the ashes. Our Belgian 90-year-old was not alone in her self-sacrifice. Some, despite the horror they have been facing, despite the events triggering the need for control, still chose to reach out, impacting another with hope, with the type of justice our Lord believes in: the lifting up of another.

And so the stories spill across the internet: The German church that opened its door to Muslim worshippers so they had a place to pray for Ramadan during quarantine. The Detroit man who spent his \$900 savings to buy gas for nurses during COVID-19. A father who drove more than 1,000 miles to surprise his daughter with Chick-fil-A on her 19th birthday. An elderly neighbor who leaves plants outside his front door for lonely passersby. A tri-state restaurant that offers free meals to students while they are out of school. The landlord who told his tenants not to worry about the next month's rent and bought them all groceries. From large gestures to the quaint, you find people who accepted the situation and asked what they could do for others, matching their resilience to a vision and taking on humility amidst a storm. Here, we find noble acts that remind us all that there are other options available. Choices that perpetrate the hatred crush the fear and eradicate the crushing isolation.

With billion of the planet choosing to follow Christ, there are, I trust, more of these stories because of the love of Jesus in our lives. But sadly, the mere existence of belief does not and has not always meant we make noble choices. And that question “What’s the noble choice?” began to ruminate in my mind every time I faced a challenge, be it large or small. I was more likely to do what Jesus would do if I asked for the noble choice. If I answered it honestly, I was less likely to justify it or miscontextualize Scripture for my own benefit.

The prophets have been saying across the world that this is a time of testing hearts. Distinguishing the wheat from the chaff through our true motivations, our true tenderness toward His hope, never stifled by our own needs.

If we knew our hearts were being observed, if we knew heaven were counting on us not just to survive but to wake up and act with a noble stance, would we do something different?

Perhaps we would. Perhaps we could make the noble choice. It is available to all of us.

For all of those who trust in Him. For all of those who want to change the record. {eoa}

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