

This Character Trait is Critical if You Want to Live a Spirit-Filled Life

No one is born with courage,” Michael Anthony says. “Courage is something anyone can develop.”

That’s good news because Michael had to find courage again and again at critical points in his life, but he had to work at it.

“I recognize my own propensity for cowardice so deeply,” Michael says. “And when you read the book of Revelation [Rev. 21:6-8], it says very clearly that cowardice is right up there with adultery, murder and witchcraft. We all get concerned about adultery, we get concerned about murder, we certainly are concerned about witchcraft, but we gloss right over cowardice.”

Michael points out that courage is also closely related to other virtues that are important to the Christian life.

“All the other virtues—Maya Angelou said it—are built upon the value of courage,” he says. “You cannot demonstrate any of the other virtues without courage. You have to recognize what your sin is and then you have to be willing to do what you need to do. So courage isn’t the absence of fear. It’s doing what’s right regardless of the consequences.”

If the believer wants to live a Spirit-led life, courage is critical.

“Courage is central to leading a holy life,” Michael says. “Courage is central to evangelism. Courage is essential to speaking the truth with love. Courage is essential to living a surrendered life, absolutely essential.”

Make Your Life Count for God

Michael knows firsthand the need for courage in many areas of his life such as when he left a lead pastoral role to launch his own company, when he came close to being kidnapped, when he was diagnosed with cancer and when he barely escaped death.

"I've had a lot of things that have happened in my life," he says. "I nearly died four times, and I was almost kidnapped several times. So there's been a recurring theme in my life of things that happened to me that I think were designed to hinder me, limit me and kill me."

He had to learn the power of perseverance as well.

"I had to make decisions again and again and again," he says. "Am I going to let this hold me down, or am I going to learn how to stand up and be courageous? I don't think anybody's born with courage. Courage is something we can develop. We have to be intentional about it. So I realized in my own life my shortcoming in regard to courage, realized that without courage, I'm not going any place with God or with people. I want to make my life count for God, I want to maximize the only life I have this side of eternity. So I realized I better get this courage thing figured out."

Figuring it out was important because he only hurt himself if he didn't find courage. He felt he was holding himself back and limiting his potential.

"Why am I limiting what God hasn't in my own life?" he asked.

But thankfully a burden was lifted.

"I began to realize with a great sigh of relief that if courage can be developed, then I want to develop courage."

Today he is the founder and CEO of and host of the Courageous Nation podcast. Formerly lead pastor of Genesis Church in York, Pennsylvania, he has also worked in management and

executive administration in the fields of health care, public utilities and Christian publishing. He is now a speaker, podcaster, author of *A Call for Courage: Living With Power, Truth, and Love in an Age of Intolerance and Fear* and creator of the Courageous Life Planning System.

Plug Into the Power Source

Clearly Michael has learned a few things about courage in his personal and professional life. He's figured out where courage comes from—ultimately.

“Number one, I think it comes with direct time with God,” he says.

This is where Michael makes an unusual statement that raises questions in the minds of his fellow Christians.

“This goes back to why I feel the church needs to be saved,” he says. “We’re trying to get people to follow Jesus, but we’re not following closely, and we don’t realize it. So courage before people is a byproduct of intimacy before God. When you walk with God, truly, in humility, you will be courageous in front of people. And you see that story again and again throughout the Scriptures very clearly. When they saw that these were unschooled, ordinary men, but they had been with Jesus. These things are hidden in plain sight, but we don’t tend to think of them as centrally as we should as Christians, and I think that’s because of poor theology. To build your courage, lift your Bible. If we’re going to stand before people, we have to genuinely kneel before God.”

How does anyone get past the fear or apathy that are telltale signs of a lack of courage?

“Courage is what helps you move forward if you’re stuck,” Michael says. “I have found that whenever I’m stuck, it’s because I am not living with courage over one issue or in one area of my life. And without fail, when I go back and I ask

myself, Hey, what am I afraid of? Guaranteed, when I address that issue, I move forward. I really do believe that courage is the bedrock. It is the foundation of a life, of a family, of church, of a leader who moves forward and moves people forward.”

Live With Jesus as Lord

Christians who want to maximize their potential and succeed in achieving God-honoring goals can find the tool they need in Michael’s Courageous Life Planning System.

“There’s a lot out there about goal setting and achievement, but it comes from a secular perspective, not an eternal perspective, Michael says. “I wanted something as a pastor that would disciple people. We can talk about Jesus being Lord of our lives at the 30,000-foot level, but we don’t do a good job at landing that plane and getting it on the tarmac. Until I learn how to make Jesus master of each day, master of my moments, I can’t really live with Him as Lord of my life. I can talk about Jesus being Lord of my life, but we really can’t live with Jesus as Lord of our lives until we learn how to make Him master every moment.”

To do that, he created a system to empower the Christian who wants to make life count in every area.

“I created a goal setting and achievement, a life management/time management system specifically for the Christian who wants to make the most of their lives—the homemaker, the homeschooler, the businessperson, the entrepreneur, the pastor, the Christian leader, whatever capacity. This is a discipleship tool to help a Christian live with Jesus as the Lord of their life in what I refer to as seven major areas of life.”

The real issue is not setting goals, Michael says.

“The real issue is one of accountability and inspiration and

motivation," he says. "But what is that going to look like in each of the seven areas of life?"

The seven areas that encompass all of life are relationships, spiritual life, health and fitness, finances, education, career, and rest and recreation.

When a believer asks, "Is Jesus the master of my life in each of these areas?" they develop an understanding of where they are in their faith and how that impacts their life.

"You begin to have the 'Aha!' moments and you realize, 'I can grow in this area,'" he says. "'I can invite Jesus to be the master of this area of my life in a way that I never thought of before.'"

Questions like these arise:

Who are the people who are most important to me? What relationships am I going to prioritize?

What kind of health and fitness goals do I have for the next three to 50 years in light of eternity? What's going to matter?

Michael made changes in his life because in 2009, his doctor told him he had a softball-sized tumor in his chest. Thankfully he recovered well.

"I remember talking to somebody about my cancer, and I was eating differently, eating very healthy foods, and he laughed at me," he says. "He's a little bit of an overweight guy. He said, 'Why do you even bother doing that because you're going to die anyway and you're going to be with Jesus? And I remember thinking to myself, You know, that misses the point. I might die prematurely, and I might have health problems that I otherwise would not have had if only I lived with Jesus as Lord over the temple of my body and took care of it because it's the only one I get this side of eternity.'"

This was when he started his life management system.

“So I created a daily success journal, a life planner and an annual planner that helps you live with Jesus as Lord of your life in each of the seven areas of life,” he says. “You set goals for your lifetime, you set goals for the next 12 months, and you live daily in light of eternity with the daily success journal.”

Understand Your Identity

Having been a busy pastor, Michael knows it's easy to slip into the busyness and preoccupation of daily life rather than maintaining an eternal perspective.

“This is designed to spare you from the human doing trap because whether it's church or our personal lives, we confuse busyness for productivity, and it's not the same thing,” he says. “We know the Bible says we're all going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and the quality of each man's work will be tested, not the quantity. It's not about the number of things we do. It's the quality of the things we do. So this whole planning system is built from the foundation of sparing you from the false belief that doing more is more. Oftentimes, it's doing less that makes what you're doing more valid and more significant.”

He asks a few questions to help the individual escape the human doing trap.

Is this a poser?

Is this something that presents itself as important but really isn't in the eternal scheme of things?

Is this going to change me from the inside out, or is it just going to give me a false sense of fulfillment?

“The way to recover and to spare yourself from the human doing trap is to understand that you're a human being created in the

image of God," he says. "And if you could only remember that on a daily perspective, that we're living in the here and now heading toward eternity, and who I become is important, that would change everything."

Michael believes life is more than just accomplishing one goal after another even if they are valuable.

"It's not just the goals that we achieve that are important in life, but it's the person that we become in the process of achieving those goals that matters the most before God," he says. "So what matters most to God should matter most to us. That's why I created this as an accountability and motivational, inspirational tool to help people keep this in perspective, to develop an attitude of gratitude, with positive affirmations that are in the present tense so that you're focusing on the 'future you,' in the here and now, becoming the person you want to be in the future but doing that day by day."

Venture Outside the Church

Michael enjoyed being a pastor, but facing death multiple times pushed him out of a traditional church model to get his message out even further. He made the change in 2019.

"I realized that much of what Christians need to hear within the church, the church is not equipped to teach them and to help them understand," he says. "So as a cancer survivor, somebody who has had multiple brushes with death, I realized that I wanted to, with the remaining years of my life, get outside the four walls of the church to evangelize the people who would never hear certain things and also warn people and encourage them about what's coming."

The church didn't even fully understand what was to happen in 2020.

"None of us could foresee that, but I did sense in my spirit

there were difficult times coming and there was a sense of urgency," he says. "And so when I wrote A Call for Courage, it was about teaching people to develop courage as a new way of life. Truth plus love equals courage."

People would tell Michael they loved the book and it changed their life, but he realized that wasn't enough to fully effect change.

"After people read the book, three to six months later, you remember a small fraction," he says. "That's why I created the courageous life planning system. So you can keep these important things front and center.

Sensing that "terrible times" were coming to America, Michael says he chose to "take a step of faith and to get out of the four walls of the church, to blow the trumpet, and to help people solve this fundamental question, which is, 'How do I live for Jesus as the Lord of my life on a moment-by-moment basis?'" he says. "I don't believe we're teaching people how to do that practically. We tell people they need to do it, but we really struggle as church leaders. And as Christians, we really struggle with showing people how to do it because discipleship isn't just about knowing theology; it's about the lordship of Jesus. It's about knowing how to make Jesus master of your life, living like that.

"I saw what was coming. I wanted to prophetically warn and encourage Christians at the same time, and I wanted to provide a solution en masse that I knew I wouldn't be able to do if I stayed in the four walls," he says. "We love our church. But if I stayed in the four walls of a church of about 1,000, I wouldn't be able to do what I'm doing now, which is to basically take the world as my pulpit."

Just as he learned to let his voice be heard, he knows other believers must take courage and do the same in their own lives. He wants to help them develop a "new way of life so

they learn how to stand up, speak out and expand their influence, in what has become a sit-down, shut-up world.”

What will that require? A “revolution of courageous humility,” he says.

“The definition of courageous humility is truth plus love equals courage. That’s the equation, and oftentimes, probably the Christians don’t really understand what humility is. They confuse it with humiliation and walking around with their heads down and being extreme in regard to meekness where we’re apologetic about our opinions or apologetic about the truth instead of demonstrating apologetics, which is different.

“When you look at Jesus, He was the perfect embodiment of courage and humility. He was continually speaking the truth in love. So today, there’s an extreme, we either speak truth without much love for those who need to hear it or we talk about love, thinking I don’t want to offend somebody, so we refrain from telling the truth. And either of those extremes is not biblical. The correct approach for the Christian, especially today, is to speak the truth with love. And that’s what courageous humility is, having the courage to say what needs to be said, and the love, the humility, to say it in the way it needs to be said.

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