

When I was in 9th grade, I thought I was one tough dude – and by freshman standards I was! Few people thought of messing w/ me! I was the starting WR on the JV football who was called up to play on the varsity team a couple of times. I was an accomplished wrestler who crushed everyone I wrestled. I was the only freshman to make the varsity baseball team – and I started. I was the man! So I thought.

One day while goofing off in the gym, I thought I'd impress my friends by smarting off and talking trash to a ginormous, meat-head senior on the football team – who decided it was time someone taught me a lesson about respect. Now in 9th grade, I was 5'5" and weighed 120 lbs. soaking wet and this guy was at least 6'4" and weight 250 lbs. I'd like to tell you he was my Goliath and that I took him out – but that'd be untrue. No – when he took off after me, I did what any sensible, stupid smart-aleck kid would do – I ran and lock myself on the balcony so that he couldn't get to me. Needless to say... not one of my prouder moments.

I was suffering from *mastigophobia* – fear of getting beat up.

Did you know there are over 2,000 things people are fearful of? There's *claustrophobia* – fear of confined spaces. *Arachnophobia* – fear of spiders.

The most prolific is *glossophobia* – the fear of public speaking. Raise your hand if you suffer from this fear. Why don't you form a line and share w/ us how you feel about it? And if you have *ablutophobia* – the fear of bathing – don't worry about raising your hand – we already know.

Science says we're all born w/ two fears – the fear of falling and the fear of loud noises. **This means all other fears are learned and if learned then they can be unlearned.**

The opposite of fear is courage. In **2 Samuel 23** we find a list of 37 amazing men known as David's Mighty Men – fearless men who basically served as David's Green Berets or Seal Team 6 – elite Israeli forces. Among this group, there were (5) men who stood above the rest. There was Josheb-Basshebeth who defeated 800 Philistines w/ a spear in a single encounter. Eleazer who fought so long and valiantly his hand froze to his sword. Next was Shammah – who stood in victory w/ David to overcome a band of Philistines. The 4th was Abishai who was the commander of the Mighty Men who was credited w/ taking out 300 men w/ his spear. Mighty men of faith and courage!

Today I want to focus on the 5th guy among these Mighty Men – who was the toughest of the tough – he was one bad dude! He so tough and reliable – David made him his own personal bodyguard.

Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a valiant fighter from Kabeel, performed great exploits. He struck down Moab's two mightiest warriors. He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion. And he struck down a huge Egyptian. Although the Egyptian had a spear in his hand, Benaiah went against him w/ a club. He snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him w/ his own spear. Such were the exploits of Benaiah son of Jehoiada; he too was as famous as the three mighty warriors. He was held in greater honor than any of the Thirty, but he was not included among the Three. And David put him in charge of his bodyguard.

Let's state the obvious: In these encounters, Benaiah wasn't the favorite. He was like Hampton playing Kentucky this week. He was **out-numbered** by (2) Moabites champions – (2 Goliaths). He was **out-sized** by the lion he chased into a pit. He was **out-gunned** against an Egyptian he killed w/ the guy's own spear. He faced (4) giant fighting machines and came out the victor. No wonder David made him as his bodyguard – he was one bad dude! The guy chased a lion!

It's like the joke I heard of a man being chased by a lion until he came to the edge of a cliff w/ no way of escape. Desperate, he fell to his knees and prayed, "Lord, save me. Make this lion a religious lion!" Much to his surprise, when he opened his eyes, he thought he was saved b/c kneeling in front of him, paws clasped, was the lion praying! "Lord, thank you for this food I'm about to receive!"

As we peek into Benaiah's life, I'd like to suggest that – **IT Matters** – that like Benaiah – we have a courageous faith.

Personally, when I consider Benaiah's exploits, I can't help but to see his life played out in the movies. Each encounter is epic – especially the scene w/ the lion.

When my mind flashes to this scene, I can't help but wonder what would compel him to chase a lion into a pit. After all, no one hunted for sport back then – so why did he do it? Maybe the lion had been killing livestock and posed a danger to his family. Maybe times were lean times and he needed the food. We don't know, but what we do know is Benaiah was the predator and not the prey.

I'm also intrigued this happened on a snowy day. Snow makes the ground slippery and would give a four-legged adversary w/ a low center of gravity a great advantage over a man on 2 ft. Benaiah was facing insurmountable odds. Men don't usually win in one-on-one combat w/ lions. Lions can run in bursts of speed up to 40 mph. They can jump 30 ft. Their eyesight is 5x better than humans. A lion can crush a human skull w/ a single slap of his paw and his jaws are powerful enough to bite through any bone in the body.

Back to our movie... I can see the camera above Benaiah's head as he stealthily stalks his pray through the dense cold fog following the lion's footprints in the wet snow.

W/ a white-knuckle grip on his spear, his every breath creates a cloud of suspense. Suddenly, the lion's tracks vanish into a black hole. You know something terrifying is about to occur as the score begins to build. Cautiously, Benaiah peeks over the edge. As a seasoned warrior, he tosses a stone into the darkness to hear the thunderous reply of the lion which translated, "Come down, if you dare!" At this point, most of us would've turn and run, but not Benaiah. He's consumed by a different conviction. So w/ his heart pounding and pulse is racing, he summons his courage and w/ the cry of a champion, dives spear-first into the pit.

We won't show the graphic violence of this scene, b/c it may not be suitable for all audiences. But the sounds from the pit are deafening. The violent shrieks of combat, the muffled sounds of feet and paws scuffling in the snow, the dull sound of flesh tearing, and then silence – deafening silence.

Most viewers would expect the lion to emerge from the pit; but instead, Benaiah, bruised and bleeding surfaces! As the camera pans out, we witness the victor's cry as a battered, but breathing Benaiah fall to his knees – his sweaty, bloody face turned toward heaven – and shouts, "Praise you Yahweh! My rock and my refuge – my shield and defender!"

That which appeared to Benaiah as a scary lion turned out to be the basis of his reputation and success b/c life's greatest opportunities often come disguised as God-sized challenges.

Why? B/c the path to a person's greatest potential is often directly through the confrontation of their greatest fears.

Does this mean Benaiah operated in his ability or ingenuity? Absolutely not! Did he pursue this lion of his own initiative? I don't think so! I'm certain He was moving under the leading of God. He was responding to the initiative of God.

Is there a place in Scripture God allows his people to operate independent of His H.S.? NO! Is there a time God approves our living in our human ingenuity apart from Him? Never!

IT Matters – we always walk in stride w/ God and under the influence of the H.S. **IT Matters** we boldly trust in the Lord.

Trust in the Lord w/ all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your steps. Proverbs 3:5-6

I believe Benaiah understood and applied this truth to his life. He was a man abandoned in faith to His God.

I IT Matters – We REALIZE God is Big

trust – utterly depend upon. To trust is to believe God will never let you go, never let you down, and never let you off. It is to recognize God is big and that he can be absolutely trusted even when it doesn't make sense to us. **(Batterson)**

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9

Did you know light travels at 186k miles per second? In the time it takes to snap your fingers, light has circumnavigated the globe (6) times. Let's put this in perspective. The sun is 93 mil. miles away. If you could drive to the sun traveling 65 mph, 24 hrs. per day, 365 days per year w/ no pit stops, rest stops, or gas stops – it'd take you 163 yrs. to get there! That's a long way! Yet a single ray of sunlight is only 8 min. old when it arrives to us from the surface of the sun.

Now get this! Our sun is the nearest star in our galaxy! Yet astrophysicists at the European Southern Observatory have learned of galaxies 13.2 bil. light-years away! If you do the math, one light-year is equivalent to 5.88 tril. miles. Meaning the furthest galaxy is 13.2 bil. times 5.88 tril. miles away! That distance is incomprehensible. God says that's the distance b/w our thoughts and His thoughts, our ways and His ways! Our best thoughts about God on our best day falls 13.2 bil. light-years short of how great and good He really is! **Benaiah believed God was big so nothing could defeat Him.**

A low view of God is the cause of a 100 lesser evils; a high view of God is relieved of 10,000 temporal problems. *Tozer*

In other words, a small god is the cause of a 100 lesser evils. A big God is the solution to 10,000 temporal problems!

I think this might be the difference b/w scaredy-cats and lion chasers! If your god is smaller than a 500 lb. lion you'll tend to run! But if your God is bigger than a 500 lb. lion, then you might just muster the moral courage to chase lions!

II IT Matters – We ACCEPT We're Small

lean not on your own understanding – don't put your trust in your ingenuity or capabilities – but place on God alone.

The more highly we think of ourselves and our abilities and our talents, the less God can use us. *A. W. Tozer*

Faith in God and faith in ourselves cannot co-exist. When we place faith in God, it always kicks our abilities to the curb.

The fastest way we get ourselves in trouble and move in God's way or away from God is by trusting in ourselves. Yes, God made us capable individuals; but not for our good but for His glory. The entirety of Scripture is about God seeking to rescue us from ourselves and our sense of self-sufficiency. We must accept that our best efforts fall short of His good – but when surrendered, He can do marvelous things through our lives for His glory. Benaiah knew his only hope was in the Lord and the battle belonged to God.

III IT Matters – You BELIEVE God is Able

in all your ways acknowledge – to put in its rightful place or to place yourself under and in alignment. To acknowledge your ways is to bring your life into alignment under God. It is to accept His authority/jurisdiction over your life b/c you know He is willing/able to use your life for His purposes.

We do this by accepting God at His Word and allowing His truth to be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. We meditate on His truth day and night so that we will be like a tree planted by streams of water that yields God-fruit in due season and whose leaf does not withers. We align ourselves w/ Truth and relinquish our lives to His will.

These are the ones I look on w/ favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word. Is. 66:2

IV IT Matters – You FOLLOW God's Lead

He will direct your steps – God will be your guide, your provision and sustenance. He will be your refuge and your salvation – your ever present help.

The path to a person's greatest potential is often directly through the confrontation of their greatest fears.

I'd like to reframe this statement. **The path to a person's trust and dependence on God is often directly through the moments where God forces them to choose His way or a way that seems right to themselves.**

A great example of this reality comes from a story about Andrew Murray. In 1895, Andrew Murray was suffering from a painful back. He was staying w/ friends in England for support. One AM at breakfast, his hostess told him of a woman who had come to visit who was in great distress and desired advice. Murray handed her a paper he'd been writing and said, "Just give her this advice I'm writing for myself."

In time of trouble, say, "First, God has brought me here. It is by His will I am in this strait place; in that I will rest." Next, say, "He will keep me here in His love and give me grace in this trial to behave as His child." Then say, "He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow." And last, say, "In His good time He can bring me out again. How, and when, He knows." Therefore say, "I am here (1) by God's appointment, (2) in His keeping, (3) under His training, and 4) for His time." *Ray Stedman*

IT Matters we understand God is working in us and in our circumstances to move us to a courageous faith. **IT matters** we turn to Him for our guidance, direction, and provision.

The Lion Chaser's Motto

Quit living as if the purpose of life is to arrive safely at death. Set God-sized goals. Pursue God-ordained passions. Go after a dream that is destined to fail without divine intervention. Keep asking questions. Keep making mistakes. Keep seeking God. Stop pointing out problems and become part of the solution. Stop repeating the past and start creating the future. Stop playing it safe and start taking risks. Expand your horizons. Accumulate experiences. Enjoy the journey. Find every excuse you can to celebrate everything you can. Live like today is the first day and last day of your life. Don't let what's wrong with you keep you from worshiping what's right with God. Burn sinful bridges. Blaze new trails. Criticize by creating. Worry less about what people think and more about what God thinks. Don't try to be who you're not. Be yourself. Laugh at yourself. Don't let fear dictate your decisions. Take a flying leap of faith. Chase the lion!