

“Powerful and empowering”

— Catherine S. Leggett

*Courage
in the Valley of Death*

Daily Practices for Whole-Hearted Living

By Robert E. (Dusty) Staub II

An *Acts of Courage*TM Book

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 **Dynamic Spiral Press**

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Foreword

Have you ever had a visceral experience—when you were watching a movie or reading a book where the central character beats the odds, overcomes obstacles, and fulfills their destiny—of sensing your own potential and destiny yearning to be realized? Haven't we all? These hero stories (real and fictional) abound from time immemorial, from Gilgamesh, Odysseus, Moses, Joan of Arc to Amelia Earhart, Dorothy (in *The Wizard of Oz*), Luke Skywalker, Indiana Jones, Harry Potter and thousands more. While these familiar names had experiences and stories on a mythic scale, I believe that what we're feeling, at its deepest level, isn't necessarily calling us to that magnitude of life-or-death adventure. I believe what most of us are feeling is a heartfelt desire for a life we recognize as our very own, one grounded in authenticity and autonomy. A life where our chosen path and resulting experiences call upon our unique gifts and talents, and are aligned with our God-given purpose and calling.

In *Courage in the Valley of Death*, Dusty is issuing each of us a poetic and penetrating, brief but direct call to action to live the life we were put on this earth to live. As he points out, there's just one catch—that life is found outside the borders of what we perceive as safety, the comfort of the familiar. We want more but, all too often, we continue doing the same things, thinking the same way, and hoping for something different. Why would we deprive ourselves of the possibilities that await us beyond the borders of "safety"? Dusty's answer is as simple as it is true—fear. When you strip it down to the bare truth, we can fear loss more than we fear the mediocrity inherent in a life spent clinging to what we have. The irony of that approach to life is that we can't hold onto what we have because the fundamental nature of life is change and, ultimately, loss. How do we break out of the prison of fear? Again, Dusty challenges us simply but directly: have faith and courage.

Dusty had a life-changing, life-clarifying experience when he witnessed a wife and daughter's heart-wrenching loss of their husband and father as he took his last breath in his hospital bed. *Courage in the Valley of Death* recounts that moment and the revelations that flowed from it. Dusty has written a series of books on the subject of courage. This book provides a glimpse into the personal depths from which they emanate and bestows the reader with the "why" and "why now" urgency to find the courage to live with purpose and passion.

I've had the good fortune to partner with Dusty on multiple projects centered on helping my team members discover their gifts, talents, and purpose as well as their self-limiting personal narratives and behaviors. Integral to his process is creating greater self-awareness and instilling the importance of having the courage to become the person they have the potential to be. I have witnessed the life-elevating results that could only come from a teacher who authentically embodies those qualities, understands them deeply enough to transfer the knowledge, and has a passion to share their significance.

Don't be deceived by the brevity of this book. It can be a quick read, but reading it quickly would not be doing it or yourself justice. To extract the wisdom and distill the personal possibilities it offers requires the reader to read a line, or a page, and then allow it to "simmer." Let your soul be the observer as the words enter through your mind, then flow into your heart." Don't hesitate to read the page again . . . and again. Be aware of how your body responds to each observation, each admonition. Do you feel truth? Do you feel regret? Do you feel challenged? Does it remind you of what you already know but haven't put into words? This is a work not only to read but to experience. It is a heartfelt call to courageously pursue a life, guided by faith and love, that fulfills your true reason for being.

—*Scott Livengood, award-winning baking industry veteran;
retired chairman, Krispy Kreme;
CEO, Dewey's Bakery*

Acknowledgments

Of the many courageous women and men I have had the honor of knowing over the past fifty years. I wish to dedicate this book to two heart-centered and courageous women.

TO MARTHA ELLEN HAYNES (MARCI)

Marci, the strength of your faith and the power of your unconditional love gave me the courage to address manifold fears and to face into the storms in life instead of running before them. You were and continue to be one of the brightest lights I have ever known in this lifetime, a gift to the spirit in all that I do.

TO EMMILIESE VON CLEMM (OMI)

Mama-Liese, you are the whole-hearted matriarch of all of us in the greater von Clemm universe. This includes men who love von Clemm women as well as the women who love von Clemm or Staub men. Your love for the earth and tireless efforts to preserve it while serving beauty and elegance inspires us all. I love that look of battle that crosses your face, flashing in your eyes like a great warrior-queen when you see an injustice, just before you address it! You and Eberhard gave me the greatest gift possible when you blessed the marriage of Christine and me. Nearly equal to that gift has been that of getting to know you and admire your courageous spirit over the past twenty-eight years. Thank you for more than can ever be put into words.

As a young intern
I watched a man
dying of cancer
in the VA hospital
in Durham, North Carolina.
His wife and daughter were with him.

After he took his
last breath,
his wife bent
over his right
hand as she held
it tightly,
in both of hers.
She wept.

Very slowly and
reluctantly,
she released his hand.

She slid her fingers over his,
lingering at the final touch.

She left the room
with her daughter's arm
around her shoulders, both
of them
weeping.

In that moment
I was struck by a
thunderbolt of energy,
a devastating instant of
realization.

I stood in that moment,
witnessing his death
and the
reluctant releasing of
contact.

And I *knew*
with blazing clarity,
that everything I would ever have and love,
everything,
would be taken from me.

Everything
would be taken from me
at
the moment of
death.

Here's the rub:

Someday

you will have to say

goodbye

to everything you

love.

Every-thing!

How fully will you have lived?

How completely
will you have loved?

Will you be able to

let *go*

with

an open heart?

The answer to that question will depend on
how you choose to live
now.

Will you have the courage
to seize what is
yours?
Now?

Will you have the courage to
claim what is yours,
to live your life,
to love it,
with the fullness of your being;
with the wholeness of your heart?

What is it that stops any of us?

What will stop

you

from fully living,

and loving,

and having it now?

What is it that will stop you?

How do you stop yourself?

It is your

(fear)

Fear!

Fears.

And

it is the small fears
the daily small fears
that you give into
that will cheat you.

Cheat you out of your life.

Cheating you out of
the life you were meant to live.

It is the small fears, each day,
the small fears that you give into
and thereby let run you,
consuming and diminishing
the wholeness of your life,
the wholeness of your
heart.

Fear

causes you to live from the
smaller self,
from the small, tight,
constricted
part of you

Fear leads you
to say and do things
you later feel ashamed of.

Fear leads you
to not speak up and
to not express
your truth.

Fear leads you
to hide your light,
leading you
to a deep sense of
diminishment and, at times,
shame,
or to a creeping sense of
loss.

The antidote to fear,
however,
is
not
fearlessness.

The antidote to fear
is not the absence of fear
nor
is it the denial of it,
nor
being numb to it.

The antidote to fear,
the key, *is*
courage.

Courage.

The courage to do
the right thing,
the courage to be faithful
to yourself,
faithful in spite of
fear.

The courage to be faithful
to what you most deeply love,
to have love guide you
instead of fear.

“Semper Fidelis,”
the Marine motto,
means far more than
“always faithful.”

It means finding the courage
to do the right thing,
to be faithful to your mission,
your purpose in life
your values,
being faithful to
your deepest heart,
your one, unique, special life.

“Semper Fidelis”:

It means

“all” ways

as well as

“always”

faithful.

It means remembering,
even at the hardest of times,
who you are
and
who you mean
to be.

Your choice,
moment by moment,
and day by day,
is to live
courageously,
to live completely and fully.

Your choice,
daily,
to live whole-heartedly
or
to diminish a little more,
to let your soul
die,
a little more, in the moment,
every day.

To live well and
whole-heartedly
takes courage.
As Shakespeare
said in Julius Caesar,
cowards die a thousand deaths,
the valiant taste of death
but once.

What is courage?
Why is it important?

The root from which the word
courage springs
means,
“heart.”

Courage is finding
and claiming
your heart.

Courage is expressing
your deepest heart,
moment by moment,
choice by choice,
action by action,
day by day.

Why is it important?

Because

it is through small daily acts of
courage

that you claim your life,
shape your daily experiences,
form the character
of who you wish to be
and

who you will become.

Why is courage so vital?

Without it,
life is impoverished
and fears reign.

Our fears run us before them.
We exhaust ourselves in flight.

Instead, like the great bisons
of the western plains,
we can face into
an oncoming blizzard
and walk through the storm
of fears.

Courage means
having the ability
to move toward your
heart's desire,
being true to yourself,
by facing
and
moving
through your
fear.

Without courage,
all forward momentum and
any real growth in your life
simply stops.

The fear stops you.
In fact, the fear now defines
you.

Courage is your refusal
to let
fear
define who you are.

Courage is you
being faithful
to your
deepest
self.

Courage is you
claiming and
forming the
fullness
of your
humanity.

Courage comes from the
choices you make,
the actions you take,
day by day, and
moment
by
moment.

Will you have the courage
to claim what is yours?
To live your life,
to love it,
with the fullness of your whole
being,
the wholeness of your heart?

Think of those you have
admired and
those you look up to.
They were, most of all,
people of principle,
integrity,
of courage, of
heart.

Think of the leaders who have
shaped
our world.

Their courage, or
the lack of it,
defined outcomes
for good or ill.

All positive outcomes,
all lasting leadership,
were based on
insight
and
courage.

In fact,
there is no positive leading
without courage.

Every act of leadership
is,
at the heart of things,
an act of courage.

Courage is about finding your
heart
and showing the world that it
matters,
that you matter,
that it matters that
your heart
is here.

An old Sufi chant

expresses it well:

“Sing a song of glory, and
you will be that glory.

Naught are you but song,
and as you sing you are.”

Your song of glory
is the courage to express
your *self*
to tell your truth,
to boldly sing
your song of life.

When you access courage,
when you move through your
fear
to do what you know to be
right,
to be faithful to your values,
then you tap into joy.

Joy is experiencing
the delight
of being larger,
more alive,
more
capable,
than you had dreamed.

Think of a time when
you were
courageous,
when you went beyond,
beyond the bonds
of your fear.

You will remember
the fear,
but more than that,
you will remember
a greater sense of
vitality,
a realization of capacity,
of personal efficacy,
of a largeness of being
that was joyful.

The path to joy
is always
right
in
front
of
you.

Yet
no one
can take
that path for you.

You have to
step forward,
step out, and
step up.

Consciously turn and
face your fears,
walking
through the fire of
self-doubt and
anxiety,
claiming, in the process,
what is more vital and
precious
than trying to stay
“safe.”

There is no real safety
in trying
to stay safe.

By trying to stay “safe”
you surrender your
power,
the power to co-create
your life

Trying to stay
safe,
you let your fears corral you,
driving you where they will,
not
where you would want to go.

Trying to stay safe
you end up being
someone other
than the person you were
intended to be,
the person you most desire to
become.

Safety, in the service of fear,
leads to the greatest loss of all,
the loss of your self-respect,
the deep wound of shame,
the loss of your self.

Remember,
you will surrender it all
at death
anyway,
but without the exercise of
courage,
you will have lived
never having claimed your life,
never having embraced your
wholeness.

What is it you most deeply
desire?

What is it you most value?

Start today.

Claim your life.

Own this moment.

To claim your life,
to own this moment,
will require the exercise of
courage.

The courage to be fully
yourself.

The courage to be fully
yourself,
to live whole-heartedly
requires you to
claim your life by
daring to dream.

Dream of what you wish to
be and
to create,
and
then you will need to
express your dream,
letting others know what you
will do.

Courage also means
knowing
where you stand
and being able to
look in the mirror of your life
without blinking.

Courage
means
confronting your
fears.

Courage means speaking your
truth
in spite of the fear
of judgment,
ridicule,
conflict, or
anger.

Courage means
really hearing the
concerns,
complaints,
needs,
truths, and
insights
of others.

Courage means
giving up
any addiction to being right,
to start operating from
heart-based reality
instead of
ego-based reality.

Courage is the willingness to
let others in,
to be vulnerable to the
strengths,
talents,
insights,
even wild ideas
of others

Courage is letting others
appreciate,
admire, and
yes, even
love you.

Courage is staying open to
your mortality,
your vulnerability,
your dreams, and
your deepest heart.

Courage is the willingness to
act,
to take action
for what you want and
for what is right,
to act
in spite of fear,
doubts, and
opposition.

Courage is your heart
speaking
to the heart
of the universe.

Heart
speaking
to heart
is the key.

Heart
speaking to heart
is the key
that unlocks
your potential.

Heart speaking to heart
is the
essence
of courage.

Heart speaking to heart
is the key of courage,
the key that unlocks
the gates of joy.

What are you waiting for?

Who are you waiting on?

No one can do it for you.

As Rabbi Hillel asked,
if not now, when?
If not here, where?
If not you, who?

What are you willing to do
with your
one,
precious and
unique
life?

Are you ready to speak
heart to heart?

Are you ready to live from the
center
of who you are?

Are you ready
to live
the life
you truly want
to live?

Are you ready to live
as if
your life really mattered?

Sing a song of glory,
and you will be the glory.

Your life is the song.

Will you have the

courage

to sing it?

After all,
it helps to remember
that what
you most ardently seek
is also
seeking you.

Are you ready
to be both finder
and
to be found?

It is in the
small,
daily acts of
courage
that you make the real
difference
and
become the difference.

What are you waiting for?

Your life is calling.

Claim it before it is over.

How will you act with courage
today?

Who will you shape yourself to
be?

Appendix
Self-Actualization

Three Exercises for Developing
Your Courage Quotient (CQ)

Exercise One

Personal Purpose Worksheet

Intent: Defining your personal purpose helps you to capture your true power in life, to claim the fullness and reason you are here as well as to find the resources for developing your courage quotient.

What are your two or three most inspiring accomplishments in life thus far?
What three or four accomplishments or actions by others do you find most inspiring?

Recall three or more times in your life when you felt most alive, engaged, and purposeful. What is the theme that connects those three memories?

When you reflect on your personal legacy, what do you wish to leave behind?
What words, images, or phrases come to mind?

As a result of considering your answers to 1 through 4 above, write one short sentence that captures the essence of your personal purpose in life.

Test that purpose this way: Imagine you are at your funeral in spirit and listening to someone close to you speaking about your life. If they could only say the statement you have written in step 5 above, would you be able to say, “Yes! That is what it was all about!” If so, great, you have your core purpose to guide you and help you find courage when you need it. If not, what words would you wish to hear? Let that statement be your guiding purpose.

Using your purpose for guidance, lighting the way, and increasing your CQ:

Write out your purpose statement on a 3 × 5 card and place it on your bathroom mirror.

Reflect on it first thing in the morning: “Today I am all about living this.”

Reflect on it last thing at night: “How well did I do in living this purpose today?” If you did well, congratulate yourself. If you were not on track, focus on what you will do the next day to get back on track.

Have it run on your screen saver on your computer or on your phone. Set it up as a reminder.

Think about it several times a day. Ask “How am I bringing this forward in this moment, in this situation? How can I?”

Exercise Two
Identifying Strengths
and Areas for Development:

Intent: Helping you to leverage your CQ where strong and develop it where weak in order to be your best, whole self—to live a whole-hearted life of purpose, passion, and meaning.

Please rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 7 on the following acts of courage, where a higher number indicates strength and a lower one an opportunity to grow.

- ___ Courage to dream and express the dream
- ___ Courage to see current reality
- ___ Courage to confront
- ___ Courage to be confronted
- ___ Courage to learn and grow
- ___ Courage to be vulnerable
- ___ Courage to act

Ask yourself: “How will I leverage and make best use of the acts of courage where I am strongest in order to live more fully and whole-heartedly in concert with my core purpose?”

Ask yourself: “Which act or acts of courage do I most need to develop if I am to fully actualize my purpose in life? How will I do this?”

Exercise Three Identifying Your Model of Excellence

Intent: To help you develop a specific act of courage that will most help you step fully into a whole-hearted life consistent with your core purpose in life.

Think of someone you know or admire who has the kind of courage, the *act* of courage you most wish to develop in order to be faithful to your core purpose.

Study that person or visualize *how* he or she would handle a difficult situation modeling the very act of courage you most want to develop in yourself.

Begin to approximate that person's behavior and way of interacting. Make that person your model of excellence for that act of courage, and let yourself be both inspired and guided by their way of behaving and engaging.

Practice small, daily acts of courage along the lines of the act of courage you most want to develop. Build your CQ day by day and keep a journal.

Let your trusted friends know what you are working on, especially those who are stronger in that particular act of courage than you are at the moment. Let them know what you are working to develop, and ask for their encouragement and support.

For a more in-depth exploration of courage, with stories and exercises, please see the author's *The 7 Acts of Courage* in softcover or e-book.

About the Author

Robert E. (Dusty) Staub is singing his song
in Oak Ridge, North Carolina,
as the father of three
whole-hearted adult children,
a grandfather to two beautiful beings
a husband to a courageous physician,
the president of a consulting company,
a motivational and practical implementation speaker,
and the author of three other books
and numerous articles
on whole-hearted leading, personal mastery
and
courage.

About Staub Leadership

Dusty Staub and his organization offer four fundamental services through consulting, training, and coaching to increase courage quotient, effectiveness, and whole-hearted leadership by:

Developing individuals—personal mastery

Developing more whole-hearted leaders—executive coaching

Developing high-performance teams—functional, cross-functional, ad-hoc

Developing human systems effectiveness—engaging, motivating, inspiring, transforming

For more information on programs and services (or to view videos of Dusty in action), please visit www.staubleadership.com

Other books by Dusty Staub
in the *Acts of Courage*™ series

The 7 Acts of Courage

Forthcoming books

*The 8th Act: The Courage to Let Go
Courage and the Millennial Soul*

(with Sean Patrick Staub)

Courage at Work

Courage Goes to School

Courage In Family Life

Courage Is Soul Work

Courage and a Woman's Soul

Other books by Dusty Staub

Dynamic Focus

(with Wayne S. Gerber)

The Heart of Leadership

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