

A person wearing a red cape is climbing a large tree in a park. The scene is set in autumn, with yellow and orange leaves on the trees. The sun is shining brightly, creating a lens flare effect. The person is reaching up, holding onto a branch. The background shows a clear blue sky and a path leading through the trees.

FEARLESS

Creating the Courage to
Change the Things You Can

STEVE CHANDLER

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Steve Chandler



MAURICE BASSETT

books for athletes of the mind

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To Steve Hardison

Don't cure me. Sickness is my me.
My terror was you'd set me free.

Frederick Seidel

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People say we got it made,
don't they know we're so afraid?

John Lennon

Chapter 1

They say never push a coward

They say never push a coward.

They say if you push a coward far enough, he will snap like no other. Like no brave man will snap. Push a brave man, and the brave man will push back. He won't allow himself to be pushed.

Push a coward and he won't push back. Push him more, and he'll still take it. But push him too far....well, then you have to watch out.

Because a coward will come back out the other side. He won't just be a brave guy, he'll be insane. You'll be introduced to a wild animal.

I'm a coward myself.

Chapter 2

Searching for the courage code

My work as a coach and trainer gives me opportunities to study courage and cowardice at close range. Success begins with desire. People all desire success but they don't always know how to achieve it.

When I work with you on the subject of success, I begin with the question: "What would you like to create?" And once you can identify that for me, my second question is "What's in the way of that right now?"

As if I didn't know.

Because it's always the same thing. Even though I've had it described to me a thousand different ways. It's the same thing. It's not money or circumstance or time. It's fear. Fear is all that's in your way.

"I'm afraid if I did my dream, I would lose my security. I'm afraid my family wouldn't understand it if I did this. I'm afraid I don't know *how* to do it. I'm afraid I won't have time."

Those were my words, too! Most of my life I wrestled with these same fears. My own cowardice stopped me. I've written about this before. Courage has been my obsession because of my lack of it. Even as a little boy I remember that I always longed to be Mighty Mouse, then popular on TV cartoons and in comic books. It was becoming clear to me when I was young that I had no super powers myself. There was sadness and pain and large doses of fear around such threats as wild animals and bullies. So watching heroes like Mighty Mouse and, later, Superman, lit my little boy's heart right up.

Things would go wrong and people would be in danger and just when you thought things couldn't get worse, Mighty Mouse would *fly in* singing, "Here I come to save the day!" Even today, when I see a picture of Mighty Mouse, I feel a little shiver of good feelings.

Later, as I collected comic books, I also became a fan of Atomic Mouse. Atomic Mouse had no superpowers until he took his U235 pill! I always wondered if my later addictions could be traced back to Atomic Mouse . . . one pill and he was invincible!

It could be that my whole life has been a search for superpowers. So I could fly. And if a bully ever struck I would feel nothing. Most of my life I felt like someone searching the world for a secret . . . a secret code to break so that courage would be available.

I remember once—many years ago—bragging to friends in a bar in New York that I was going to write a book called *The Courage Prayer*. But I didn't believe it for a minute. Not down deep. Fear was in my way.

I had gotten the idea for that title while I was going through recovery from addiction. While going to meetings, I was frustrated by this prayer we all recited called The Serenity Prayer. Serenity? Who needed serenity? I thought, this isn't a nursing home, this is re-entry into life. The prayer said, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

I always secretly called that prayer “The Courage Prayer.” What I wanted from that prayer was the *courage*. The courage to change the things I could. How would that be? Forget serenity. At least for now. That could come later when I was enjoying the benefits of elderly living.

Courage is all any of my clients have ever wanted, too. Though they call it a million different things. Courage is always what is missing. (For example, even the solution to the time management problem is the introduction of *boldness*.) In all quests for success, what people really want to be is fearless.

So I’ll tell you how I get them there.

Life shrinks or expands
in proportion to one's courage.

Anais Nin

Chapter 3

Death is like the rose

I was sitting in Byron Katie's nine-day school and we were about to go on a field trip to conduct some very brave experiments. Many of us, including me, were scared. As we were about to board the buses Katie said to all 300 of us, "Remember, the worst thing that could happen to you is a thought."

I burst out laughing! It wasn't the first time I laughed or cried in that school. But the laughs were always joyful and the crying was sweet and grateful. Like crying at a wedding. Finally experiencing the marriage of mind and spirit.

Of life and death.

I'd been listening to Katie for a few years prior to the school on audio recordings played in my car as I drove around or in my headphones as I drifted off to sleep at night. She said one night, as I was falling into a dream state, that if she were to throw me out of an airplane without a parachute the worst thing that could happen to me all the way down was a thought. I slept well that night.

Our fear of death is staggering. Sometimes I think if we could simply erase *that* fear, everything would be okay.

Death even causes us to fear how our bodies change as they get older. We judge the body's changes to be a bad thing. Yet the rose I bought you fades and dies beautifully. You save it, even. You thumbtack it above our bed. It is dry now, and even what some might call dead. But it looks so beautiful and natural.

All form changes. All pain comes from fear of that. Fearless is the rose that fades and dries and falls from the wall, beautiful all the way down.

Some say that *all* fear is fear of death. But why do we fear death? Do we fear sleep? Deep, peaceful dreamless sleep? Where does the world go when I disappear into dreamless sleep? Why am I not anxious about going to sleep and losing everything there? After all, a day is ending . . . a day that is always my life in microcosm. Asleep now, I am happily "dead to the world," and feeling no hint of trouble as I lie fearless beneath the faded red rose pinned above the head of the bed.

You have done a good thing by putting the rose up to die so beautifully right before our eyes.

If you realize that all things
change, there is nothing you will
try to hold on to.

If you aren't afraid of dying,
there is nothing you can't achieve.

Lao Tzu

Chapter 4

Our life will never end

To understand the elimination of fear from my life, I must appreciate the role of thought. Because every feeling—especially fear—begins with a thought. And every thought causes a feeling. Nothing else can cause a feeling. Let me give you a very gentle example to begin with. Then we'll crank it up later.

In most of the world, and in Michigan where I grew up, rain was a metaphor for sadness and pain. Our whole society seemed to regard it this way. Into every life a little rain must fall. George and Martha have a "stormy" relationship. Rain is sorrow.

But sunshine! Sunshine is good ... rain bad, sun good ... you are the sunshine of my life. Things going badly? Don't worry. Here comes the sun! And it's all right.

The secret to bad and good and love and fear is reflected in our views of rain. How we interpret the rain. In Arizona, for example, we don't think the rain is so bad because weather itself is not a concept that we are overly familiar with. When clouds appear, we start feeling romantic. When we watch a movie mystery set in rainy, foggy London town, we wish we were there.

Driving to Tucson recently the romance of the rain did not let us down. The winds blew across the desert, and as we looked out toward the Catalina Mountains black clouds crackled with thunder and lightning. Rain fell. We smiled and walked slowly from our car to go meet our friends Fred and Lynette.

Fred is Fred Knipe—someone I met in Tucson at college in 1964. Later the two of us wrote songs together for a living for a number of years. Three of our songs had the word "rain" in the title. ("Rain on Me," "Rain Forest" and "Melinda Rain.") In each of those songs, the element of rain was a positive *romantic* element. Most songwriters write songs wherein the rain is a negative thing: "Stormy Weather," "Baby, The Rain Must Fall" and "I Made It Through the Rain" are examples.

But it's all perception. Every feeling in life is! Perceive something one way and you are terrified. Perceive it another way, and you are happy. You yourself get to write the perception. Always in life, *you* get to compose the song.

Consider the eerie power of Jim Morrison singing "Riders on the Storm." ("The world on you depends / Our life will never end.") You hear rain behind the opening cascading keyboards as Morrison sings of the storm and how it brings out the dark side of humanity, a killer on the road; his brain is "squirming like a toad."

But without his interpretation, the rain means nothing.

I actually saw a little toad come out of the desert last night. I wasn't thinking like Morrison at the time, so I decided it was good. The toad hopped across my path and enjoyed moving along the rain-slick patio tiles at the resort. He had suction-cups for feet. I smiled at the sight of him. Rain is a thought that is welcome here. All sad things can be beautiful when the mind is right. Fear is washed away in the blink of an eye. In the turning of a thought, fear is washed away.

Chapter 5

Life's most troubling comic material

I saw Robin Williams on *Inside the Actor's Studio* once and he stood up and asked the audience to throw an object—any object, anything—up to the stage.

Someone threw him a towel.

He wrapped it around his head and took on a foreign accent and said some hilarious things—then he put it around his waist and acted like a delicate man at a steam bath—people roared, although the towel was just any object—a neutral, meaningless thing until he used it. Re-interpreted it. Just as we do with all the troubling comic material of our private lives.

My coach uses my problem the same way. To him it is “material.” He creates with it. He twists it around into different shapes. By the time we are finished, we are both glad the problem is here because we have taken so much from it. My coach (yes, he's a real person, www.theultimatecoach.net) Steve Hardison says, "This ‘problem’ is going to be a great seminar for you. You couldn't have invented a better seminar for you to take right now."

Solutions are one of the great joys of the fearless life. And all solutions have problems. You can't have a solution without a problem, and a life without solutions is flat and boring. Some coaches and mentors know how to use problems to create solutions so elegant that it would make Einstein jealous.

That's the fascinating thing about problems. When taken on, they are life-changing gifts. Once we can do the mind shift (from paranoid mode to creative mode) necessary to see them for what they are, all problems become advanced seminars in What I Now Need to Learn to Advance on this Spiritual Journey Up the Ladder of Consciousness to Some Real Fun and Good Mischief and a condition we've all heard described as fearless.

Your kids have turned out great!

My seminar attendee in Boulder was named Tracy. She was in the process of outlining her financial desires and describing a good business plan when she blurted out, "But most of the men in here won't understand this, because I am a single mom and I have a child to raise. I do have a son."

Some men, because they have imaginations, *can* understand her. Compassion does not come from having experienced someone's identical life experience. Compassion comes from imagination.

I myself understood that woman's fear, both because I could imagine it—and also because I was a single father myself raising four young children on my own. I had full custody of those kids while also having my own business to run, and so I do have compassion for what single mothers experience. I was one! In fact, now that I think of it my children back then would even sometimes *refer* to me as a "mother."

What a gift to me that time was. What a joy to have that experience, no matter how wild it was. My children and I used to watch the movie *Meatballs* to absorb the central message that "It just doesn't matter." Whatever our situation was at home, it didn't matter. Not even a little bit. Everything "negative" was illusory, and everything good felt real. There was enough love, music and humor to cover for us. We covered the spread. We knew we had nothing to fear from the rich kids in the camp across the lake.

Was I a good father? No one will ever know. Was I fearful about how my children would "turn out"? No. Not at all. They were not muffins. They were not in an oven. They were free spirits. There would be no "turning out" one way or the other because they were never going to get that final evaluation.

Most parents are always checking in the oven to see if the kids are turning out okay.

"I hope he turns out okay."

What is okay? What exactly do you want from him? Where does this fear come from? Will you be graded on how he turns out? That's really it, isn't it? It's a concern about *you*, isn't it?

My daughter Margie told me a story recently I hadn't remembered. She was in grade school, and it was her birthday. Her favorite color was always purple. And as she came outside for recess that one birthday day she saw me sitting on a swing in the playground with a large bouquet of purple flowers in my arms. I had no fear about how she would turn out. I just wanted to celebrate how perfect she already always was.

Time is never disappearing

A lot of fear arises when we think about disappearing time. The sand running out of the hourglass. It feels like there's never enough time. It feels like that, anyway.

But while feeling that way you miss something. You miss the secret truth (and therefore beauty) beneath this gathering storm of unfinished tasks: you have all the time in the world. You have nothing *but* time. Time sweet time will remain infinite for you, always abundant, yet always just this moment right now.

Time is what being alive is made of. If you'll slow down you'll feel it. You'll feel all the time in the world right now.

And yet people sit with their friends and say, "I don't have time." Not realizing that time is *all* they have.

If I think I am upset *because* of my unfinished tasks, I have a chance to see my mind at play. Because I'm not really upset because of these tasks. I am upset because of the *thoughts* I believe about them.

When people think their problem is time management, it is not. Time itself cannot be managed. The problem here is boldness. The problem is the courage to say *no* to the things that distract your simplest journey.

When I'm upset, I'm upset by thoughts (just passing thoughts) about how my life *should be* versus how it really is. How life really *is* is Robin Williams' towel. It's material for the act. The whole world is a stage and we all play a part. Fate had me playing in love with you as my sweetheart. Act one was when we met.

If the activity is important enough (falling in love with you), time is not an issue. So the secret to a fearless relationship with time is for me to slow down and focus. Focus fully on the one thing, the only thing.