



Unleashing Courageous Faith
The Hidden Power of a Man's Soul
 by Paul Coughlin
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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH PAUL COUGHLIN

1. This book about the nature of courage and how it influences our faith is written more to men than women. Are you saying that courageous faith and other actions don't apply to women?

Not at all. Much of this book applies to women as well, but I have targeted men for two reasons: I have a unique ministry to men and courage is expected more from men. Women have a courageous nature as well, and they will also find this book very helpful in creating more muscular faith and love.

2. *Unleashing Courageous Faith* introduces Christians and non-Christians alike to a very old word: *thumos*. What does it mean?

Thumos is a Greek word that essentially means animated spiritedness, a fighting spirit, courage, willfulness, fervency, and related attributes. The Greeks believed that all of us, but especially men, are three-part beings: Logos (reason, found in our brain), Eros (emotion, found in our heart) and Thumos, courage, (found in our chest and lungs.) This explains one reason why if we want to bolster our courage, we usually find ourselves breathing deeply.

When C.S. Lewis wrote about “men without chests” he was decrying society’s tendency of ripping the essential nature of courage from men—then telling them to go be courageous. Likewise, I am decrying how church culture—often with the best of intentions—tears thumotic courage from our souls, then, incredibly, expects leadership. We want what we cannot possibly have on the terms we demand it.

3. But you warn that *thumos* has a dark side. What would be an example of this?

Spirited animation—the quality that gets people off their rear and make something happen and change the status quo—can go very bad very quickly. I call this “shadow thumos,” and it is found in the darkest people throughout history.

4. *Unleashing Courageous Faith* promotes a definition of masculinity that is uncommon. Please explain.

Masculinity, at its best, is love bolstered by courage. The Greek word for man, *Andra*, is the same word they used for courage. A man’s nature is to be courageous, but he must learn how to grow it and season it—not discard it and crucify it, which is what many have been told to do.

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Acts of courage always include some form of sacrifice and conflict. Our spiritual training covers sacrifice, but hardly deals with conflict. And many, if not most, people go to church to get away from conflict. That's one reason why we call the room we gather in a sanctuary when in many ways it should be called a war room.

5. Why should people care about thumos? What good will it do them?

Understanding what grows and drains our thumos—the seat of action within us all—helps us understand why we may have loving thoughts and loving feelings, but why we don't forge loving actions. Thumos helps us create a more loving and muscular faith in action, helping us to be doers of God's will, not just talkers.

Our thumos helps put feet on our loving thoughts and feelings, but it is a different kind of love than what many of us are used to hearing in church: unsentimental, confrontational, sacrificial, practical, playful, powerful, prophetic, kinetic, unpredictable, and noble. It is a superior love, which is not an excuse to embrace what is weak and innocuous, but love as a call to battle against all that is unlovely and unloving in the world, such as injustice and related cruelty.

6. Why does lack of courage training in church concern you so much?

Because it's the largest missing piece in our spiritual puzzle. Courage is the virtue that underpins all other virtues, yet the subject is rarely explored in church. And it's opposite, cowardice, is a sin that God puts in the same category as lying, adultery, sorcery, and murder (Rev. 21:8).

Courage is a product of our thumotic will—not our heart, and our spiritual training has us believing that even the capacity for being willful is wrong, making our faith anemic. So men and women alike have been told to leave their thumos-will at the Cross, as if it were dirty and sinful, one of the biggest mistakes you will ever make. What the church needs to do is show us how to season and discipline our thumos-will, transforming ourselves from being *willful* to being *willing*. It has been and always will be people of thumos-burning faith and courage, such as William Wilberforce, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Martin Luther, Pope John Paul II, and so many others, who have changed the world for the better.

7. What will a person get from your book after reading it?

A more courageous faith, which will lead to a greater sense of purpose, meaning, and a more muscular love, and with it, joy. They will be better equipped to wrestle with real issues and create real acts of loving change and redemption. And they will be more soulful: authentic, real, and trustworthy, like our Savior, Jesus.

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8. What grows and drains our thumos?

Our thumos is grown through connecting our lives to transcendent causes, studying the lives of the courageous, fellowship and brotherhood, faith, working on behalf of peace and justice, and what I call “grief work,” where we learn to feel our grief and in doing so grow our indignation, which means “much to grieve.”

Our thumos is drained from a wimpy and heretical caricature of Jesus, spiritual abuse and neglect, materialism, and cynicism, which is a sin that is more tempting to men than women, and is a form of gossip with hair on its chest.

9. This is a provocative book with some uncommon observations and prescriptions. What do you hope to achieve with this kind of book?

Mainly, to reform what I call the Official Script, which has tamed Christianity to lists of do’s and don’ts and which is a dangerous defender of the status quo. Christianity is revolutionary, and we need to put courage back on our spiritual radar to carry out our spiritual duties.

For example, I include a Courage Assessment Test (CAT), where people who possess more thumos should receive preferential treatment in seminary and church-related jobs. I want us to rewrite the Official Script, not in order to be provocative or disrespectful, but in order to produce a more muscular expression of love, joy, and faith.