

I Corinthians 16:13-14 NIV

¹³ Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. ¹⁴ Do everything in love.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14 The Message

¹³⁻¹⁴ Keep your eyes open, hold tight to your convictions, give it all you've got, be resolute, and love without stopping.



I Cor. 16 is Paul's grand finale to the Corinthians. He begins his letter with advice on personal morality, then moves on to worship, then community, then faith maturity and how to live in the resurrection. Now are his final words of benediction. The last word of verse. 13 admonishes us to "Be Strong."

At the recently concluded Men's Rites of Passage at the Audubon Center of the North Woods in Sandstone, Minnesota, 34 men, and a greater number of leaders, initiators, support crew, and alumni were able to name how to be strong:

"There Is Such Strength in a Group of Vulnerable Men"

The world wants us to believe that vulnerability is a weakness. No crying. If you hug a brother it would be easier for him to stab you in the back. A vulnerable spot in a steel beam means it could give way. Steel can break but it never shall bend.

Our ego wants us to believe that being vulnerable might reveal our brokenness. We can't talk about that. But I suspect everyman on a church pew faces either illness, addiction, a broken marriage or relationship, lust, financial difficulty, strain with his children, father wound, father hunger, brother wound, brother hunger, a loss of identity, purpose or even faith.

Paul's words begin with "Be on Guard." We might think of guards as the enemy – Roman soldiers who led Jesus to the cross. But not so. Jesus forgave the men whom he knew were trapped in an oppressive society too.

Paul had a jailer whose duty was to kill himself after the earthquake from singing praise songs at midnight burst the cell door open. What did Paul do but invite him into the Kingdom. Habakkuk 2 talks about the loyal soldier who stands firm at the watchpost – he is waiting for the vision from God.

There is a guard described in Isaiah 21:6 who is told to go post a lookout. This guard does not enable covert activity but is to scout for any injustice that could tear down the kingdom or our brothers and sisters. Harper Lee takes this verse from the King James to describe Atticus Finch when he sat by the jail entrance when a lynch mob was coming after Tom Robinson – Go Set a Watchman.

We are to stand firm in the Faith. Hebrews in 11:1 says Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.



Evidence not seen? Try using that as Exhibit A in Court. We are talking about A – the Alpha and the Omega. The more I mature in my faith the more I rely on mystery and silence to guide me. I honestly quit using words in my personal prayers when I realized I was dictating my agenda to God rather than listening for the whispered word God was saying to me. I call my prayer life contemplative sits.

Paul says be courageous. I held a rock for two hours while praying over men who were actively grieving. I especially chose a heart-shaped soap stone because it has the word courage on it. It is no coincidence that the French root word for courage and heart are the same – couer.

A St. Louis suburb is named Creve Couer, which means sacred heart - a broken heart. Our society tries to avoid pain but there is such a thing as sacred wounding and necessary suffering. Just ask Jacob after he wrestled the angel, Jonah in the whale, Paul with his thorn in the flesh, and Jesus on the cross. Join them in being on the sacred descent.

Sharing your heart means that **Joy will be multiplied, and Grief will be divided.**

Verse 14 says “do everything in love; love without stopping.”

Our weaver, the wisdom elder at the Men’s Rites of Passage, is a burly, long haired, bearded, minister in Texas. He shared incredible vulnerability in describing his abusive father. He told the men at the Rites with all sincerity:



“If any one of you, any of you men had been in my life as a boy, I would not have had the father hunger I suffered.” My friend suffered mother hunger too.

Wow. Just any one of the 80 men gathered. Any one of us can and will make a difference in someone’s life who at even advanced age needs a father or mother figure or a brother or sister. Find them, go to them, be there for them. Be there for each other now. God bless you as you discover this.

The next Men’s Rites of Passage in Minnesota is June 2021. I hope men of your church will venture with me.