

WHERE GUTS BEGINS

Scriptural Basis: *Read John 11:1-43.*

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“Don’t be an idiot,” he told me. “How can you be sure you’re doing the right thing? You’re leaving a prime position with a bright future. To do what? Go work at a tiny church in backwoods Virginia? I really think you should reconsider your decision, Jeff. Churches are notorious for paying their youth pastors nothing and expecting them to live on faith and hand-me-downs. Is that what you want for you and your new wife?”

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The phone line remained silent for a long time while I contemplated how to respond. No doubt my oldest brother was hoping his words of wisdom had really sunk in. In truth, there was only one sentence he'd said that had caught my attention: *How can you be sure you're doing the right thing?*

How could I be sure? What was it that made me so certain that leaving my career as an officer in the Air Force and then moving me and my soon-to-be wife across the country to accept a youth pastor's position at half my current salary was *the* right thing? Exactly how did I know that's what God was calling us to do?

I reassessed how I'd come to the decision. I had spent months praying about the possibility of taking the position. I'd searched the Bible for answers. I'd sought the counsel of close friends. All seemed to confirm to me that the position in Harrisonburg, Virginia, was where God was moving us.

But beyond all this, I just knew this was the way to go. From the moment I was first asked to consider the position, I knew it was the right thing to do. In my gut I knew. I had heard God speaking to my heart time and again, telling me this was His will.

My oldest brother, Jordy, was right in one respect. From a sheer economic standpoint I could hardly refute him. It was crazy to resign my stable Air Force officer's commission for a position as a youth pastor at a small church. After all, how many youth pastors were let go annually, simply because the small church they served couldn't afford to keep paying their measly salaries? Too many. That was the side to this decision that made me nervous. Yes, it was

nuts. But even with the fear of financial ruin hanging over my head, I couldn't escape it. That was my calling.

Then I considered Jordy's spiritual condition. At that time he wasn't living for the Lord. Although my siblings and I had all been raised in the church and taught to love and obey God from an early age, at that time in his life, my oldest brother was living far away from the Lord. And that's what angered me. I was almost indignant that he would even question whether I knew what God was calling me to do. My decision was crystal clear to me, and I would not let the threat of financial difficulty bring doubt into that decision.

I chose my words carefully. "Thanks for your advice, Jordy," I responded. "But when you are living for the Lord, in a daily, deep relationship with Him, speaking to Him day and night, and when you are involved in the ministry of a local body of believers, then I will listen to you. Until that time, I'll thank you to keep your advice about my life calling to yourself, and I'll accept my own counsel instead." The uncomfortable silence on the line settled on us again. I waited for his response.

"All right. I guess I'll talk to you later," Jordy stated.

"Fine. Bye." I hung up the phone, fuming. How dare Jordy, who had no relationship with God, question my decision? As the moments passed, my anger abated. I knew he wasn't trying to irritate me with his questions. Jordy, because of his protective nature, was simply trying to look out for me, attempting to prevent me from making what appeared to be a bad decision. But he had left me questioning how sure I really was.

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A week later I called Jordy to see how he was doing. We chose not to dredge up the previous week's conversation. We both respected each other too much. He respected my freedom to choose my own course for my life. I respected his right, as my brother, to question if I really knew what I was doing. We both loved each other too much to hold a strong disagreement against each other.

Three months later my newly wedded wife and I moved to Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Years later I knew it was the best move I ever made in my life.



Over a decade since then, that conversation remains frozen in my memory. I even remember what I was doing as I talked to my brother: I was sitting on my couch on my day off, watching a late September Colorado rain shower blow over the front range and begin sprinkling on my outside patio. My beloved pug, Thor, was nestled down beside me having a good nap.

It was a formational moment in my life. I praise God that my brother Jordy had the guts to ask me those questions, because that conversation was the genesis of what has become the book you are now holding. The exchange we had that day launched me on a stream of thought, research, and Bible study in a quest to find out exactly how we can be sure of God's voice in our lives. From that moment on my life took on a new shape.

Several months ago I was visiting Nashville on business

and I had dinner with Jordy and my sister-in-law, Dawn. They asked me to tell them about the book I was working on. I smiled and reminded him of our phone conversation so many years ago. For the life of him, Jordy couldn't remember it at all.

"Well, whether you remember it or not, it drove me to find the answers to exactly how we can know God's will in our lives," I said.

Jordy forked the plate of sesame chicken sitting in front of him. Having since settled his relationship with God, he smiled and asked, "So, what's the answer?"

"Faith," I said, "Gutsy faith." We spent the next hour discussing exactly what a no-holds-barred, open-communication-based, gutsy faith relationship with God was all about. As we talked, our broccoli beef, sesame chicken, and fried rice grew cold.

While the waiter boxed up our left-over food, Jordy said, "Well, I might not remember that phone call, but I sure am glad I asked what I did that day."

"Me too," I agreed.

FAITH . . . AND GUTS?

Do you understand what it means to have guts? Aside from the obvious definitions dealing with internal organs, *The American Heritage Dictionary* gives the following definitions to the word "guts": "guts: 1) One's innermost being. 2) The inner working parts. 3) Courage; fortitude. 4) Nerve; audacity. 5) To remove the essence, or substance. 6) Deeply felt."

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When a person is described as having guts, we generally mean that person is very brave, able to take on any situation without batting an eye. We often see him or her as fearless or unshakable.

If we described a person as having a gutsy faith, we might think of him or her in the same way: Through prayer, nothing shakes a person with a gutsy faith. But just as the word “guts” has various meanings that can apply to various situations, couldn’t it mean much more to say a person had a gutsy faith? Couldn’t it also apply to someone who knows the inner workings of his or her soul—a person who might know how to respond to any given situation based on the knowledge of what God might be doing in his or her inner being?

When we look at an individual’s depth of faith from a holistic, life-changing perspective, the kind of gutsy faith we will be exploring has roots in all of the definitions we’ve listed as it correlates both to God and to our relationship with Him.

Yes, sometimes just answering God’s call can be a harrowing experience. Obedience can bring frustration, fear, and turmoil. Sometimes, even when we know we’re in the center of God’s will, it would just be so much simpler to give up, to quit. Sometimes living up to what God calls us to means all that we know, all that our lives represent, and all that we have come to believe in will end. In such circumstances, it’s clear that having faith to move forward would take a lot of intestinal fortitude—guts.

But I am of a mind that having guts in our faith is so much

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more than dealing bravely with making difficult decisions. I think that having a strong, unshakable faith takes guts in a variety of ways. We will explore those in this book.

I also fully believe that having that kind of faith is something a person develops. We aren't born with it. Some will develop guts in their faith easier than others, but in the end, we are all capable of having a gutsy faith.

As you move through this book, I challenge you to record your responses. At the beginning of each chapter I've included a large block of Scripture that I challenge you to read. No doubt God will begin speaking to you through His Word about the kind of guts the particular characters in the block of Scripture possessed, and what it took for them to get there. Write those thoughts down.

And at the end of each chapter I have included "thought questions" for you to answer. The thought questions are designed to help you really dig into the deeper meaning of each chapter and how this deeper meaning applies to your life. I encourage you to record your answers, to journal your thoughts as you progress through these pages.

You may even want to take this journey with a friend or two. Open vulnerability with a trusted friend not only is good therapy but also helps you work through what God might be saying to you. And true accountability is one of the best ways to grow a gutsy faith.

So, are you ready to develop a gutsy faith? I assure you, this isn't going to be the easiest read you've ever had. It will likely be challenging. It's going to require blatant honesty

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from you in order to reach that gutsy level of faith in God. If you *are* ready, let's begin.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to you to have a gutsy faith?

- Do you think of yourself as a person with a gutsy faith? Why or why not?

- Name at least five people in the course of your life whom you see as having a gutsy faith.

- What characteristics do these people possess that you would like to see developed in your life?

- Are those characteristics key to their gutsy faith?

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- If so, why do you think that is the case?

- If not, why do you want to develop those characteristics in your life?

- What reasons do you see for why you lack those characteristics?