

David Whyte on Courage by David Whyte

is a word that tempts us to think outwardly, to run bravely against opposing fire, to do something under besieging circumstance, and perhaps, above all, to be seen to do it in public, to show courage; to be celebrated in story, rewarded with medals, given the accolade, but a look at its linguistic origins is to look in a more interior direction and toward its original template, the old Norman French, Courage is the measure of our heartfelt participation with life, with another, with a community, a work; a future. To be courageous is not necessarily to go anywhere or do anything except to make conscious those things we already feel deeply and then to live through the unending vulnerabilities of those consequences. To be courageous is to seat our feelings deeply in the body and in the world: to live up to and into the necessities of relationships that often already exist, with things we find we already care deeply about: with a person, a future, a possibility in society, or with an unknown that begs us on and always has begged us on. To be courageous is to stay close to the way we are made.

Courage is what love looks like when tested by the simple everyday necessities of being alive.

The French philosopher Camus used to tell himself quietly to live to the point of tears, not as a call for maudlin sentimentality, but as an invitation to the deep privilege of belonging and the way belonging affects us, shapes us and breaks our heart at a fundamental level. It is a fundamental dynamic of human incarnation to be moved by what we feel, as if surprised by the actuality and privilege of love and affection and its possible loss. Courage is what love looks like when tested by the simple everyday necessities of being alive.

We become courageous whenever we live closely to the point of tears with any new possibility made known inside us, whenever we demonstrate a faith in the interior annunciations and align ourselves with the new and surprising and heartfelt necessities of even the average existence. To allow ourselves to feel deeply and thoroughly what has already come into being is to change our future, simply by living up to the consequence of knowing what we hold in our affections.

On the inside we come to know who and what and how we love and what we can do to deepen that love; only from the outside and only by looking back, does it look like courage.

From the inside, it can feel like confusion, only slowly do we learn what we really care about, and allow our outer life to be realigned in that gravitational pull; with maturity that robust vulnerability comes to feel like the only necessary way forward, the only real invitation and the surest, safest ground from which to step. On the inside we come to know who and what and how we love and what we can do to deepen that love; only from the outside and only by looking back, does it look like courage.

Excerpted from David Whyte's book, *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words*, published by Many Rivers Press; First Edition edition (January 1, 2015).