

"Make Up Your Mind" Or "Into The Lion's Den"

Many years ago, a young boy was assigned the task of lighting a slow-warming, pot-belly stove in a single room schoolhouse before his classmates and teacher arrived every morning. This task he perfected through repetition, starting early so the classroom would be warm for his classmates.

But one cold morning something terrible and unforeseeable happened, and it would change the course of his life forever. His teacher arrived at the schoolhouse to find the building engulfed in flames. Through the heat waves of the fire, she could see the boy lying motionless on the schoolhouse floor.

He was rushed to the hospital, where rushing nurses and doctors tried to save his life. His burns were severe. While slipping in and out of consciousness, the boy heard a doctor whispering quietly to his worried mother, "I'm sorry, but I don't think he is going to make it. The burns are just too severe."

In that moment, something stirred in the boy's heart. While undetectable to those standing around him, inside the boy it was like the roaring of a lion. You see, in that moment he made up his mind that he would survive.

And survive he did. To the amazement of everyone, the boy lived on. His recovery was slow, for the burns were deep. Yet everyday he was a little stronger than the day before. Again, he overheard his doctor speaking with his mother. He informed her that the boy would survive, but that he would never have the ability to walk again. Though burned from head to toe, his legs received the worst of the flames, and for this reason walking was an impossibility. For a second time, he made up his mind. He would walk again, just as before. The only opinion that mattered to him on the subject was his own.

Soon he was well enough to go home. His mother had painstakingly prepared the house for him to have access to everything from a wheelchair. She even made a way for him to go out in the backyard, though it was painful to remember how he had loved to run and play there not so long ago. It shouldn't have been a surprise that this was one of the first places the boy went when he got home.

She watched him in silence from the backdoor as he wheeled himself out as far as he could go, all the way to the white picket fence that surrounded the house. While she pitied him, a lion was roaring.

Suddenly the boy forced himself out of the wheelchair and fell harshly on the ground. She rushed from the door to help him back in his chair. Stopped short. A mother knows her child, and she knew suddenly that this boy wasn't looking for help back into that chair.

She was suspended in time as she watched the boy begin to painfully pull himself up on the fence. Slowly he rose, using the posts to support his weight. Once steadied, he reached out his hand for the next post, and began to drag his lifeless limbs along behind him, as he made his way around the yard.

It is hard to say what it was inside of this boy that caused him to fight. Everyone would have understood if he had quit and died. No one would have blamed him. The burns were severe. Surely the boy hadn't grasped some vision of greatness in his years to come. The course of his life was now in the hands of an injury, and that was out of his control. With the permission of all, and no greatness in sight, why didn't he die? I imagine that, though he had no power in his body, he chose to fight for the power that he had on the inside. And this hidden power was the power to choose. He learned to choose with the ferocity of a lion, while those around him relinquished this power to probabilities and circumstance. He chose, not for promised greatness, but because he would not stop believing that he could decide his future.

Before long, a smooth path was worn around the edges of the fence. The boy learned to walk haltingly, and then to walk with no help at all. And then, he ran. He ran everywhere. He ran to school, he ran home. He ran for the sheer joy of running. And some years later, under the historic lights of Madison Square Garden, he ran once again. The crowd erupted with praise as they watched Dr. Glen Cunningham, the fence-crawler, run the world's fastest mile.

Once a boy, now a man.

Always a lion.

(This devotional is excerpted from Mark's talk entitled, "Becoming A Leader." If you would like to learn more about this or other titles Mark has to offer, visit us at www.markgorman.com)

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