

Courage: The Man with the Axe
Adapted from *Hero Tales, Volume I*, by Dave and Neta Jackson

Gladys Aylward, the small woman who told she was not qualified to be a missionary, served God faithfully until her death on the mission field of China.

Someone was pounding on the gate of the Inn of Eight Happinesses. I heard my name called. “Gladys Aylward! You must come quickly!”

As I followed the messenger, I could hear terrible screams coming from inside the local prison. It sounded like a riot. But why had the Mandarin sent for me? Confused, I bowed respectfully to the Mandarin, who was standing with the governor of the prison.

“Thank goodness you have come!” said the governor, wringing his hands. “You must go in and stop the riot!”

I was shocked. “*Me?* Why don’t you send in your soldiers?”

“Impossible!” the man cried. “These prisoners are murderers and thieves! The soldiers would certainly be killed!”

“But, if I went in there, they would kill *me*.”

“Oh no,” said the governor. “You tell our people that God lives inside you. If what you say is true surely your God will protect you when you go inside the prison.”

I stared at the two men. Were they making fun of me? But they were serious. I realized that if I did not believe God could protect me, I could forget about being a missionary in China.

I swallowed hard. “All right. Open the gate.”

I was so frightened my knees were shaking. Inside the prison courtyard, a horrible sight greeted me. Prisoners were chasing one another with knives and screaming like madmen. Dead and wounded prisoners were lying everywhere. And—running straight toward me was a huge man holding an axe over his head!

I was so terrified I couldn’t move. But when the man was only a few feet away, he suddenly stopped. One by one, the other prisoners stopped yelling and running and just looked at me. They wondered who I was and what I was doing there.

Suddenly, I got mad. The man with the axe was just a big bully. “Give me that axe!” I demanded, holding out my hand.

Without a word, the man handed me the axe.

I looked at the prisoners. They were dressed in dirty rags. They were so thin their ribs showed. They looked cold and miserable. Suddenly, instead of being afraid of them, I felt sorry for them. “I have been sent by the governor of the prison to find out why you are fighting.”

At first, no one spoke. Then a young prisoner came forward. “My name is Feng,” he said. “We don’t know why we are fighting...but we are hungry and have nothing to do day after day.”

I frowned. These men had been locked up like animals, without any food and no work to keep them busy. “If you will promise to stop fighting, and will bury the dead and take care of those prisoners who are wounded, I will speak to the governor for you.”

The prisoners agreed. As I stepped outside the prison, the city officials bowed to me with respect. I told the governor of the prison that the men needed to have work to do so they could earn money, buy food, and have self-respect—and I, Gladys Aylward, was going to come back to visit the prison every day to make sure it happened!

Courage is knowing God’s power can help you do something hard even when you feel scared.