

Courage is often imagined as something dramatic, like saving a life or standing in front of a crowd without fear. However, courage is not always loud or visible. It often exists in quiet, personal decisions that others may never see. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to move forward despite it. It is choosing yourself again and again, even when doubt is present. Courage is the decision to keep going, especially when the path in front of you feels unfamiliar.

For me, courage means pursuing higher education despite coming from a family where degrees were not the norm. There were no clear examples to follow, no blueprint to guide me through the process. At the same time, I was still expected to succeed, even without that guidance. The first time I went to college, I went because I felt like I was supposed to, not because I truly understood why I was there. I struggled and ended up failing my first year. That experience could have stopped me. Instead, it became a turning point. When I returned to college, I did it for myself. Every step still felt uncertain, but it meant more. Courage, in this moment, was not about getting it right the first time. It was about starting again with purpose.

Courage also means facing imposter syndrome and refusing to let it take control. There are moments when I sit in academic or professional spaces and question whether I truly belong. My thoughts may tell me that I am not qualified, that others are more capable, or that I am somehow out of place. In those moments, courage is reminding myself how far I have come, what I am capable of, and who I am. It is raising my hand, sharing my ideas, and continuing to show up even when my confidence feels fragile.

Courage also means being the youngest and constantly being compared to my older siblings. There were expectations for me to follow a certain path, yet those expectations were not always supported by a belief in my ability to succeed. Because my older siblings did not have high aspirations, my parents did not always believe that I would have them either. That assumption felt limiting, like my potential had already been decided before I had the chance to prove myself. Courage, in these moments, is choosing to believe in myself anyway. It is defining my own path and refusing to be confined by expectations. Courage is not perfection, and it is not always confidence. It is not always having everything figured out or feeling ready. Instead, it is continuing forward even when you feel uncertain, overlooked, or doubted.

At the same time, courage means moving forward without role models who reflect my exact path. It means figuring things out on my own, asking questions, and learning through experience. There is no one to show me exactly what to do or how to do it, which can feel isolating at times. It also means making sacrifices, such as missing out on rest or social moments, in order to stay committed to my goals. Courage, in these moments, feels like walking through an unfamiliar space in the dark, trusting that each step will lead somewhere meaningful.

In the end, courage is deeply personal. It is not always recognized or celebrated, but it is present in the choices we make every day. For me, courage is continuing to pursue education, challenging self-doubt, and creating a path where one did not exist before. It is the quiet strength to keep going, even when fear and uncertainty are close behind. Courage is choosing yourself, again and again, no matter how difficult the journey may be.