

How to Take Risks, Face Your Fears and Choose Courage – Ryan Holiday with Dave Asprey – #868

Dave Asprey:

On today's show, one of my most favorite authors is joining us. And there are different kinds of authors. No, this is not a Neal Stephenson writing a cyberpunk book. This is Ryan Holiday, who is, seriously, nails it with books and writes at a speed and just a prolific-ness that I don't understand. If you read *Super Human*, you know that I was reading his daily *Stoic* with my son in the sauna every morning. And I quoted some of his translations of ancient Greek philosophy as part of my anti-aging theory. And so, that's how much I like Ryan's books.

And just his thinking has been, I think, affecting many, many people in society. And he's got a book about something that I'm completely opposed to, and that is called courage. Because right now, if you would just set down your courage and allow yourself to be controlled by a central AI algorithm, wouldn't you be safer? Okay, there might be some sarcasm there. Ryan, my friend, welcome back on the show.

Dave:

You've written so many cool books. And one of my favorites is about what it takes to create a great book or a great work of art. What was the exact title on that book?

Ryan:

Perennial Seller.

Dave:

Perennial Seller. Thank you. I have a hard time remembering it, because no one I know who writes books writes them to be sold. The perennial part sticks, but it's like perennial greatest, perennial something. So, Perennial Seller. I will tell you whether you're in our live audience from upgrade collective, and welcome guys, or whether you're just listening, if you want to write a book or create a podcast or a blog, you got to read Perennial Seller.

Because the amount of creative force that goes into a book, I've never read a book that explains what it takes to make something that is worthy like that book. So, Perennial Seller is just one example of the many things that go into the way Ryan thinks about stuff. But now, *Courage Is Calling*. It's like the perfect title, the perfect time when we actually need some real courage. I got to ask you, when did you decide to write this book?

Ryan:

Would have been just the fall of 2019. So this has happened to me twice now with my ego book as well, where I thought I was interested in something and then life overwhelmingly made that subject the focus of all my attention. Obviously, no idea that a pandemic was coming and I didn't start thinking about it because there was a pandemic, it just happened to be accidentally right in line with the moment.

Dave:

So it seems like you had the ability to read the future. And I keep talking about favorite authors. You're more than an author, kind of philosopher, but you're also an organic permaculture farmer like I am. But I look at guys like William Gibson, he actually rewrites his books. In fact, he'll be about to release a

science fiction, a cyberpunk book and go, oh, wait, I always base this on society. I have to go back and rewrite half my book because drones just got invented. And he's famous for missing deadlines because he is tweaking until the last possible second. Did you do that with *Courage Is Calling*? Did you go in there and ...

Ryan:

Yeah, a little bit. I don't know about you. You read the audiobooks on your books, right?

Dave:

Yeah, I do read my own audiobooks.

Ryan:

So I have found that that is a blessing and a curse because it's the last thing you do. But it's really like the first time that you've engaged with the book in that way. I don't know about you, but I don't sit in my office and just read my own writing aloud to myself. That would be really weird. So I am someone who is editing all the way up through the very end, making changes, usually probably within a little window of like 5% to 10%. It's nothing transformatively different, but I feel like you're really dialing it in as you go. But you have to be disciplined about it. Because you can never finish and never ship. So, it's this tension between like this could always be better and at some point, you have to fling it away from you and be like, I just don't want to touch this ever again.

Dave:

In a lot of spiritual traditions, at the beginning, there was the word and it's om or amen or whatever else. I feel like there's some kind of spiritual power in reading your own words when they're complete and putting it out there. It's like it instantiates it, at least in my mind. Maybe in reality, in a way that's different than if I have someone else read the book. It's one of reasons I do it. Do you have that same sense?

Ryan:

Yeah. And Everson talks about how he's saying this specifically when like, you have an idea and then you don't act on it and then you see someone else do it, he says, you feel an alienated majesty that you'd be like, I had that idea. And then you're watching it made real. I have a weird experience when I read my own books because you've been involved in the process, you've been in the muck of it day to day for so long, and then you get some ... You put it aside and then a month later, two months later, they're like, okay, you have to do the audiobook or you have to edit galley proofs or whatever.

You're reading it and you can get lost in it. You can be like, this is good. Where did this come from? And you realize that there's something in art about where you are accessing something, either from beyond or from a deep part of your consciousness that you don't ordinarily have access to. And that's why when you read the finished product, there's an alienation/surprise substantiation, as you said, where you're just like, wow, this exists outside of me and yet I know it came from me. And it's a very surreal, almost magical experience.

Dave:

It is. There's something about it. And so, it's helpful for me as a fellow author to know I'm not alone in both hating and appreciating the ability to read my book. Because it just takes a whole week and every

word you speak has to be done with your stomach moving and you put on your voice and it's work, right?

Ryan:

You're like a babbling idiot by the end of it. You realize that you are not as literate as you thought you were because you don't know how to pronounce any of these words. And yeah, it's a grueling process. But it's also, I think, really important as far as the relationship with the audience because every once in a while, I'll meet someone ... Not every once in a while, this happened two hours ago, someone is like, "I listened to all your books on audiobooks."

And I was doing the math, I was like, okay, 10 books, let's say, 7 hours of ... That's 70 hours that we have spent together, me talking directly into their brain like reading, you read in your voice. But when someone's listening to an audiobook, think about even with their headphones on, it's like you're speaking directly inside their skull. That's a very powerful thing. It's why I think podcasts are such a cool medium as well. You just have a profound relationship with the creator that you don't have in any other medium.

Dave:

You are correct. Even video, it isn't the same as just audio. There's a magic there. Well, let's get into the stuff you're teaching in *Courage Is Calling*, that there's basically fear, there's courage, and there's heroism. And you look at those separately. Can you tell me what's the difference between those?

Ryan:

Yeah. Before there is courage, there is fear. Because if there's not fear, there's no courage. The whole point is if it was guaranteed, if it was safe, if you weren't afraid of it, there would be no opportunity for courage. So one is one requires the other. So the first part of the book is really about this battle that we all face in different ways, in different forms, at different levels. But fear is a constant of the human experience. We're afraid of what other people think. We're afraid of losing our lives.

We're afraid of so many different things in whatever it is that we happen to be doing. So that's the first battle. And I tell the story of Florence Nightingale. She gets this call, she has this sense that I think a lot of people have that like, I'm meant to do something special, I'm not going to have my parents' life. She comes from these rich, indolent, spoiled parents in the British countryside in the middle of the 1800s. She was expected to do nothing. She was expected to go to dance parties, get married, keep a house, that's it.

And she has this sense that she's meant for more, but she can't muster up the courage to pursue that. She's afraid. She's afraid of what people might think. She's afraid of what her parents might think. She's afraid of it not working. She ignores this call. I think this is a thing we miss. If you look at the hero's journey, in early step in the hero's journey is the refusal of the call. We're like, I'm not ready, it's not for me, it's not going to work. So she refuses the call not for a little while, but for 16 years.

She just sits on this, until eventually she does get this sense that she's never going to be happy, she's never going to live a good life. She's never actually going to please these people that have imprisoned her by doing what they want. And she has to strike out on her own. And she ends up inventing essentially modern nursing in rebellion to this. But that fear is the first battle. And it's not until we get over that do we express that first bit of courage that we can begin to live a courageous, exciting, adventurous life.

Dave:

Based on what you've learned about that part of courage, there's a lot of people who are losing their minds right now. Maybe a little bit more on the fear side of things. What's your advice to reclaim courage if you're just feeling ... You watch the news all the time, you're feeling like it's the end of the world.

Ryan:

Yeah. I mean, look, these are scary, weird times. I mean, it's like you hear about the history that your grandparents lived through and it seems very interesting and fun. But it probably wasn't super fun at the time, right?

Dave:

World War II sucked, right?

Ryan:

Yeah. I mean, look, my grandfather lived through the depression. He wasn't aware how that would end in the middle of the depression. He's 15 years old, in the depths of the depression. He's not aware, one, that it's going to ... First off, he's going to have to go land a D-Day before this thing is over. But he's also just not aware that like, oh, this is a temporary thing. This is a thing that will actually put forth a century of American dominance. We don't know how the story is going to end.

So when we study history, these events seem much more clean and clear cut than they were at the time. They could have gone in any direction. And so, I think we should be empathetic to the fact that there's a lot of uncertainty and people are dealing with that. But I would also argue that people were afraid long before COVID, they were anxious, they were worried, they overstated risks to things. They were afraid of, really, not scary things. People are afraid of public speaking. I mean ...

Dave:

That's the number one fear in the US.

Ryan:

Yeah, public speaking is scary, but there's ... Even if the odds of COVID are somewhat overstated, you're definitely not going to die of public speaking. Half a million people don't die every year of speaking in front of crowds. That is the good news. So we've always had this tendency to be really scared of things that pose very little danger to us that if we couldn't master, would allow us to get closer to whatever it is that we wanted to do in life.

Dave:

Is getting over a fear a rational thing? I mean, Stoics typically are going to think their way. They'll take it from the realm of the emotion, into the realm of the logical, but emotions happened before thoughts. So I already feel afraid. I'm telling myself stories about why my fear is real. How do I really get to the bottom of that? I mean, it's a tough thing.

Ryan:

Well, the Stoics talked about this, they're like, look, no amount of philosophical training is going to make you not cold if I throw cold water at you. Or if I jump out from around a corner, you're going to be like, whoa, that was a surprise. These are hardwired biological reactions. But I think you talked about cold

water training yourself. It's like you can have that reaction, but then you also realize, if you don't act on it, if you push through, there's often something on the other side of it.

Or you realize that the more you expose yourself to it, the less scary it is each time and the less perhaps even that you feel that thing. So I think part of what the Stoics are talking about is training, but then also making a distinction. So there's a great Faulkner quote that I love, he says, "Be scared, you can't help that. Just don't be afraid." And so, this distinction ...

Dave:

Ooh, I love that.

Ryan:

... between being scared, which is that immediate, emotional, instinctive reaction and being afraid, which is a thing you carry forward, I think, is an easy way to think about it. And for an analogy, I've thought about this because I'm like, well, aren't they the same thing? Being angry and doing something out of anger are not the same thing. So if someone insults you, it's perfectly reasonable that that would have hurt you. And I don't think a Stoic just doesn't give a shit that someone just called out your greatest insecurity in front of other people, but how you choose to react to that, particularly in the cool light of the passage of time is the big thing.

Dave:

So well said. What happens, at least in my map of reality and there's this quarter second where the nervous system does stuff before you can notice, and you might get down to like 190, 190 milliseconds if you're a super well trained F1 driver and all that. And you have a little bit of a narrow window when you're young, but it actually extends as you get older, it takes you longer. So this is like the gap where you're going to feel scared, the way you described in that elegant quote from ... It was Emerson, was it?

Ryan:

Faulkner.

Dave:

Oh, from Faulkner. Okay, cool. That sounds like Faulkner. So what happens there is, okay, it did happen. And then if you allow your conscious brain to tell yourself that that's real, you'll make up a whole story to justify it. In your book about courage and in the Stoic philosophy, what happens in that little gap between the scare and the fear? When they're talking about fear, are they talking about scared plus the story about scared or are they talking about just the activity after you feel the feeling? Because it's a very big distinction for those of us who want to own our own reactions to both.

Ryan:

Sure. Yeah, Viktor Frankl talks about how between the stimulus and the response we choose our condition.

Dave:

There you go. Perfect.

Ryan:

And I think your point that there's a story is a really good way of thinking about it. Because the Stoics say events are objective, then we tell ourselves a story about them. And this story often determines what we're going to be able to do. So I talked about this instance with Pericles, the Athenian general in the book, so he is leading his men and there's an eclipse. So imagine 2500 years ago, you don't understand what an eclipse is. And suddenly, the entire world goes dark or the moon disappears or the sun disappears. That'd be fucking nuts.

Or more recently, we only understood what tornadoes were like 150 years ago. Just imagine you're just chilling, the weather changes, and then everything goes up in the air and falls back down. You're just like, what is that?

Dave:

Sure. Definitely.

Ryan:

Yes. And I think a lot of these explanations make sense when you're like, oh, they just didn't know. His men are thrown into chaos by this eclipse. And Pericles thinking about it really quickly, he goes, okay, it's dark, this is scary. He's like, walks up to one of his men and goes, "Okay, I flip your cloak over your head. And suddenly, it's dark. You can't see. Is that scary?" And the guy goes, "No." And he goes, "Okay, well, that's what happened here. It was light, now it's dark. Is the darkness itself scary?" "No." "So let's proceed."

The same thing with thunder, and he goes, okay, something is causing this noise in the sky. He's like, something's also causing the noise of these two rocks bouncing together. The noise isn't scary. And so, I think if we can take a moment and break down what we're afraid of, really think about it, you're like, okay, you're afraid of public speaking because people might heckle you. And you're like, wait, what do I care that much about some random drunk guy who is such a jerk that he screams out in the middle of somebody else talking? You're like, oh, I don't care about that person. So what they do no longer has that kind of hold over me. So I do think there's an ability to take this thing and decide, am I going to tell myself a negative story about it or a positive story about it?

Dave:

It's true. You can choose the story you tell yourself. And the perennial example that I like to use is someone cuts you off in traffic like, they did it because they don't respect me. Or they did it because I'm on the way to the hospital. You just don't know. Pick a story that just works better for you. Is that a Stoic perspective, though? I mean, did they tell you to pick the story?

Ryan:

Yeah, yeah, of course. I mean, look, I think, ideally, you get to a place where you don't need to think anything about it at all.

Dave:

Exactly.

Ryan:

There were three cars ahead of me. Now there's four cars or whatever it is. Ideally, you get to a place where you're just objective and indifferent either way. But I think the idea of ... I think it's Epictetus says

like, how do they acted wrongly if you don't know their reasons. And I think what you're doing there is coming up with a charitable reason instead of an uncharitable reason. And we begrudge the charitable reason less than the uncharitable reason. And I think one of the ways we can think about this also is like, look, when you cut people off, why do you do that?

It's unintentional, you're in a hurry, you're having a bad day. You have all these reasons that you excuse. So is it fair for you not to extend that same courtesy to this person and extending it or depriving it, what makes your day better? You're punished ... I think what's so good about the car examples is I think about this where you're cursing them or whatever. They're in their car and you're in their car. The only person experiencing this negativity is you. They don't even know that you hate them. So what's the point?

Dave:

Yeah, exactly. What's the point? And believing someone else's motive is usually part of a fear response, at least in my experience. If you call someone a liar, that means their motive and that they're intentionally being deceitful. You don't know that. All you know is that they're wrong. And if you say you're a purveyor of misinformation, that's fancy propaganda for a liar. You don't know if it's misinformation. They might just disagree with you. And using these judgmental pejorative terms seems like it's in violation of the four virtues of the ancient world because it's not any of them. So I'm like, let's get uncharged in our language. It's either true or it's not.

Ryan:

Yes. It's tricky, I think, when we get into like, should the person know better? Oh, they're not lying. They just believe their own bullshit. There is [inaudible 00:21:16].

Dave:

They're not lying, they're an idiot. Dave, that's different.

Ryan:

It's a little different. Again, if you're the perfect sage, you cannot get upset by these things. Day to day human being, it's difficult, especially I think ... Again, to go this idea of the immediate reaction versus the more well thought out action. So the person cuts you off in traffic as you're swerving your car to recover to narrowly avoid the accident, you're probably going to think, what a jerk, why did they do that? Now, if you're still holding on to this 30 minutes later or if you're following the person to wherever they're going to confront them about this, now we're talking about a whole other level of not just insanity, but rage and being consumed with a thing that you should have let go.

So I think, again, it's like, look, if you fall off a horse, it's good to be probably a little bit wary about getting immediately back on a horse. But if because you had a singular bad experience, you never do that thing again. 5 years later, 10 years later, you're still on this thing. Now we're really talking about where fear, the negative story has consumed you in your life.

Dave:

Yeah. Well said. I'm curious. In the Stoic teachings, there's courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom, four big things. Are you planning the next book is temperance, and then justice, and then wisdom? Is that how you're framing this out? Or you went to courage first, but they're just in this order, right?

Ryan:

Yeah. I'm about halfway through, maybe a little bit further on the temperance book, which I'm rendering more as self-discipline. Temperance is a ...

Dave:

It's a weird word.

Ryan:

First off, it's a weird word. It's not a particularly sexy word. And I think of what we need today, self-discipline is probably needed more than temperance. So yeah, I'm in the middle of a four series. Because I think this is really important. First off, none of the virtues are possible without the others. But also, none of them are worth very much without them. So courage, in pursuit of an unjust goal, is not so great. And justice, like a sense of what's right, without the courage to implement it is, of course, not much good for anyone. The virtues are all related to each other. And I'm doing this ... Yeah, what I'm calling the four virtue series.

Dave:

And this isn't just a Stoic belief. If you look at Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, pretty much any halfway decent philosophy has some similar words or maybe it's I am sorry, whatever that. But if you boil it all down, you're going to come up with these basic ideas that you should have wisdom about stuff and you should be fair and you shouldn't be over reactive and you should have bravery for a good cause. And anyone who argues with those, I'm like, what is wrong with you? Do people argue against these? Do people ever go, those aren't the right things?

Ryan:

I think one of the tricky, but also brilliant parts about the four virtues is they're unfalsifiable. It's like how can you ... There's almost no philosophical school that has ever said like, we're the school of cowardice. We're the school of in moderation. We're the school of injustice and the school of ignorance and stupidity. Obviously, we can have a lot of disagreement about what those four virtues look like in practice. And I think what I'm portraying in the series is probably the western ideals of those things.

But at the core, I think almost all philosophical schools and religions, and then to say nothing of like just bedrock, try to find me a civilization that did not worship courage as a valuable thing. I mean, it's evolutionarily valuable. So I think these things go to the very core of who we are as people.

Dave:

It does go to the core of who we are. And the list is, I think, almost unimpeachable. You could try and come at it, but you're not going to eventually win an argument about that. And to me, courage ought to come first because you will not develop wisdom if you don't have the courage to try stuff and fail at it sometimes. Because all of that takes courage. So if I had to order these, I think you've got the right order. Is that a Stoic order? Did they tell you how to be in this order? Because they're all interrelated, as you said.

Ryan:

They definitely get moved around depending on how the translator renders it or what philosophy you're looking at. But for the most part, this is the order that I've found them in. And this is typically how

Marcus Aurelius tends to put them through. He was my guide on a lot of these things. But I would say, yeah, people go, well, how do they all relate to each other? To me, you go to your point, it's not just courage and wisdom are related in the sense that you said, but also like, what is scarier than truth or ideas. You need courage to pursue.

When we say ignorance is bliss, that's because ignorance is everything you want it to be. Ignorance doesn't challenge you. Ignorance doesn't force you to change. Ignorance doesn't make you uncomfortable. But to pursue ideas, whether it's history or science, is inherently a scary pursuit because you're going to find things you don't like, whether it's about human beings or about our biology.

Dave:

We call that cognitive dissonance. And, man, people get really uncomfortable when something that they were told by their parents, or their church, or their society, or their social media, and all of a sudden, they face profound evidence that it's not true. You feel like you're going to die. And unfortunately, earlier in my life, one of my favorite hobbies was creating cognitive dissonance in people.

Ryan:

Which is ego death, right?

Dave:

Totally.

Ryan:

But who I was, was built around this fact. This is, I think, why we talk about cults. Nothing is scarier than a person having to come to terms with having been very wrong about something. Like if you bet your identity, if you bet your bank account, if you bet your career on a thing, this is why it's hard to admit that the invasion of Iraq was a mistake. This is why it's hard to have to tell an updated newer version of history because who we are was predicated on certain assumptions. And it feels like you're admitting that nothing is stable now.

Dave:

I thought you were talking about Fauci for a minute there.

Ryan:

Well, look, I think all scientists have to cultivate the ability to admit they were wrong. And not all of them can do it.

Dave:

And I said that mostly to be funny. We'll get into that stuff later. But for listeners, guys, I come from a family of scientists for many generations. And, man, once you're wedded to a theory and you studied it and you've done four experiments that have been published in papers that say that it's real, and then some young upstart jerk spreading misinformation comes up and says, but, and has that one little thing, man, it is like an ego death. Prime example. I've had a guy on the show from the Resonance Academy.

He's a professional ski instructor who came up with a model that's 4% more predictive than the standard model. And the low level scientists had come and speak at CERN. And the high level bureaucrat scientist like, how dare thou, you're not one of ... And they literally wouldn't let him speak, even though

his math is better. And so, this is endemic in just hard science from universities. But then when you get it with industrial funding, that's also there where there's a financial motive. It takes stupid amounts of courage to stand up and say, this is the reality that I see. How do we encourage scientists to have courage? Did you come up with a special recipe for that? Because we need more scientific courage right now.

Ryan:

Well, so just admitting that something that you have professional or personal reasons to have an affinity for, that's tough enough. As Upton Sinclair said, "It's very hard to get a person to understand something that their salary depends on them not understanding." So if you're an expert, you gave a famous TED talk about X, and then that study is not replicated. And now you have to disavow your millions of your TED Talk. That's a hard thing to do. But I think about something like, and I'm forgetting the guy's name. When they start to understand that illness is caused by germs and that doctors not washing their hands ...

Dave:

Was it Pasteur?

Ryan:

No. But some French guy, I'm sure.

Dave:

Yeah. The epidemiologist guy in Paris mapping ... I know the story. Okay, yup.

Ryan:

Yeah. Okay. So imagine you have this new theory, which itself is disruptive and provocative and already going to have trouble taking hold, but your theory is also inherently an indictment of a generation of doctors. So you're not saying, hey, guys, we thought the moon orbited, or sorry, the sun orbited the Earth. Actually, the Earth orbits the sun. It's like no skin off my back. But you're saying, hey, every time you went into the operating room or you delivered a baby, you were personally infecting or making less safe the person you thought you identified with helping.

That's even harder to do. It's like, if it's hard to get someone to understand something, imagine the courage to admit culpability or mistakes. Because not only is this challenging your identity, there's potentially legal liability, there's the issue of your conscience, et cetera. So I think when we think about getting people to change, we have to understand just the real process that is preventing them from doing that. It's not as simple as, well, here's evidence, accept this evidence.

You're forcing the ego death, but you're also forcing them to reckon with a lifetime of decisions made confidently around that information. Not everyone can do that. I mean, I try to think about all the things that I used to believe that were wrong. And I go, oh, okay, I was a real asshole about some of those things. I do hope part of the outcome should just be some intellectual humility as well.

Dave:

I guess humility is one of the future virtues here. I want to go deeper on courage with you. There are some other words that are part of the definition here or the kind of a list of attributes. Can you describe courage and what it looks like, what it feels like, how you would write about it?

Ryan:

Well, I was trying to think because there's typically described as being two types of courage, physical courage and moral courage. One is a soldier one is a scientist. One is running into a burning building, the other is putting out some transgressive piece of art or a cultural commentary. But what do those things have in common? Why is one also considered courage if it's not risking one? Basically, I think it's like, at the core of courage is putting your ass on the line. So you're either putting your money on the line or you're putting your life on the line.

You're putting your reputation on the line. You're putting your body on the line. It's got to be something. Because if there's not, again, if there's no risk, if it's a certainty, it's not that it's not important, we're just not talking about courage. But by definition, you have to be braving something that ordinarily people or people in your position would not be expected to do. If I told you, hey, 100% guarantee, Bulletproof Coffee is going to be successful, it's going to get this massive cultural adoption, you'd be like, oh, of course, I'll do it. I don't have to think twice about it. But the fact that it was a risk, not only did you not know, but lots of people told you very confidently that it [inaudible 00:34:16] more.

Dave:

It took a lot of guts.

Ryan:

That's where courage comes in. And then I say in the book, obviously, there's a level beyond that. There's a difference between courageously starting a new business and courageously leaving a successful business to, I don't know, be a social worker in the inner city. There's a level of heroism above courage where you're putting your ass on the line less for your own benefit, where you're really in no position to reap the rewards of that courage. I think that's an important distinction or higher transcendent level of courage that we often forget.

Dave:

There's risking your meat, your life, and then there's risking your reputation, are two different aspects of courage?

Ryan:

Yeah, yeah. And it's not always as simple as that, because it could be a combination of those two things. You think about a politician today speaking up against, I don't know, this bill or that bill or this trend or that trend. They're risking being reelected or not, which is a scary thing to do. Now you go back ...

Dave:

That's why they always lie no matter what party they're in.

Ryan:

Right, of course. But you go back 2000 years, the same senator in Rome is also worried about being executed by the emperor or something. There's a combination of the two.

Dave:

We should bring that back.

Ryan:

Well, people are mad about cancel culture and I'm like, this has existed for a long time. They called it exile.

Dave:

Exactly.

Ryan:

And we've got a long glorious tradition of driving people away that upset us.

Dave:

That we do indeed. What has required the most courage for you in the last few months?

Ryan:

I don't know. I don't know. I try to think about these books as I'm trying to write them. Obviously, I used my own experiences and I think about my own life, but I try to think about them as a writer, as an artist. I'm trying not to be a character in the books so much. But I mean, just a real simple easy one is I opened a bookstore here in the middle of the pandemic, which was a big swing for me. Certainly, it was a big swing not just financially, but the upside was also not particularly high.

It was a thing I thought would matter and both be fun, but also have a positive contribution to society. That was small business risky when I started thinking about it in December of 2019. And then became a whole other level of risky and uncertain when a pandemic comes and as you know, as all these massive implications for retail and supply chains and logistics and all that. That has been the battle of my last year or so.

Dave:

We both have been through something like that. I opened, here in Victoria, a farm to table upgrade cafe, where I'm growing the meat and most of the vegetables and serving ... I opened a restaurant in the middle of the pandemic. And you don't make money at restaurants or bookstores, to be honest. But you love books and you love writing. And I think it makes you happy, right?

Ryan:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And it was something that once I decided to do it, not doing it because it was scary or hard seems like bad reasons. Do you know what I mean? It's like if you have the means, if you have the idea, if you think it could work, to not do it because other people are like, well, what about this, this, and this? Cowardly is too strong a word, but it just seemed not the recipe for an interesting life.

Dave:

At the end of the day, when you die, either you have an interesting life or you didn't, but whether you had a Ferrari or not probably. Less important at least [inaudible 00:38:21] we are.

Ryan:

Yes, for sure.

Dave:

Okay. Talk to me about bravery versus sacrifice. And there's so many aspects to courage as a big bucket, and you go into those in the book. It's actually very fascinating to not just think about it, but to say, well, here's what we've learned throughout the history for it, which is why I like your work a lot. Because you study it, you don't just think about it.

Ryan:

Well, so one example I have in the book is, and I'll say this as someone who is generally a huge Netflix and Reed Hastings fan, but you think about the middle days of Netflix. So starting a business is scary. Then you're successful. He start this multibillion dollar business distributing DVDs by mail. It's very successful. But he gets this sense that the future is going to be digital, and Reed Hastings bets everything on transitioning from physical to digital. He essentially burns the boats behind him, walks away from one business to transcend, transform the business into another.

That's courage. And I think that needs to be lauded and celebrated as an example of capitalistic courage, let's say. Now, flash forward, several years later, Netflix is international behemoth, one of the most powerful and successful companies in the world. And Netflix is distributing the show with Hasan Minhaj, who criticizes rightfully Saudi Arabia's murderous dismemberment of a dissident journalist. He talks about this in this episode. It's a great episode, brave stand for him to take as an individual.

But suddenly, Netflix is under pressure from its allies and investors in the Middle East who are like, you got to pull this episode, this isn't what we signed up for. We don't like this. And Reed Hastings does pull it. And he said something like, we're in the entertainment business, not in the truth to power business. I contrast those two moments. They both call for courage, in one, he does it, in the other, he doesn't. But the costs of that latter one are not so much financial as they are spiritual and ethical. And look, I'm sure he has his reasons.

But I think zooming out at the end of his life, I think he's going to think, why the hell did I become worth hundreds of billions of dollars, run one of the most powerful companies in the world, to not be able to say or to stand behind someone who says, hey, chopping up journalists into little pieces is not cool with me. And so, it's often interesting how we can have lots of courage in one aspect of our lives or in one big moment and then in another moment, that same courage can falter. So when we think about courage, it's not just like, hey, is this going to benefit me or not? But I also wanted people to think about like, do you have courage when it really counts when there's principal on the line and when you're the only one in a position to do something?

Dave:

How do you teach that? How do I get my kids to be able to be that person, if they so choose?

Ryan:

I mean, I think a big way to do it is by celebrating and making them feel a kinship to the people who did do that. And I don't think shame is powerful, but I think also talking about moments where people fell short. Winston Churchill is a flawed person who did many shameful things. And we should talk about those shameful things and learn lessons from them, but we should also be like, look, when the world fell to pieces, one guy was like, no, I'm going to do something about this. One guy put England on his back and said, "We're going to fight on. I think we can do this." And those are ...

Dave:

Right. Guy was a star.

Ryan:

Yeah, those need to be our heroes. And these need to be a diverse cast of heroes. And that's something I think about in my books. It's why I very deliberately was like, I want to make sure I open this book, not with a man and not with some sort of military courage. And so, the reason I opened the book with Florence Nightingale, is because, one, I want it to be identifiable to all different types of people. But, two, I want people to understand that it doesn't matter who you are or what you do, there's an opportunity for you to be one of those kinds of people.

Dave:

Yeah, there's always Rosa Parks and that kind of courage is actually a lot more important. I'm diverging a little bit here, but I'll get back to it. Seems like almost all the movies I can find on Netflix now, since we're talking about Netflix, it's just like a five-foot tall woman wearing body armor with guns shooting the crap out of everyone over and over and over. I'm like, it's just not entertaining, it's not interesting, and it's not courage at all. It's just rote violence. I'd rather see a movie about a man or a woman, whoever it is, doing something that matters other than just shooting.

Ryan:

I got an email from someone not long ago, they've read the book or they saw an article about the book and they were like, "How could you put Rosa Parks in this book as an example of courage?" She said, "She was a civil rights activist before." She was like, "She wasn't just some random lady sitting on the bus who decided not to do it. It was planned." And I was like, "How do you think that that makes it different?"

Dave:

Not at all.

Ryan:

I was like, how easy do you think it was to be a civil rights activist in the 1950s and 1960s in Alabama as a [inaudible 00:44:35]?

Ryan:

And the fact that it was planned makes it more ... I mean, she willingly did this. She said, "Somebody needs to do something about this, and it's going to be me." I think your point is a good one, which is that it's almost like we overstate physical courage and we understate the moral courage. Although, again, I would argue, Rosa Parks is such a great example of physical and moral courage. They could have beat her. They could have killed her. They could have killed people who are close to her. She said, "I don't care if you throw me in jail. I'm taking a stand on this thing. And then I'm going to fight the case until we bring about change." And that's what courage is.

Dave:

They could have also taken away her job, told her she wasn't allowed to enter certain kinds of establishments unless she told the party line. They could have prevented her from traveling unless she did whatever they said.

Ryan:

Of course.

Dave:

They could have mandated almost anything. What's your take on mandates in terms of courage?

Ryan:

Mandates in what form like laws jeopardy or in ...

Dave:

Do it or we'll shoot you. It doesn't matter what it is, really.

Ryan:

Yeah. I mean, look, obviously, civil society is inherently based on mandates. The whole form of government that we have, specifically, is the idea that society collectively entrust a government, which is made up by us to enforce certain laws or norms that are done [inaudible 00:46:23].

Dave:

Like segregation and stuff like that, right?

Ryan:

Yeah. Look, it's not always done well, and that is the challenge.

Dave:

[inaudible 00:46:29]

Ryan:

But look, I think it's tricky. I imagine what you're specifically getting at, is the mandates that we're now looking at with COVID, whether it's masks or vaccines.

Dave:

I'm more worried about biological autonomy. It's not a specific matter of vaccines. It's one of those things where do we have control over what we put into our own bodies, because I'm deeply concerned that the next one is, oh, you'll be taking prophylactic antibiotics, antidepressants. And it's a very slippery slope. Oh, and you can only eat six grams of red meat a day that's coming from the UN. No, I'm not signing any paperwork. And I will literally die on this battlefield over whether I have the right to what goes in my body. I might actually choose to get vaccinated.

That's my choice. But, man, you tell me that you're going to shut my family my life down? I think there's about 100 million Americans with guns who are not going to take that. And I think that's a fundamental human right. And to me, it's courage and to all of those other people here. It's courage. Because, yes, there's societal arguments on both sides, but the arguments might be wrong, going back to the science thing. I'm looking at that as courage.

Ryan:

It's tricky. There's a couple things. I want to make a courage point, but I think specifically about these. It's both an existential and a practical question of, where does one person's freedom begin to impede on another person's freedom? I think about a family friend who recently died of COVID, who had been vaccinated, but was currently undergoing chemotherapy, so very immunosuppressed. He dies of COVID. And I won't say, but I happen to know who infected him and it was an unvaccinated person. And I think about where that guy's freedom went.

And so, it's a tension between generally a living and letting live and where the consequences of those decisions begin to bleed over into other people's lives. And we should talk about that. But what I would say that is important as far as courage goes, because this is where the virtues interrelate with each other. Courage in the abstract is meaningless. There's a great Lord Byron quote that I have in the book where he says, "Tis the cause makes all that hallows or degrades courage in its fall."

So the person who stands alone, the person who says, I'm willing to die over this, the person who says like, over my dead body, whatever it is, this matters. There's courage in that. The person who says, I don't care if you fire me, I'm not going to do what you say. But were there people who have done that over good causes all the time? Of course. And there's people who are doing it over bad causes. There was a really poignant example of this to me to also bring another politically charged issue into this.

But I remember during the George Floyd protests in Buffalo, New York, there was an old man. You can watch videos of it. It's really sickening. This old man walks up to these police officers to say something, I think he's trying to hand them something. And this police officer shoves the guy to the ground. And you can hear the thud of his head when he hits the ground. So ...

Dave:

I remember that was shocking.

Ryan:

It was one of the worst things I've ever seen on video. And so, the police officer was immediately suspended. But then, all the members of this guy's unit resigned in protest. But the pivotal thing is, are they resigning in protest of what he did? Or are they resigning in protest over his treatment of being held accountable for what he did? And in fact, it was the latter. The courage to quit your job in protection of a comrade is courage. But if you are doing it to protect a comrade who should be held accountable, it's not.

Where I come back to on the COVID stuff is, I respect in the abstract the courage to say, my body, my choice, you're not going to make me do this, I'd rather die. But then I think also what the protest is potentially, not in all people, but potentially, is the freedom to be the vector of a deadly virus that's killed hundreds of thousands of people. And that is ultimately the tricky thing on this. I was going to say, I'd love for there to be no mandates, but to me, the but is just rhetorical. I don't know what the solution is.

If people aren't doing the right thing, to me, the purpose of government is to solve collective action problems. And a pandemic, a public health thing, depression, a war, these are collective action problems that, individually, it's very hard to just get everyone voluntarily to do the right thing. And so, we have to come up with solutions. Is this the right solution? I don't know.

Dave:

It concerns me because at least where I live, right now, in Canada, there is no exemption. And as a biohacker guy that has only written a few books about medical stuff, there are actually people, including one of my family members who actually have very, very valid medical reasons for this. I have a family member who almost died of a series of vaccines for doctors without borders and was actually out of work for a year. So any doctor would say and has said, it's probably a good idea for you to be one of those people who doesn't get it.

However, the way they're setting up the mandates, it doesn't matter if the vaccine is much higher risk for you than average, you will be treated like one of our pieces of property. That's why mandates are evil. That's why they're always must be, you know what, unless it's the wrong thing to do for you, at which point it becomes a strong recommendation and not a mandate. The government doesn't have this power over our bodies. And I won't hand that over any more than I'll hand over my right to free speech, because I already handed that over to the algorithms that govern our life now, accidentally.

Ryan:

Well, I think in the US, at least so far with the mandates, they have been largely either employment based or profession based or activity based, which I actually like, in the sense of it's not the government saying they've done with many vaccines in the past like, hey, by the way, we gave your kid a polio vaccine at school today, hope it all works out. I prefer the idea of like, sure, if you don't want to get it, that's great, but then you can't participate in certain things that other people who have taken the hit, so to speak, now have the entitlement to go do.

Dave:

It's interesting that people who have natural immunity, I've had COVID, so I have 13 times more immunity than vaccinated person according to some studies, or at least as much. That doesn't count. And that's another part of this that is disturbing to me. And so, I know that you're on an early and vocal advocate of getting vaccinated. And I'm totally okay with that. I support our ability to make that decision and I can see the reasons for doing it.

I also can see reasons that forcing it on people without any emergency brake and without a control group might not serve society over the course of the next 10 or 20 or 100 years, and that's why I'm objecting to mandates, not objecting to your right and even the viability of saying, okay, I'm going to get vaccinated for these reasons. But you already got sick. Pft! Like, okay, great, prove immunity or breathe in a thing and prove you don't have it. By the way, I'm an advisor, becoming an advisor to a company. They will have a 15-second breath test for COVID.

So you want to go to a concert? Breathe in this tube and everyone's happy and freedom is there. I think that's a good answer. But I'm a little worried when you go to courage because there's courage to take this risk, whatever it is, we don't know what the risk of a vaccine is because the company is lying. We know that. But it's probably not going to kill you because most people who got vaccinated most people didn't die. Yet, 5G control and magnetizes Bill Gates, whatever. None of that. Well, you took some courage like, okay.

And you took courage when you go down your platforms like, guys, you're an idiot if you don't do it. And I've seen you call people something like that, and I respect you greatly for doing that. You took a stand and you took a risk for your business. You might have alienated some Stoics. You have balls and you believe what you're doing, you stand for it, and like, you go, brother, seriously. We did that. But where do we end up from a Stoic perspective where I have courage, the man on the other side of the

battlefield also has courage. One of you is Athens, one of you is Sparta. Where does courage end up when we have two courageous people facing each other who don't agree?

Ryan:

There's a great line in Lincoln's second inaugural address where he basically goes, this has been a horrible civil war that we've just engaged in. And it was like, on both sides of the battle, we evoked God to bless our cause and thought that our cause was just. And he said, now, look, one side thought that it was their right to steal the labor from a whole race of people and exploit and kill and own them. And he says, but let us not judge lest we be judged.

Which I think he is talking about the somewhat intractable situations that we find ourselves in, where we have these in unreconcilable differences of opinion that are really tough, they're really tough. I think anyone that thinks the government has done a spectacular job responding to COVID is out of their minds, and anyone that trust the government implicitly and explicitly has no understanding of history. So I get where you're coming from.

I think where I come down on this is like, this is an inelegant solution to a difficult changing real world problem if I was in charge, but I do it slightly differently. Is there probably a way to tackle it where it's vaccines, plus testing, plus different kinds of medication, and people were choosing them? Yes. But I think the really tricky part about it is like, where I come down ... This is what I'm saying earlier, I would love for this not have to be mandated because I would love everyone to be on the same page.

Not even as far as what the best way to treat it is, but we're not on the same page, as far as reality goes with a significant chunk of society. If you told me that the people who said, hey, I'm worried about the vaccine for the following reasons, we're also perfectly overlapped with people who took COVID very seriously. I'd be like, okay, we're all adults, we can work out a solution. But I think that the tricky part about COVID is that the people who are the least resistant to vaccines, to masks, and other mitigation measures are also the people most in denial about whether it exists at all.

And so, we're in this tricky business where the vast majority of people are on the same page, are doing what they can, are not part of the problem, and then we're all at the mercy of the people who are the problem. So I just think about, it's like, where's my kids freedom? Because they don't get to choose whether they're vaccinated or not. They have to either not do things that would be part of a normal childhood or run the risks of COVID, which are relatively low, but the long term consequences are unknown. Where's their freedom? So society, the modern world is a tradeoff of these things.

Dave:

It is one of those, like you said, intractable situations there. And I've talked with medical ethics experts, people who taught medical ethics, and they're saying, it's not ethical to require one person to take a treatment to protect another person. It flies in the face of everything we know about it. But to recommend it and say it's an act of kindness, it's an act of courage, it's an act of bravery, I can support that. I also know that there are probably some kids out there where their doctor is like, you know, they have a weird gene and the risk for them is five times higher than everyone else for this.

And it's okay to be like, you know what, people with this snip might not handle aspirin very well, so they shouldn't take aspirin. And to build a world where we ignore that, I'm really concerned about. And so, I want to create [inaudible 00:59:28]. You know what, most people don't do it and we create protection and maybe we measure antibodies and all that. And there can be some good things that come out of it. And what I'm hoping is that we have people who have that fear response. And we're getting amplified fear from media, right?

And then have the courage to say, you know what, I'm going to do everything I can to protect myself and others around me, I'm going to lose weight. I'm going to take my vitamin D. I'm going to get vaccinated if I and my doctor and my care providers believe that it isn't a higher risk for me than it is benefit. Because it's different for different people. And if you're 80 and overweight and have five conditions, you should probably get like triple vaccines just in case because you're ... I don't know, you're maybe not in a very good position there. So it's like, it has to be tuned. And it's that treatment of the seven billion people we have. We're all the same. It's hard for me.

Ryan:

I mentioned my grandfather earlier. So I think he landed at D-Day plus three. So I think about like, what must have been going through his mind? And so, they were like, hey, you have to do this. You don't have a choice. You very likely could or will die. You may or may not be around to collect payment for the services rendered. You live in America, so it's very unlikely that the consequences of not doing this will be borne by you. And yet, he not only went, but it was just a pivotal moment of his life in world history.

And very few people, I think, looking back on it, go, that draft was unethical, we shouldn't have done that. I guess I would push back on the idea that we don't ... It's not right to mandate that someone do something at their expense for the benefit of another. I mean, to me, at least as far as stoicism goes, but also my conception of what America is, to me, that's the whole part of it. To me, that's not just what courage is, but what heroism is. And I did this piece for the economist recently where I was talking about this idea that Viktor Frankl, who I mentioned earlier, about a corresponding statue to the Statue of Liberty. So he said, on the East Coast, we have the Statue of Liberty, and on the west coast, he said, we should have a statue of responsibility.

Dave:

That was the best article then. I love that.

Ryan:

Thank you. To me, part of this comes down to responsibility. And again, like I said, I would love for there not to have to be ... It undermines responsibility if you're forced to do it legally. But I would love to live in a world where responsible people did the responsible thing because they saw it as part of their values. And to see an area where we agree, I would say also, taking good care of yourself, being in shape, et cetera. These are also parts of contributing to the common good that I think, as a society, we've done a bad job talking about and creating a culture around. Because if you are not taking care of yourself, ultimately, somebody else ends up carrying that weight.

Dave:

It's true. And even in a draft, if you had an injury in your leg or something is wrong with you, they would kick you out of the draft and say you don't get to go fight or they give you a desk job, right?

Ryan:

Sure, sure.

Dave:

Something would happen there. And so, I mean, you and I aren't going to solve this major intractable thing, but I appreciate the ability to have a curious open-minded discussion about it without all the

rancor that's happening in society right now, all the judging and all. Because I really respect the way you think about things. And it's cool to be able to hear what you think about this.

Ryan:

Well, the tragedy of COVID is that face-to-face is the best way to talk about all these things. And that is the one thing we have been less able to do. It's like, if you were to take something like a pandemic, this goes more to the virtue of discipline, but take something as complex as a pandemic or the ethics of vaccinations or whatever and you're like, what's the best medium for society to hash this out? I don't think anyone would say 240 characters on your phone.

Dave:

Yeah. That might be a little limiting. I'm with you there. Well, you're one of the few remaining long form journalists, as well as authors. And there's actually a lot more books, but there's fewer really heavy books like ... Heavy is the wrong word, but just deeply researched and written books, the way you do it in your piece, and that was The Atlantic, right?

Ryan:

The Economist.

Dave:

The Economist, sorry. But your piece there, there aren't a lot of 3000-word pieces left, even though that's how we used to think and learn. So you're doing that. I want to know, as we wrap this up, you've written *Courage Is Calling*, what do you hope readers are going to take away most? What's the change in the world that's going to happen from this book?

Ryan:

I know for me, writing it and living with these characters over the last year-and-a-half or so, it's really encouraged me as far as stepping up, saying what I think, not holding back, and doing what I know, but that voice in your head is like, well, what about this? I think we would do better as a society if we ... I had Alexander Vindman on my podcast recently. He was the whistleblower in the second Trump impeachment. And again, people are probably already mad hearing that.

But he had this great line, he said what he learned as an expert on Russia, he's a 25-year expert on Soviet-American relations. He said, "The key is do not self-deter." The idea is like, the Russians would do something aggressive, and then the US would be like, well, we don't want to do anything because what about this, this, or this, or this, or that. We would talk ourselves out of doing what we knew to be right because of this boogeyman of the opponent or the boogeyman of how it would be perceived in the media, instead of just like, this is obviously the moral correct, courageous thing to do, let us do it.

So this idea of self-deterrence, I think, goes to the point in the book about fear. We often self-deter because don't want to piss off followers, don't want the hassle, don't want to lose money, et cetera.

Dave:

Yeah. We have both recently take some risks by just having a stand. I think a few of your followers got really pissed off and probably laughing. You probably gained a bunch of others, right?

Ryan:

Yeah. I mean, I think there's definitely parts where I've pissed some people off, for sure. But I think, often, you're afraid of pissing people off and then what you failed to anticipate is, as you said, the people who send you really nice notes were like, hey, thank you so much for doing this. I haven't seen other people do it. I think it's a wash at the end of the day.

Dave:

It is a wash and I've noticed the same thing. You know what, I'm like, look, I stand for your right to work with your doctor and say, I'm going to decide what goes into me even though ... If there's a valid reason, I won't. But there's some people really said mean things about me. And I lost a lot of sleep over the mean things they said about me. I did not lose sleep over that. Did you?

Ryan:

No, not really.

Dave:

[inaudible 01:07:18] not all either. That's what courage is. I'm going to do what's right. Sorry. I saw you nodding. I'm like, you did not really. You got me there. Now, I know that the Upgrade Collective has some questions here. What do you have to say, Bonnie?

Bonnie:

Hi, Ryan. Thanks for being a part of this. It's very lively. Awesome.

Ryan:

Yeah, thanks for having me.

Bonnie:

When you mentioned about the canceled culture, and this has been going on for a long time, what are those handful of things that have been around since humans have been around? Because to me, it gives a comfort, like we've been here before kind of a take heart. Is there five, four, three things like that?

Ryan:

I mean, I would say almost everything that we're experiencing today has some historical antecedent in. And the reason is that people are people. Just as an example, I was driving across the country earlier this month and I was in Tombstone, Arizona, the site of the famous battle of the O.K. Corral. I found it to be very funny that there were signs all over town for the different bars and saloons that still exist there that say, no guns allowed inside these establishments. Because that was literally what the Battle of the O.K. Corral was about.

It was whether you can openly carry guns in town. So 150 odd years have passed and this tiny town in the middle of the desert in Arizona, is still litigating this issue that you think would have been put to bed around the time of cowboys and Indians. And so, one way to look at that is depressing, that we never solve anything and we never make progress and we're stuck with these intractable issues. The other way to look at it is that history is the same thing happening over and over and over again, that people are people, and we're just along for the ride. I know that doesn't quite answer your question, but it is one example I was thinking about recently.

Bonnie:

Great. Thanks so much.

Dave:

Thanks, Ryan. Looks like Jim and Joanne, probably Joanne has a question for you.

Joanne:

Ryan, I'm wondering if David Hawkins is a philosopher you followed. I appreciate that Hawkins applauds warriors on opposing sides of a battle. It would seem to me, in your four categories, that would be because of both the courage and discipline that these brave warriors are following.

Ryan:

Yeah, yeah. I think that's a good way to think about it. Obviously, there is courage on both sides or it wouldn't be much of a battle, so to speak. I guess the question is like, how far do you take it? There were lots of great brave generals on the side of the Confederacy or in Japan or Germany. I think this is why I made this point that ultimately, the cause does distinguish the conduct in some way. I do take pains, for instance, when I see a member of a political party that perhaps I disagree with a lot. When they take an unpopular stand within their own party, I always liked that.

I always think it's worth calling out. Because if you don't, it's less likely that it will continue to happen in the future. But I do think there is, inevitably, some judgment that has to be made about the righteousness of the cause. We have to do this with humility and the perspective of history. But I do think, ultimately, you're judged by the fruits.

Dave:

Thanks for the question, Joanne. And that brings up something that, Ryan, I want to share a little story with you and get your Stoic take on it. We talked about cognitive dissonance earlier. And I was raised in a mostly fallen Catholic atheist kind of house. And I went to college. And I found that I could take religious studies courses and it was lot easier to get an A in that than it was in computer science, which was my topic. So I was padding my GPA with religious science courses. And it's a good course called Religion and Violence. And it was taught by rabbinical scholar.

And we're studying Jim Jones. We're studying Hezbollah, all these religion turned very, very violent. And he said, "What do all of these people have in common?" And I said, "They're all idiots because they can't think." And he laughed, and he said, "Actually, that's a common answer, but that's not true. What they all have is they have different assumptions about reality than you. And all of their behavior is logical. If you believe that you will go to heaven if you do this, and that is your reality, then they aren't illogical. They're rational actors with different assumptions."

And it was a big cognitive dissonance. So how much of courage is seeing reality versus taking action?

Ryan:

Well, this is the tricky thing about, say, an issue like abortion, which you don't have to wade into, but I think if you want to talk about respecting both sides. If you don't think that an unviable fetus is worth protecting, then a woman shouldn't be forced to be pregnant against her will, up until that point. If you do think that it is life, it is sacred life, then that immediately raises the stakes to an incredible level. And you can see why some people are very adamant about it.

But this is where also, I think, the courage to look at both what you believe, why you believe it, the intellectual history of that belief is also really important. So you take something like abortion, you go, yes, the right in America takes abortion very, very seriously. And they clearly sincerely believe that, but how long have they believe that? When did that become a deeply held belief in that ideological group? Oh, it's actually much more recent than you think. Actually, it has this issue or it has this impetus or that impetus, which is suddenly not so noble.

And then you go, oh, so are you correct? I guess, you talked about the difference between misinformation and lying earlier. Someone might be very sincere in what they believe and committed to that with the sincerity, but if they don't have the courage to question themselves, to have the intellectual humility to go, why do I believe this is a correct et cetera, there's also a certain amount of cowardice in that. And I think when we look at a lot of these issues, it tends to be that the belief wasn't sui generis, it wasn't individually discovered.

It was something they inherited from their parents, from talk radio, from political talking point. And you need to have the courage to be able to question that belief. And so, I guess, to make this really practical, wherever you happen to be politically, if you are in perfect lockstep with all of the beliefs of that group, chances are, you don't actually agree with any of it. You've just assumed an identity versus someone who like, I believe these things and the Republican Party, I believe these things in the Democratic Party. And then here in the middle, I have a bunch of beliefs that they both find abhorrent. That's probably a sign of at least some intellectual courage or independence.

Dave:

And we've one more question for you, Ryan, from Ski, one of our Upgrade Collective members. By the way, guys, ourupgradecollective.com, you get to be in the live studio audience, weekly calls with me and my team of coaches, thousands of questions answered, ourupgradecollective.com. Ski, what do you have to ask?

Ski:

Thanks. Thanks for taking my question. In this day and age, I mean, your topic could be seen as a bit erudite. It is leaning toward higher meanings and a bigger message. So you have a background in media, you understand public relations and how media works. So I guess, in an era, when we've got eight-second attention spans and we're trying to break through amidst all this noise, how are you getting your message out there where it might be needed most?

Ryan:

That's a great question. So I think a couple things. One, always knowing who you're trying to reach. If you're trying to reach everyone, you're probably not going to be successful. So, as an author of books, I understand that books are not for everyone, but that there is a specific market who reads books, and that's who I write for. And I try to make them as accessible to those people and practical to those people as possible. But I understand that a book is not the same as a YouTube video or an Instagram post or a TikTok. Now I'm also on all those other mediums.

So I try to take the ideas that I spend a lot of time and length on as a writer. I also have a team that helps me break those things down into 30-second clips and 15-second clips and 10-minute videos and 20-minute videos, and so on and so forth. So I think one of the things you ... It's like, what do you have to say? What's the best medium for that? And then, once you've had traction there, how do you go

out and reach people on all the other mediums that they spend time on to bring them into those ideas? And if you're not doing that, you're probably not reaching as many people as you can.

Dave:

Thank you, Ski. That was a great question. And, Ryan, I want to say thank you for being on the show, and thank you for just writing a whole bunch of worthy books. There's more books than any of us could ever read in our lives. Just that if you read ... I mean, you run a bookstore now.

Ryan:

Yes.

Dave:

You can't read everything in the store even if you want to. And you've written a series of books. I've never seen one of your books that isn't worth the time it takes to read, and it's hard to do that.

Ryan:

That's very kind.

Dave:

That's true, honest praise. No kissing ass there. So just thanks for putting the time and the dedication and effort into it. And your website, ryanholiday.net, *Courage Is Calling*, and that's the name of your book. Your timing couldn't have been better. It was arranged that way for a reason. And I want to ask everyone listening here, read the book and apply courage. And the No. 1 place I want you to apply your courage is apply your courage to be kind towards people who disagree with you. You might have noticed that Ryan and I don't see everything eye to eye. I have great respect for the guy. And it's okay that we disagree. And if we can do that as big, powerful author people, then you can do that too. Alright? [inaudible 01:19:29] kindness.

Ryan:

Well said, and I needed that reminder myself. So I appreciate it.

Dave:

You got it, my friend. Thank you, again, truly for your work. And for everyone, Upgrade Collective. Everyone listening to this stuff, seriously, kindness, this only happens when you're courageous, and it's when you don't punch the guy back. And we can all do that. And thank you for listening. And thank you for reading Ryan's book. You need to do this. See you all later.