



### If I were the Queen of the Forest...

By Tina Ely

If I were a character from the Wizard of Oz, I would be the cowardly lion. The lion, supposed king of the forest, was so afraid even his own tail would scare him. He hid from danger, cried when confronted, and shook with fear at the mere sound of the wizard. But he also dreamed of what he would be like if he wasn't so afraid, what he would be like if he was the King of the Forest. I can relate to that. Which character would you be?

I'm glad to say that I have been on a quest to find courage, so I will not stay a cowardly lioness. That's the good news, and the hope, of following Christ. He does not leave us where we are - He gently and lovingly walks us through our situation, past it, and eventually into a new, deeper level. This cycle repeats itself throughout our whole life as we journey with Christ. There are always places to come out of, always areas of our lives that need transformation and changing. Sometimes it's big and radical. Sometimes it's minor, but it's always important.

Much happens in our life that takes our confidence, knocks us down, and reminds us of our past failures.

I had a series of events that took my confidence - I was knocked flat. When I tried to get up, move ahead, those failures would come to mind, only creating more fear and failure. What a tough cycle! And that is the tool Satan used to remind me that I couldn't succeed. I should just shut up and sit down. Stop trying; it wasn't going to work anyway. I'd only end up embarrassed, unsuccessful, and more fearful. What did I have to contribute, anyway? And it took me a long time to realize those were lies.

A few years back, Casting Crowns came out with a song called "The Voice of Truth." This song resonated so much with me - it was a constant reminder to listen to God, not the lies of failure. It became a sort of theme song for me, a song of courage and hope. It reminded me what God says about fear and what he says to do in response to fear:

- *"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear..." 1 John 4:18a*
- *"Be strong and courageous... Be strong and very courageous...be strong and courageous..." Joshua 1:6a, 7a, 9a*
- *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Phil. 4:6-7*
- *"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." 2 Tim. 1:7*

Do I have it figured out? No. Did I face it? Yes, but not alone. The key part is facing fear with Christ, with your armor of God on, with friends at your side as a "cloud of witnesses" to pray with, cry with, and talk with.

We are all afraid - afraid of the first day of middle school, of sports tryouts, and our first speech in speech class. We're afraid of asking someone to Homecoming, we're afraid of making the final decision of which college to go to. We're afraid of job interviews, public speaking, spiders, people seeing who we really are, being laughed at, tripping across the stage at graduation. What are you afraid of? Give it some thought. Name it out loud; tell a trusted friend. C.S. Lewis said fear gets bigger and gains control when you keep it inside.

There are plenty of things to be afraid of - but the flip side is there are plenty of things to be excited about, to look forward to. It took me a long time to see that - perhaps it's my personality type. I hope and I pray that you will see the adventure ahead of you. God has a plan, a hope and a future for you - claim it!!

*"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9*