

## Part 1 Max Isn't Brave

The heat from the fire burned against Max's face as he watched the apartment building go up in flames. Explosions burst from the windows and glass flew in all directions. The crowd jumped back as the blast rippled through the air. The fire sirens screamed as they pulled up to the scene.

Just then Max saw a team of firemen jump out of the truck and gear up. They looked like robots as they lined up to enter the burning building with masks covering their faces, tanks on their backs, and axes in their hands. Max was amazed as he watched each fireman press into the flames without hesitation. As the last fireman was entering the building, Max caught a glimpse of his face. His expression was calm and focused. There was no sign of timidity or fear. Max felt his phone ringing.

"Hey, Mom."

"Where are you, Max?"

"I'm on my way home. There's a fire on 14th street. It's huge!" Max's voice was distant and weak.

"What are you doing near it, Max? Get away from it and get home!" ordered his mother.

After lingering for a few more minutes, Max turned and headed home. The image of that fireman's face was burned into his mind.

Max woke up and got dressed for school. He had slept horribly that night. Nightmares of flames burning him alive had tormented him. Max headed out the door to school. He traveled his usual route, walking through the park, when he was startled by a scream. "Help! Help me!" Max looked around him and didn't see anyone in distress. He heard it again. "Help me! I can't get down!" Max looked up the tree to his right. It stretched far into the sky. Way up high, he saw a small girl who was clinging to the tree. "Please help me! I came up here to get my cat and now I can't get down." Max's heart raced and he felt dizzy. He hated heights. "I can't help you.... I can't climb that high!" "Please, help me. Please!" cried the girl. Max felt paralyzed as he looked up the tree. "I, I can't...I will...I will get someone." Max got his phone out and texted his mom, asking what to do. She told him to get the fire department to come.

After a few minutes a fire truck pulled up and a fireman got out. He came over to the tree where Max was slumped at the bottom.

"Are you the one who called for help, son?"

"Yes," said Max with his face downcast. "I couldn't help her."

When Max looked up, he recognized the fireman's face. He suddenly felt even more shame as he remembered watching this same man walk directly into the burning building yesterday with no hesitation.

"I'll get my ladder. You wait here."

The fireman got the ladder, went up the tree, and helped the girl down. The girl's parents arrived and thanked the fireman for his help.

Seeing Max looking rather upset, the fireman turned and strode over to him. He extended his hand, introducing himself. "My name is Paul. What's yours?" Max slowly lifted his head and shook his hand. "I'm Max."

"What's the matter, Max? You seem a bit sad."

"I couldn't help her," muttered Max.

"Why not?"

"I was too afraid to climb up there. I was scared just looking up at her."

Max halted for a moment, staring up at the man. "I saw you yesterday going into that fire. You didn't look scared at all. You just went right in. How did you do that?" The fireman reached into his pocket and pulled out a small notebook. "Max, when I first started fighting fires they scared me to death. I could barely get one foot in front of the other when it was time to act. I couldn't stand being afraid. I felt so embarrassed and felt like a failure.

One morning as I read my bible, God showed me a verse. It's from 2 Timothy 1:7 and says, '*For God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.*' I say this verse everyday to remember that God did not create me to be afraid. He created me to be powerful and have full control of myself. Now, every time I say this verse I believe it a little more. I can step into those fires and feel that *I am brave. God is bigger than my fear. I am safe in His loving hands.* I want you to keep this book for yourself. Read it every day. Read it until you believe it.

1. What amazed Max as he watched the last fireman enter the burning building? (*He showed no sign of fear in spite of the obvious threat to his life.*)
2. What was Max's big fear he could not overcome? (*Fear of heights*)
3. What was the secret to the fireman's bravery that he shared with Max? (*The bible verse which the fireman said every day until he truly believed it.*)
4. What did the fireman give to Max and tell him to do with it? (*He gave him his notebook with the bible verse and said to read it every day. Read it until you believe it.*)
5. \*What is your greatest fear (either here at the gym or perhaps outside)?
6. \*If God is not the one who gives fear, where does it come from?

\*Questions for discussion. Answers will vary.

## Part 2 Max Versus Fear

Max rolled out of bed and reached over to his night stand. His hand grasped the small notebook the fireman had given him. Max rubbed his eyes and sat up to read the verse inside. *“For God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.”* Max read it a few times, put it in his pocket, and then got ready for school.

When school let out, Max headed to the field to play frisbee with his friends. As they tossed the frisbee, a contest developed to see who could throw it the farthest. When Max's turn came, he wound up and whipped the frisbee as hard as he could. Just as he released it, a gust of wind came from behind and lifted the frisbee high into the air. Up and up it went until it finally came to rest atop a tall pine tree. Max's friends cheered, “You won, Max! That was amazing!” Then they laughed saying, “Looks like you’re going to be climbing!”

Max nervously swallowed as he walked toward the tree. He began to sweat as he stared up at the frisbee. He wiped the sweat off his hands onto his pants and then felt the notebook in his pocket. He pulled it out and read the special message from the fireman. He read it over and over. “Come on Max, hurry up,” yelled his friends. “We don't have forever.”

Max put the book in his pocket and reached for the first branch. He pulled himself up then slowly reached for the second branch. One shaky step at a time, Max got closer to the frisbee. Every step got harder. Max was only a few branches from the frisbee when he froze with fear. He closed his eyes. “What did the fireman say?” Max tensed up as he focused his thoughts, trying to remember. *“I am brave...God is...bigger than my fear... I am safe in His loving hands.”* Max forced himself upward, grasping tightly to the final branches until... “I got it!” he said triumphantly to himself.

Max tucked the frisbee inside his shirt then slowly worked his way down. Finally, he reached the last branch and jumped down. He collapsed on the ground and rolled to his back. A rush came over him as he looked upward and exclaimed, “Yes, I did it!” He trotted back toward his friends thinking, “I am brave, I AM brave...”

1. What was the first thing Max did when he awoke this morning? (*He read the verse inside his notebook from the fireman.*)
2. What did Max have to do to make himself keep climbing higher and higher? (*He had to focus his thoughts on what the fireman had told him...“I am brave...”*)
3. When Max was at the bottom of the tree looking up, he was very afraid. How did he feel when he was at the top of the tree looking down? (*Triumphant! He actually made it!*)
4. \*Do you think Max would have climbed the tree if his friends were not there?
5. \*Max's friends did not know he was so afraid of heights. He could have told them, but he let that peer pressure make him do something he could not do the other day - climb a tree. Was that a good thing or a bad thing?
- 6.



## Part 3 Still Not Brave Enough

The bell rang and the whole class scurried toward the door. Everyone was bumping into each other and rushing to their lockers. Max grabbed his backpack and headed out the exit doors. As he turned the corner of the school building, he saw a small circle of boys cornering someone. He slowed his gait to listen in on what was happening.

“What’s wrong with you?” yelled one of the boys in the circle. “You’re pathetic. You can’t even defend yourself. Be a man. Get up and fight!” Max heard a thud, and looking over, he saw a scrawny boy take a hit to the face and fall. Several kicks followed.

Max’s heart raced as he watched. “I need to help him,” thought Max, “but what if I get hurt too?” He watched as the scrawny boy took a few more hits. Then, too scared to help, he slowly turned and walked toward home. A feeling of utter embarrassment and guilt came over him. His heart ached as he thought about that poor boy getting beaten up.

“Dinner’s ready!” called Max’s mom from the kitchen. Max came out of his room and slumped into his chair across from his dad.

“What’s the matter, Max?” asked his dad. “Is something bothering you?” “I wasn’t brave today,” sighed Max as he pushed his food around the plate. “I’m always too afraid to do the right thing.”

“What were you afraid of?”

Max then explained what he had seen, and how awful he felt leaving the boy there to fend for himself against the bully. “Well, Max, that’s a tough one. Being brave is very hard, and it doesn’t always end well. What do you wish you would have done?”

“I wish I would have jumped in there and beat those guys! I wish I would have stopped them from hurting that boy!”

“That would have been exciting, wouldn’t it?” said his dad. “Well, you aren’t happy with how it ended today. What if you had stepped in and taken a few of those hits yourself so the boy could get away? Would you feel better then?” Max thought for a minute. “Yes, I *think* so...” Max finished his dinner and went to do his homework.

Later that evening, Max’s dad came into his room and sat by him. “Max, I’ve been praying and thinking a lot about what you said during dinner. One verse I often think of when I am afraid to do what I know is right is Psalm 27:1.” He opened up his bible and read, “*The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid?*” He closed his bible and placed his hand on Max’s shoulder. “God might give you another chance to be brave. God is a good Father and He gives us lots of chances to grow and do the right thing.”

After his dad left, Max quickly reached for his notebook and wrote this new bible verse in it. He read his two verses over and over until he slowly drifted to sleep.

1. Why didn’t Max help the boy who was getting beaten up? (*He was afraid he would get beaten up too.*)
2. What did Max’s dad tell him about being brave? (*Being brave is very hard, and it doesn’t always end well.*)

3. What does Max's dad think about when he is afraid to do what he knows is right? (*God's word: "The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid?"*)
4. \*Should we only be brave if we know that we will succeed in the end? Is that really bravery?
5. \*Has your fear of others ever kept you from doing what is right like it did for Max?

## Part 4 Max's Second Chance

The bell rang and Max's belly growled. It was finally lunch! Max got to the lunchroom and sat down to eat. A tall boy came over to him. Max knew who he was. It was Tom. This was one of the boys Max had watched beat up another boy few weeks earlier. "Hey, Max! Word has it you can throw a frisbee. We need another person for ultimate frisbee later. Want to play?" Max was caught off guard for a second. He usually didn't get asked to play with the more popular guys. "Sure," said Max. "Great... see you after school," Tom called as he walked away.

Max had conflicting feelings as he waited out the rest of the school day. He wasn't sure that he should have said yes. After all, this was the same guy he watched pummel someone. But Max decided he would play to see what these boys were like.

The frisbee flew towards Max. He jumped and grabbed it mid-air with one hand. "Nice catch, Max!" yelled Tom. Max whipped it to his teammate and they scored! "Whew! Quick drink break and then we'll go again," yelled Tom.

As they sat down, another boy walked across the field. "Well, well...look who it is," pointed Tom and then yelled, "You looking for another beating, boy?" Max looked over and saw the same boy he had watched get beat up a few weeks ago. The boy retorted, "Leave me alone and play your stupid game!" With that, Tom jumped up and ran after him. Tackling him, he began to rain down blows on the small figure.

Max jumped up and then froze. "What should I do?" he thought. "What will Tom do to me if I try to stop him?" Max then remembered the feelings of embarrassment and guilt he had when he failed to act the last time. The verses Max had read over and over now rushed into his head. "*For God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.*" "*The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid?*" Max knew what he needed to do. He ran towards Tom and tackled him off the boy.

"Leave him alone, Tom. You've got no business picking on him."

Tom looked shocked for a minute. "Why do you care about him? What's this got to do with you?" Tom stood and advanced toward Max, but Max stood tall. "I'm not going to stand here and watch you pick on someone who hasn't done anything to deserve it. It's wrong." Tom grabbed Max and swung at his face. He ducked to avoid the first punch but took another jab right to the gut. Max dropped with the air knocked out of him.

"Stay away from me, Max. You're pathetic."

Tom walked off and left the field. Once Max was able to breathe again, he stood and helped the other boy up. Then he headed for home.

Max couldn't wait to tell his dad. Today he felt no shame, no embarrassment, no guilt. Though he felt pain in his stomach, he also felt peace in his heart. His mind filled with the wonderful thought, "I am brave... I am brave."

1. Why did Max decide to play frisbee with Tom? (*He thought he should find out what Tom and his friends were really like.*)
2. What happened that showed Max what Tom was really like? (*The same boy Tom had beaten up earlier crossed the field and Tom went after him again.*)

3. After Max asked himself, "What should I do?" what rushed into his head? *(The verses from the bible he had read over and over.)*
4. Max made the right choice to help the boy, but what did he receive for his brave act? *(He got kicked in the stomach, but he also felt peace in his heart.)*
5. \*Do you want to be brave? How will you ever know for sure if you are brave? *(possible answer: You will only know if you are brave if you do what is right even though you may be afraid.)*
6. \*What are some things that you would like to stop being afraid of? How can you be brave?

## Part 5 Bravery in Action

The end of the school year was drawing near. Max couldn't wait to be on summer break and enjoy the weather. The days kept getting slower and slower. To pass the time, Max would pull out his notebook and read through his verses. He was amazed at the power they had to change him. Max no longer felt like a scared, fearful victim. He had come to believe the words he read daily. He would say his verse over and over, along with the words from Fireman Paul: *I am Brave. God is bigger than my fear. I am safe in His loving hands.* Max had also added his own favorite verses to his notebook. His latest addition was Isaiah 41:13-14:

*"For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear; I will help you. Do not be afraid, for I myself will help you,' declares the Lord, 'your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.'"*

Max loved the peace it gave him to know that he didn't have to be brave on his own. God was holding his hand. God was the one who made Max brave.

The fire alarm suddenly screamed out! A voice came over the loudspeaker, "This is not a drill. This is NOT a drill!" Panic set in and everyone started to shuffle toward the doors. "Stay in line!" yelled the teachers. "Follow the plan!" When Max's class reached the hall, smoke was rippling in. They all began to cough as they inhaled the black smoke that was filling the halls. Finally, they reached the exits and poured out onto the parking lot.

"Everyone stay back. The fire department is on its way," shouted the principal. Max could only vaguely hear the fire truck's sirens. "They can't be that close," he thought. He looked up at a second-floor window where smoke was pouring out. At that moment he caught sight of something that put his stomach in knots. A hand was slapping at the window. He could barely make it out through the black smoke.

"There's someone up there!" yelled Max as he pointed to the window. A teacher looked. "No - that's my room. I know everyone was cleared out."

"No! There's someone inside!" cried Max.

"We can't go in there, Max. Everyone is out; we counted them!" assured the teacher.

Max broke from the group and ran toward the school doors. "Get back here now!" screamed someone. Max ignored the command and headed straight for the doors. Fear gripped him as he felt the heat blast his face. Max covered his nose and mouth with his sleeve and paused. He knew there was someone upstairs, and he knew the fire department wouldn't make it in time. Max was fully aware of what he had to do and he spoke it out loud: *"God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control."* With that reassurance, Max sprinted into the burning building.

1. Who has been helping Max on his journey in becoming brave so far? (*Paul, his dad, and most of all, God*)
2. What did Max see that no one else saw after the fire broke out? (*He saw a hand waving in the second-floor window.*)
3. This was the most dangerous decision Max had ever had to make. He was afraid. What helped him decide so quickly to run into the fire? (*It was clear the fire department was not going to make it in time. He had learned to fully believe God's word and now he spoke it out loud - "God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control."*)

4. \*Max broke the teacher's command to stay where he was. Was that right or wrong?

## Part 6 Max Is Brave

The heat burned against Max as he worked his way around the flames. Slowly he inched to the stairs and headed toward the room he had seen the hand waving from. It was getting harder and harder to breathe. The flames swallowed up the oxygen. Smoke filled his lungs, causing them to tighten and shorten each breath he tried to take.

Finally, he reached the classroom where he thought he had seen the hand. He pushed open the door but couldn't see through the smoke. He slowly walked through the blackness toward the window until his foot bumped into something. He reached down and felt a hand. Max knelt down and put his ear to the boy's mouth. He heard shallow breaths. He heaved the boy onto his back and made his way to the door, gasping for air as he struggled under the boy's weight. With each step, Max felt weaker. "God, please help me get him out. I can't do it."

Max willed himself to take another few steps until he made it to the staircase. Faltering under the boy's weight and growing fainter every second, he managed to reach the first floor and crawled to the door. With his last bit of strength, he dragged himself a few more feet then collapsed.

The firemen were now pulling up. They rushed to Max. "I've got this one!" yelled one of the fireman. Max lay motionless as the fireman lifted him up while another fireman tended the other boy. The fireman laid Max on a stretcher and began CPR. "Come on son," the fireman murmured as he continued CPR. Max regained consciousness and peeked through swollen eyes.

"Well, hello there, Max." Max was very dazed. "Do you know who I am?" Max's whole body screamed in pain; his lungs burned, his skin burned, his eyes burned.

"Paul?" Max uttered weakly.

"Yeah. You look a little different than when I last saw you." Max tried to smile but remained still.

"I heard you ran in there to save that boy, Max. Why did you do that?"

Max moved his leg a bit and the fireman looked down and saw something in his pocket.

"Do you want that out of your pocket?"

"Yes," uttered Max. The fireman reached in, pulled out the notebook, and smiled.

"This also looks a little different than when I last saw it."

On the front of the notebook it said, *I Am Brave*. As Paul turned the pages, he saw all the verses Max had written in it. When he reached the final page, he saw where Max had written the same thing over and over.

Max slowly turned his head toward Paul. With a faint whisper he began, "*I am Brave....*," then stopped. Paul had to finish the words. "*God is bigger than my fear. I am safe in His loving hands.*" Then Max's body relaxed.

1. What happened to Max as he went upstairs to search for the boy? (*It was getting harder to breathe. Smoke filled his lungs, causing them to tighten and shorten each breath he tried to take.*)

2. What did Max realize after he heaved the boy onto his back? (*He couldn't do this alone, so he prayed: "God, please help me get him out. I can't do it."*)
3. Who was there to help Max when he finally crawled out? (*Paul*)
4. What do you think Paul saw that was so different about the notebook he had given Max many months ago? (*It was worn, it had many new bible verses, and "I am Brave. God is bigger than my fear. I am safe in His loving hands," had been written many times on the last page.*)
5. \*When you can't do something by yourself, who do you ask for help?
6. \*What do you think happened to Max at the end of the story?