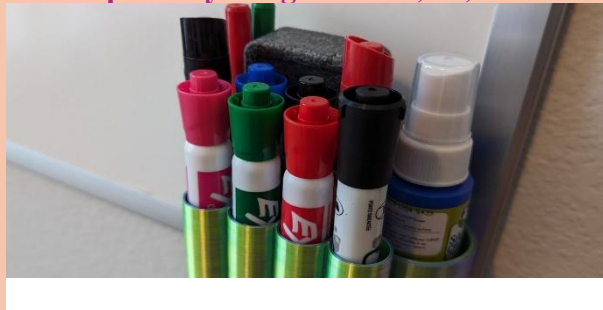


“Rise Up Now”
Inspired by Judges 4:4-10, 14, 21-22



Rain tapped steadily against the wide windows of the community center as Raymond stood at the front of the small meeting room, staring at a whiteboard filled with crossed-out ideas.

“We’ve tried petitions, and we’ve tried meetings,” Flint said, pacing. “Nobody’s listening.”

April leaned back in her chair, arms folded, “It’s not that they’re not listening; it’s that they don’t *care* enough to act.”

Pearl sat quietly near the window, her notebook open, eyes thoughtful.

Raymond exhaled slowly, “Then we’re thinking too small.”

Flint stopped, “Too small? We’re trying to fix a system that’s been broken for years.”

Raymond turned to face him, “Exactly, so why are we acting like we need permission to do something about it?”

A Voice That Won’t Stay Silent

Pearl finally spoke, her voice calm but firm.

“Raymond’s right,” she said, “we’ve been waiting for someone else to step in, to lead, and to fix things.”

April raised an eyebrow, “And now you think *we* are those people?”

Pearl met her gaze, “I think we’ve been called to be.”

The room quieted...

Raymond nodded slowly, as if that was the confirmation he had been waiting for.

“There’s a moment,” he said, “when you stop asking *who’s going to do something...* and realize it’s supposed to be you.”

Flint shook his head, “You really think people will follow us?”

Raymond smiled slightly, “Not at first.”

The Reluctance of a Leader



They gathered around the table, maps and notes spread out.

“There’s a rally next week,” April said. “Community leaders, media coverage; it’s our chance.”

Flint crossed his arms, “If we go big, we could fail big.”

Raymond looked at him, “If we don’t move, we’ve already failed.”

Flint hesitated, then admitted quietly, “I don’t know if I’m the kind of person who leads something like this.”

Raymond stepped closer.

“Good,” he said. “Because the kind of people who think they’ve got it all figured out usually miss what matters.”

Pearl smiled at that...

“You don’t have to be fearless,” Raymond added. “You just have to be willing.”

The Turning Point

A few days later, they stood backstage at the rally.

The sounds of the crowd buzzed beyond the curtains.

April peeked out and pulled back quickly. “There are way more people than I expected.”

Flint ran a hand through his hair, “Yeah... I’m officially nervous now.”

Pearl closed her notebook and took a deep breath. “This is bigger than us.”

Raymond adjusted the microphone in his hands.

“Exactly,” he said. “And that’s why we can’t back down.”

Flint looked at him, “What if we freeze out there?”

Raymond’s voice softened, “Then we take one step anyway.”



“Now Is the Time”

The organizer signaled...it was time.

Raymond stepped onto the stage as the crowd murmured, unsure of who he was.

For a brief moment, doubt flickered across his face.

Then he remembered why they were there.

This isn't about comfort; It's about courage.

He stepped forward...

“Good evening,” he began, “I don’t stand here because I have all the answers...”

The crowd quieted...

“I stand here because staying silent is no longer an option.”

April and Pearl exchanged glances backstage.

Flint whispered, “He’s really doing it.”

Raymond continued, his voice gaining strength:

“There are moments in life when waiting feels safer than acting, but those are often the moments when action matters most.”

He looked directly into the crowd...

“And I believe this is one of those moments.”

Rising Together

One by one, Pearl, April, and Flint joined him on stage.

April stepped forward, “We’ve spent too long thinking someone else would fix this however change doesn’t always come from ‘someone else.’ It can also come from us!”

Pearl added, “From courage...from unity...from refusing to give up.”

Flint hesitated stepping up beside them...

“And from people who are unsure,” he said honestly, “but show up anyway.”

A ripple of applause spread through the crowd.

Raymond smiled...

The Unexpected Victory

In the days that followed, something shifted.

Calls were returned and meetings were scheduled causing momentum to build.

One evening, the four of them gathered again at the same community center.

Flint leaned back in his chair playing his guitar, “I can’t believe it’s actually working.”

April smirked, “Correction: God has already worked it out.”

Pearl looked at Raymond, “You knew, didn’t you?”

Raymond shook his head, “I believed.”

He paused, then added, “There’s a difference.”

Courage in the Shadows

Later that night, as the group packed up, Pearl lingered.

“Do you think,” she asked quietly, “that one moment can really change everything?”

Raymond thought for a moment.

“Not just one moment,” he said. “But one decision in one moment? That can start everything.”

Pearl nodded slowly.



Moving A HEADD

As they turned off the lights and stepped outside, Flint glanced back at the now-empty room.

“Funny,” he said. “It all started right there.”

Raymond smiled.

“No,” he said, “It started the moment we decided to move forward, even when we were unsure.”

April nudged him, “That sounds like something important.”

Raymond shrugged lightly, “It is.”

He looked at each of them, his voice steady and full of conviction.

“When the moment comes,” he said, “you don’t wait... you rise.”

The others nodded, understanding now.

And as they walked into the night, something stronger than fear walked with them as

courage awakened at just the right time.