

CAFFEINE + COURAGE



Steven Case


THE
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This series is dedicated with respect, admiration, and gratitude to the youth of the Windermere Union Church who allowed me to try out many of these lessons in our meetings. Thank you. You made me better.

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SHHHHHH

THEME: BEING BOLD

ORDER HERE

Being bold is not about being noisy. We get a picture in our heads of the triumphant hero on the top of the building with the wind blowing his cape and his hands on his hips. The music swells to a "Taa-Daaaaa." But that's not what being bold is about. Bold is quiet. Bold is resolute, certain, convinced, audacious.

Pilate got right in Jesus' beaten and bloody face, both of them knowing what Pilate could do to Jesus. "Are you the son of God?" Jesus' answer was quiet...and it changed the world.



START THINKING

Which is bolder?

- Ordering the plain bagel with plain cream cheese / Ordering the "Everything" with jalapeño cream cheese
- Mild wings/ Hot wings/ Singe-my-colon wings
- Choosing a book report topic that everyone else is doing (and planning on doing it better) / Choosing a book report topic that could give you a nasty label
- Having lunch at the chess club table / Having lunch with someone you've never met
- Being the designated driver / Telling your friends not to drink in the first place
- White shoes after Labor Day just because you feel like it / Checkerboard Vans classics with your prom outfit

TABLE NOTES

In the space below or on a napkin or the back of a place mat, draw three traffic/road signs that (metaphorically) you think guide you in times of difficult decisions.



SCRIPTURE MENU

Look up one or more of the sets of verses, and respond to the discussion questions that follow.

Read Matthew 10:34–39.

Is being a Christian easy?

Have we softened what it means to be a Christian?

“I’m trying to find myself” is a phrase often used by people who don’t seem to have a direction. Jesus said, “Look to me and you’ll find yourself *and* me.” What do you think he meant?

People will think of their jobs and use it to define themselves—“I’m a lawyer,” “I’m an electrician.” Why do we associate what we “do” with what we “are”? How do we use “Christian” as part of our identity? Do we use it too much or not enough?

Mark 7:27–30 (NRSV)

²⁷He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁸But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” ²⁹Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” ³⁰So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

In a time when a person of a certain background (let alone a woman) did not speak in public—let alone call a rabbi on the carpet—this woman was breaking all kinds of social boundaries. Who do you know (from the news or history) who stood face to

face with power and said what needed to be said?

There are some scholars who have said Jesus was testing the woman. Others have said she was just “ballsy” enough to throw it back in his face. Which do you believe and why?

Have you ever been that desperate (remember, the woman’s daughter is “possessed”) to stand up to power and demand to be heard? What would it take for you to barge into somebody’s office and demand attention?

Exodus 14:8–9 (NRSV)

⁸The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt and he pursued the Israelites, who were going out boldly. ⁹The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, his chariot drivers and his army; they overtook them camped by the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

The Israelites left without looking back. Keep in mind they had no sense of “out there.” They had been slaves since birth, as were their parents and grandparents, they had no concept of anything beyond their city walls. People say that “the devil you know is better than the devil you don’t know.” Why is the unknown scary to people who are already in pain?

1 Samuel 2:1 (NRSV)

**Hannah prayed and said,
“My heart exults in the Lord;
my strength is exalted in my God.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in my victory.”**

Hannah was dancing even after losing the child she had prayed so hard to have! What was so different? Hannah now was able to look beyond herself and her own needs. She could sense God’s love now, and trust Him. And she could sense the future that God had for this first child she loved so deeply. Because Hannah truly had given her son to the Lord, she trusted God to care for him and to give him a fulfilling life.

Psalms 138:3 (NRSV)

**On the day I called, you answered me,
you increased my strength of soul.**

Give an example of a person who has “strength of soul.”

When was the last time you felt your “strength of soul” increase?

Proverbs 28:1 (NRSV)

**The wicked flee when no one pursues,
but the righteous are as bold as a lion.**

Does it seem like people who are trying to put one over on you simply talk LOUD and FAST? (Have you watched an infomercial?) Do you need to be over the top if you have the truth?

Read Ephesians 6:19–20.

Talk about a time when you were tempted to just “give up” and “walk away” but didn’t. Why didn’t you? (Or why did you?)

Read Philippians 1:20–21.

Think about world history for a moment. What was the boldest thing ever said by anyone, anywhere?

What was the bravest, most courageous thing you ever said?

TAKE HOME BAG

The opening soliloquy from *Star Trek* includes the phrase “to boldly go where no one has gone before.” The word “enterprise” (the name of the ship from the series) means “endeavor, mission, objective, venture, and vocation.”

Choose an “enterprise” that you have been thinking about. Then list three ways to go about achieving it “boldly.”



TIP

Moral excellence comes about as a result of habit. We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.

—Aristotle

COME WITH ME IF YOU WANT TO LIVE

THEME: TRUST

ORDER HERE

It's that great scene that shows up in the Terminator movies. The hero (or heroine) is suddenly confronted with a choice of staying and dying or trusting the hand that might just be worse. "Come with me if you want to live." The hero/heroine does, and the story continues, though not without pain and purpose. God calls to us the same way. Often when we are at our worst, God says, "Come with me if you want to live." Not that the alternative is death, but "live" as in live fully, live freely, live abundantly, live with all capital letters: LIVE! God wants to give us FULL LIFE. The offer is made again and again. Eventually we take it.

START THINKING

In the space below or on the back of a place mat, arrange the following people in order of trustworthiness.

The President

A convicted felon (rehabilitated)

Cell phone salesperson

Screaming Naked Guy claiming to be a Prophet

Bill O'Reilly

My principal

Myself

Drive-thru worker

Charles Barkley

Jesus



TABLE NOTES

In the space below, in your journal, or on the back of a place mat, draw six circles, one in the center with five other circles surrounding it. Have you ever done a “trust fall”? Thinking metaphorically and imagining yourself as the central circle, who do you want in your circle to catch you when you fall?



SCRIPTURE MENU

Have someone look up the verses and ask the questions aloud.

Romans 8:28–39 (NRSV)

²⁸We know that all things work together for good* for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. God’s Love in Christ Jesus.

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written,

**“For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”**

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor

powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Break this passage down verse by verse. Condense each verse (okay you can combine a few if you want) into two words: God _____.

See what you can come up with individually or as a group.

Which condensed verse appeals to you the most?

Read Psalm 18:16–18.

Is David saying here that God will solve your problems for you? Have you ever asked God to solve a problem for you?

What is David's promise about God here? Is there any situation in which this could not be true?

Psalm 34:4 (NRSV)

**I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.**

Even more so than the last passage, David is not talking about God "saving" in this verse. God is meeting us a little more than halfway. What does this assume on our part?

Can you think of an issue or problem you've been through in which you had to meet God halfway? What did you do? What did God do? What did "half way" look like when you got there?

Job 8:15 (NRSV)

**If one leans against its house, it will not stand;
if one lays hold of it, it will not endure.**

Great imagery here in the book of Job. What does it say about trust?

Read Psalm 115:4–8.

Is there someone you know who has "become" like the God the person worships? (No names if you know the person personally.) So if we put our trust in God, what do we become? Give examples.

Luke 17:11–14 (NRSV)

¹¹On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean.

Maybe you’ve heard this story before, but there’s something interesting that many people miss. The men who were lepers were not “healed” until they started on their way to the chief priests. Jesus told them they *would* be healed, and they trusted him and they were.

Remember that scene in *Iron Man* where the hero shoots a missile at the tank and turns and walks away before it hits? Have you ever seen a bowler roll the ball and then walk away knowing it will be a strike? Where does that kind of belief come from? How can we apply that kind of trust to our lives?

Read Mark 10:13–16.

What was the greatest cereal prize or happy meal freebie you ever found in the box or bag? Do you remember when joy was that easy?

God wants us to trust the same way?

What do we allow in the way of our childlike joy? How are those same things affecting our trust in God?

TAKE HOME BAG

How much money do you have on you right now, including change and bills? Count the number of “In God We Trusts” you have on your person, and let that be the number of prayers you say this week telling God that you trust in his decisions for your life.

TIP

Dare to be naïve.



—Buckminster Fuller

THIS AIN'T NO GAME

THEME: RISK



ORDER HERE

Risk is not going to a restaurant without reservations and hoping they'll have a cancellation. That's being stupid. If the restaurant requires a reservation, then make a reservation. Pre-planning, Junior.

Risk is to start off on an adventure or a venture and not know where or how it's going to end. Risk is a requirement for courage as much as courage is a requirement for risk. You can't have one without the other. Being a Christian takes faith because you never know for certain how it's going to end. Starting down the path in the first place requires more risk than many people are willing to take.

START THINKING

Rate the following on a scale of "riskiness," with 1 being "not much risk" and 10 being "Are you serious!?"

- Seeing if you can jump over a campfire
- Moving onto the intermediate hill when skiing
- African Americans sitting at a "whites only" lunch counter
- Gandhi asking the British government to leave India
- Going to your teacher to dispute a grade
- Trying the meatloaf in the cafeteria

- Reading a banned book
- Speaking in public
- Speaking at the funeral of a good friend
- Honking your horn behind a cop at a red light
- Putting your last dollar in the Salvation Army pot

TABLE NOTES

In the space below or on a napkin or the back of a place mat, make two columns. On the left, write down the five most important things in your life. On the right, write down something you've always wanted or dreamed about.



Now check off the things in the list that you'd be willing to give up to obtain what you wrote on the right.

SCRIPTURE MENU

Look up one or more of the sets of verses, and respond to the discussion questions that follow.

Matthew 6:34 (NRSV)

“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

When is it risky to be a Christian (other than that whole Romans/Coliseum thing)?

What is the most you have ever trusted another person? How did that go?

Read Luke 4:22–30.

Jesus took a giant risk here and stood in front of his hometown church. It didn't go well.

In what ways do you think your church is complacent?

What's the biggest "risk" your pastor ever took from the pulpit?

Is "youth Sunday" cute or risky?

Look at these next two verses together.

Acts 26:24

Mark 3:21

There are many places in the scriptures where people who are preaching or living the way God called them to are considered to be crazy. Is it risky showing the "real you" at school? Do you know people who seem to completely change who they are just so they can fit in?

Read Acts 4:1–22 and Acts 26:20–22.

Risky behavior is not necessarily doing a dangerous move on your skateboard or drinking and driving. Risky behavior is being yourself—being the person that God made you to be without being embarrassed or afraid. Do you know someone in your congregation who lives this way?

Read these next two verses together.

Matthew 4:18 (NRSV)

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen.

Luke 5:27 (NRSV)

After this he went out and saw a tax-collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me."

Define the term "comfort zone." Why do some people cling to it

more than others? Is it an age thing? Explain.

Jesus calls us to step out of our comfort zones—not slowly step and work our way out but come now. That’s a tremendous risk. When you get in a pool, are you more likely to test the water with your toe or cannonball off the high dive? What does a “cannonball” look like as a life lesson?

TAKE HOME BAG

Imagine it becomes illegal to pray in this country. Any form of prayer, private or public, is punishable by death. What would you pray for next?

God, please _____

Amen.

TIP

The important thing is this: To be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we could become.

—Charles Dubois



STAND

THEME: DOING WHAT'S RIGHT (EVEN WHEN IT HURTS)

ORDER HERE



The problem with right and wrong is that it's usually more obvious than we like to admit. We talk about shades of gray and "maybe more of a checkerboard." When it comes down to it, though, we already know. Doing wrong is usually more fun

and easier, and we know we won't get caught. Doing right is harder, often painful, has little immediate reward, and can even ostracize us from others. But then again...it's "right." It's all about decision making isn't it?

START THINKING

Choose one. Which is more "right"?

- Google Maps/ Mapquest
- Democrats/ Republicans
- Mom / Dad
- Burger King Drive Thru / McDonalds Drive Thru
- Used car ad / Weight loss infomercial
- The Bible / Wikipedia
- Serving suggestion on a pint of Ben & Jerry's / Nutrition information on a pack of Twinkies
- Christianity/ Judaism / Shipping estimates on eBay

TABLE NOTES

In the space below or on another sheet of paper, draw a circle and divide it like a pie into eight pieces. In each "piece," write an initial for one of the eight biggest decisions you've ever made. Now remove a piece of pie for each decision that didn't go the way you had planned. Do you have any pie left?



SCRIPTURE MENU

Read or look up one or more of the verses, and respond to the discussion questions that follow.

1 Samuel 2:1 (NRSV)

**Hannah prayed and said,
"My heart exults in the Lord;
my strength is exalted in my God.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in my victory."**

Hanna had spent years praying for a child, and when she had one the child was removed from her to go to school and become a teacher. Hannah was joyous. She put her own needs second. She celebrated that God was using her child.

Could you do this? Think of your most prized possessions. If God said, "I need one of those," could you give it up freely?

Psalms 94:16–18 (NRSV)

- ¹⁶**Who rises up for me against the wicked?
Who stands up for me against evildoers?**
- ¹⁷**If the Lord had not been my help,
my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence.**

¹⁸**When I thought, “My foot is slipping,”
your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up.**

When was the last time you felt completely alone? David was there a *lot!* He was hated and loved by his people again and again. Yet when he was at his lowest, there was only God for him. Why does it seem like everyone wants to be the hero’s friend but if he drops the ball before getting to the end zone he’ll eat alone the next day? What makes people act like that?

Could you stand up and speak out for your worst enemy if you knew that person were being accused unfairly? Why or why not? If only your worst enemy could pull your bacon out of the fire, would you even ask?

Amos 5:20–24 (MsgB)

**Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?**

**I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.**

**Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings,
I will not accept them;**

**and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.**

**Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.**

**But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.**

God is royally honked off because he sees his people claiming to be church people and yet cheating the poor out of money. (Actually they were selling dirt in with the bags of grain and charging full price.) God was so angry he told them to quit worshipping him altogether.

Right after that God speaks through Amos.

Amos 5:24 (NIV)

But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

When was the last time “justice” seemed to come in a trickle? Talk about a time when you’ve seen justice come in like an ocean wave. What about an iceberg?

Read Deuteronomy 16:18–20.

Here the problem seems to be with the leaders. How can we make sure we are electing the right people to lead us? Why don't we trust politicians? How would you heal that growing rift?

Read Colossians 4:5–6.

The problem with doing what is "right" is that we often can look snooty or stuck up. People think that Christians think they are better than everyone else. Sadly, this is sometimes true. What if when we do what is right we do so knowing that it is difficult and it is a hard choice?

What would happen if Christians approached the concept of evangelism not as condemning or preaching but as one beggar showing another where the food is? What would church look like?

Read 1 Peter 3:16–17.

How can we keep from getting stuck in a "small picture" faith? Much of the way we are asked to live requires both time and patience as well as stepping back to see beyond ourselves. How do you personally avoid getting caught in the nitpicky stuff?

TAKE HOME BAG

Take a look through your local or national newspaper. Choose one story you feel represents some sort of injustice. Clip it out and hang it on your wall or locker. Keep track over the next few weeks. Pray for the situation every day.

Come to the next gathering and talk about how the situation changed.

TIP

Only when we are no longer afraid do we begin to live.



—Dorothy Thompson

DOWN DEEP

THEME: SOURCE OF COURAGE

ORDER HERE



Here's the thing about the Cowardly Lion (and the others for that matter). All the Wizard did was give the lion a medal. He didn't give the lion courage—he simply acknowledged what was already there. Deep down inside we have the courage to do what we are supposed to do, but it doesn't show up until we absolutely need it. Then we wonder, "Where the heck did that come from?" We don't always know what we are capable of until we are called upon to do it. Then, God makes sure we have everything we need to move on...brains, heart, and, yeah, courage.

START THINKING

Fill in the blank.

The source of my coffee (or other beverage) is _____.

The source of my knowledge is _____.

The source of my money is _____.

The source of my power is _____.

The source of my energy is _____.

The source of my patience is _____.

The source of my humor is _____.

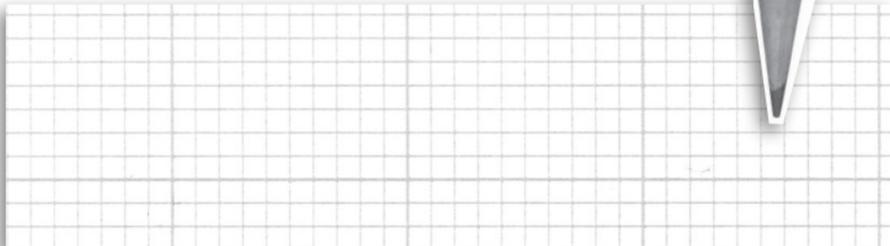
The source of my questions is _____.

The source of my wisdom is _____.

The source of my love is _____.

TABLE NOTES

In the space below or on a napkin or the back of a place mat, draw a small square. On this square, draw a symbol to represent the most important life lesson you ever learned. Now draw a treasure chest around the square and lock it.



What is the key and where will you keep it?

SCRIPTURE MENU

Have someone look up the verses and ask the questions aloud.

Genesis 26:24–25 (NRSV)

²⁴And that very night the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham; do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you and make your offspring numerous for my servant Abraham’s sake.” ²⁵So he built an altar there, called on the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac’s servants dug a well.

What reassurance did God give to Jacob?

Do you talk about God with your parents? Are there any “family stories” about how God worked in your parents’ lives? Talk about them.

Think of a time when God was very real to you. When was it? What else was going on in your life?

Have you ever thought about what the church (as in the universal concept of church) will look like for your grandkids? How has the focus changed since your parents were teens?

God is basically saying: I was. I am. I will be. Tell of when such consistency was particularly reassuring.

Joshua 1:9 (NRSV)

"I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

When God says to Joshua, "the Lord your God," why do you think he's being so precise?

This conversation with God is taking place right about the time that Joshua is taking over for Moses. Moses is gone, and God is trying to reassure the new team leader.

What was the last big transition you made? Was it of your own creation or was it sort of thrust upon you?

Do you think God would ever put you in a place that you were not ready to be in? Explain.

1 Samuel 30:6 (NRSV)

David was in great danger; for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in spirit for their sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

Isaiah 41:10 (NRSV)

**[D]o not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God....**

Does God judge? If God wanted us to do something and we failed miserably, did God know that would happen?

If God is always "with you" and you *still* blow it, why doesn't God take a more active role in the whole "with you" thing?

Read John 8:28–29.

Notice the word "again" here. Jesus tried repeatedly to make the same point. Those following him kept missing it. (Why not? It's hard to accept).

What makes God happy? What have you done that you're pretty sure made God smile?

Philippians 4:13 (NRSV)

¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Do you think God made you for a specific purpose? Who is most responsible for the "you" that is sitting here right now? God? Your parents? You? How do you even know what that purpose is?

Colossians 1:11–12 (NRSV)

¹¹May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

Think of an “object lesson” you could use to show people what that is all about. Then ask someone else to inject the rest of the passage into your example.

John 14:16–17 (NRSV)

¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

The Holy Spirit is God’s presence on earth after Jesus left. When we say, “I feel God’s presence,” or we have that all-is-right-with-the-world feeling, we are in God’s presence via the Holy Spirit. Which of the following words is the best represents God’s presence in your life?

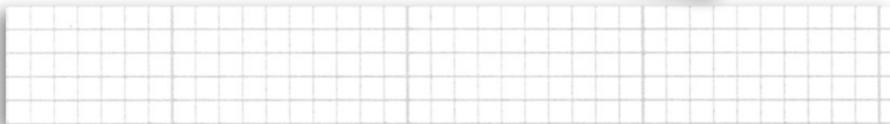
Rock

Scissors

Paper

TAKE HOME BAG

In the space below, in your journal, or on the back of a place mat, design a medal (ribbons and all) that you can cut or tear out. Write the word COURAGE in the space. Now give that medal to someone this week who you think needs to find the “nerve” that’s already inside.



TIP

If I only had the nerve.

—Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz*

I'LL BE RIGHT BEHIND YOU

THEME: LACK OF COURAGE ORDER HERE



The opposite of courage is not cowardice. A lack of courage can come from an abundance of fear, ignorance, or mistrust. These things need to be addressed before courage can take us where we need to be.

Walking across a rope bridge requires more than courage. We need to overcome fear and ignorance. We have to learn to trust ourselves and our traveling companions. Most of all we need faith. Courage is the prize at the bottom of the Faith cereal box. You might have to dig.

START THINKING

In the space below, list ten things that you have "lost" and never found.

TABLE NOTES

In the space below or on a napkin or another sheet of paper, draw a stick figure at the bottom of a hill. This is you. Draw life as a boulder. Make it representative of how life is going these days.



SCRIPTURE MENU

Look up one or more of the sets of verses, and respond to the discussion questions that follow.

Psalm 27:1–7, 11–13 (NRSV)

**¹The 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?**

**²When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.**

**³Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.**

**⁴One thing I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.**

**⁵For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.**

- ⁶Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.
- ⁷Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!
- ¹¹Teach me your way, O Lord,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.
- ¹²Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.
- ¹³I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

Which one or two phrases from Psalm 27 would you choose to say to a friend who was about to speak in public or make a hard phone call to Mom and Dad?

In the space below, write down several words that mean the opposite of each of these words.

Fear

Ignorance

Mistrust

Show your book to someone else at the table. Pick one word from each of their lists. What can you add to these words to make them stronger in your own life?

1 Samuel 24:16–19 (NRSV)

¹⁶When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, “Is that your voice, my son David?” Saul lifted up his voice and wept. ¹⁷He said to David, “You are more righteous than I; for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. ¹⁸Today you have explained how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands. ¹⁹For who has ever found an enemy, and sent the enemy safely away? So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day.”

2 Samuel 15:14–15 (NRSV)

¹⁴Then David said to all his officials who were with him at Jerusalem, "Get up! Let us flee, or there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Hurry, or he will soon overtake us, and bring disaster down upon us, and attack the city with the edge of the sword."

¹⁵The king's officials said to the king, "Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king decides."

David was being pressured into killing King Saul, yet he decided not to. This could have looked like cowardice, but it was a smart decision. It took more courage on David's part <ital>not</ital> to do what everyone was telling him to do. When was the last time you felt pressured into something? Were you called "chicken"? What happened?

If someone calls you "chicken" because you didn't jump off a roof, is that a lack of courage or an abundance of common sense? Explain.

Is this kind of behavior pretty much a "guy thing"? Explain your answer.

TAKE HOME BAG

On a separate sheet of paper, tear out a "wedge" or triangle-shaped piece of paper. Let this be the Wedge that keeps the boulder from your drawing in Table Notes from rolling back at you. Name the piece of paper. What keeps life from rolling back and hurting you? Put this in your pocket and carry it with you the rest of the day.



TIP

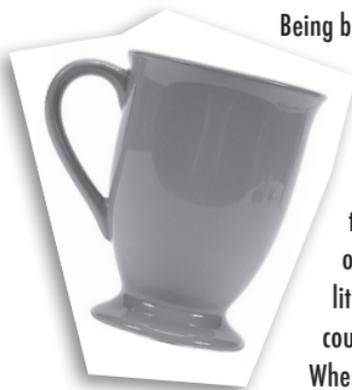
Courage, it would seem, is nothing less than the power to overcome danger, misfortune, fear, injustice, while continuing to affirm inwardly that life with all its sorrows is good; that everything is meaningful even if in a sense beyond our understanding; and that there is always tomorrow.

—Dorothy Thompson

DRAG ON... AND ON... AND ON

THEME: BEING BRAVE ORDER HERE

Being brave is a reaction, not an action. Brave is what you become when the odds are against you. It's not that you *are* brave, it's that you *become* brave. You may not even realize you have that capacity. You are called on to be brave. "Brave" is the answer when the question is "Who wants to give their speech first?" or "Who's going to stop that guy from picking on the little kid?" or "Are you going to sign up for the AP courses next year?" Brave shows up. We become brave. When there is no reason in the world that we should come out on top and yet we step up anyway, we are being brave.



START THINKING

In the space below or on the back of a place mat, list the ten bravest people you know personally.

TABLE NOTES

In the space below or on a separate sheet of paper, take the word BRAVE and make an acronym using qualities of bravery that start with each letter of the word. (An acronym is a word formed from the initial letters of a multi-word term. For example, LOL is an acronym for “laughing out loud.”)

B

R

A

V

E

SCRIPTURE MENU

Have someone look up the verses and ask the questions aloud.

2 Chronicles 19:11 (MsgB)

“See, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the Lord; and Zebadiah son of Ishmael, the governor of the house of Judah, in all the king’s matters; and the Levites will serve you as officers. Deal courageously, and may the Lord be with the good!”

If God puts you in a specific job, does that mean it will be easy? Why is failure still an option if it’s what God wants? God calls us to be brave no matter what role we are given. Why is that scary?

1 Corinthians 16:13–14 (NRSV)

¹³Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.

¹⁴Let all that you do be done in love.

When is courage required to love? Once you come up with an answer, flip the question around—When would courage be required to be loved?

1 Samuel 17:33–43, 45, 47–50, 51b (NRSV)

³³Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.” ³⁴But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. ³⁶Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.” ³⁷David said, “The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.” So Saul said to David, “Go, and may the Lord be with you!”

³⁸ Saul clothed David with his armour; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. ³⁹David strapped Saul’s sword over the armour, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.” So David removed them.

⁴⁰Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd’s bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

⁴¹The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴²When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. ⁴³The Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

⁴⁵But David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

⁴⁷and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s and he will give you into our hand.”

⁴⁸When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

⁵⁰So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a

stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand.

^{51b}When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

What forms can bullying take?

Write down three things you notice in this passage from 1 Samuel about David that would put him on God's "it" list.

Read Daniel 3:16–25.

Daniel 6:10 (NRSV)

Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open towards Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously.

How many times a day do you pray?

Why do some people prefer liturgical prayers and others just seem to do better off the cuff?

There are places in the world, right now, where praying as a Christian would get you (at the least) beaten and at the most (murdered). How would you pray if it was illegal?

TAKE HOME BAG

Draw a shield like medieval knights used to have. Divide it into four parts. In each part draw a symbol of something that makes up the "foundation of who you are."



TIP

You can't be brave if only wonderful things have happened to you.

—Mary Tyler Moore

IT'S ALL GOOD

THEME: ENCOURAGEMENT

ORDER HERE



"It's going to be okay." Those simple words can work wonders. Said with conviction, they can make a hospital stay bearable, they can heal a broken heart, they can console a person's weak spirit by the graveside. "It's going to be okay."

We need to hear it and we need to say it. The faith that comes with courage is evident in these words. Look around you, we are weak, sick, and tired, and sometimes we just need to hear the words—just as a reminder that God is good. God is present. God knows what God is doing. There isn't anything we go through that God doesn't know about. These simple words are what we can give each other when we have trouble feeling God's presence.

START THINKING

Choose one. *I am encouraged more by...*

- Music / Movies
- Church / School
- The ocean / The mountains
- The city / The country
- The news / Cartoon network
- Friends / Family
- When I see the stars / When I see art in a museum
- Quiet prayer / Audience participation
- Singing hymns / Reading the Psalms
- The Bible / The Sunday comics

TABLE NOTES

The song says that home is where “seldom is heard a discouraging word.” Write down the most encouraging word you can think of. (Yes, just one word.)

SCRIPTURE MENU

Read or look up one or more of the verses, and respond to the discussion questions that follow.

Joshua 1:6–7 (NRSV)

6Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them.

7Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go.

Right now, go out of the room and shout COURAGE! Shout it to someone you’ve never met.

Joshua 10:25 (NRSV)

And Joshua said to them, “Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous; for thus the Lord will do to all the enemies against whom you fight.”

Why do people “hold back”? What is the risk in putting our “whole selves” out there?

If there were a guarantee, would courage be necessary? Explain.

1 Chronicles 22:13 (NRSV)

Then you will prosper if you are careful to observe the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord commanded Moses for Israel. Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed.

What is the most encouraging thing anyone ever said to you? Was it specific to the moment or just a general encouragement? Write it down on a place mat or napkin and leave it behind when you go. Do not stop and see who reads it—trust that God will give the message to the right person.

Psalm 27:14 (NRSV)

**Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!**

David the Psalmist apparently thought that was an important part of the message. If we truly believe God is everywhere all the time, how do we *not* wait for God?

Here are some ways other translations end Psalm 27:14.

WAIT on the Lord

Wait patiently for the Lord

Wait with hope for the Lord

What seems to be the running theme other than “wait”?

Matthew 6:33–34 (MsgB)

“Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

“Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.”

Note there is no “s” in the first verse—it’s not God’s reality, it’s God-reality.

What is God-reality?

What is God-initiative?

What are God-provisions?

Acts 23:11 (MsgB)

That night the Master appeared to Paul: “It’s going to be all right. Everything is going to turn out for the best. You’ve been a good

witness for me here in Jerusalem. Now you're going to be my witness in Rome!"

"It's going to be all right." These are wonderful words. Have you ever had someone say this to you? Talk about it. Did you believe it at the time? Did you need to?

Talk about a time when you said them to someone else, "It's going to be all right." Was it?

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NRSV)

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Colossians 2:2 (NRSV)

I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself. . . .

TAKE HOME BAG

Write down the name of the person who most recently encouraged you and the name of the person who said the most encouraging thing you ever heard. Take those names home and pray for those people every day this week.



TIP

We would never learn to be brave or patient if there was only joy in the world.

—Helen Keller

KERRI STRUG SENDS HER REGARDS

THEME: PLAYING THROUGH PAIN

ORDER HERE



Sometimes if you watch street musicians you see something you don't see when a singer or player is on stage.

Street performers will often cry. They sing, play, paint, or act out of the pure joy of it. They're performing on the street for other people's change, and it's killing them that they can't get in a spotlight. They play through the pain. A gymnast will perform on a vault even with a broken ankle. A football player will carry the ball across the goal line even with a broken wrist or torn tendon. Sometimes the passion bleeds through and we find ourselves in the presence of God simply because we kept going.

START THINKING

Which hurts worse?

- Bombing a final / Failing a driver's test
- Not getting the newest video game / Not getting a date for homecoming
- Losing the homecoming game / Losing your little finger to a pit bull
- Breaking a tooth / Breaking grandma's favorite china
- Stubbing your toe in the dark at night / Biting your lip while eating hot wings
- Getting a bad report card / Getting detention
- Being rejected by a cute guy or girl / Being rejected by your church
- Getting a traffic ticket / Losing a concert ticket
- Getting your ears pierced / Slamming your tongue in a car door

TABLE NOTES

In the space below or on the back of a place mat, draw a horizontal line. At the right end of the line, draw a stick figure to represent yourself. At the left end of the line, draw a symbol of a goal you have. Now draw three “walls” along your path. One wall is paper, one is wood, one is steel. Label these with corresponding obstacles in your path.



SCRIPTURE MENU

Have someone look up the verses and ask the questions aloud.

Hebrews 11:32–38 (NRSV)

³²And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—³³who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

³⁵Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in

skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—³⁸of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

What's the worst situation you've ever found yourself in?

What would happen if we gave this list of persecutions from Hebrews 11 to people who were considering becoming Christian? "These are what *might* happen...okay? Are you ready to come with us?" When thinking of these persecutions, we might say, "Oh that was then." But Christians are persecuted around the world to this day. Would you still be a Christian if it hurt?

When have you felt like you were wandering "in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground"?

During worship, many churches will "lift up" those who are sick or hurting. Think of these prayers as a physical letter or a balloon or something like that. What happens to them? Does God read them all?

When you read the verse above, does getting up on Sunday morning still seem like such a big deal?

Is there too much "happy-happy, joy-joy" in Christianity? Are we too focused on the "feel good" and forget that sometimes it hurts? Which one puts butts in the pew? Explain.

Read Psalm 119:24–32.

Read the verses aloud if you can (even if you are sitting alone in your room). Imagine these are your words. Perhaps the most important words in this passage are "I have chosen."

God is love and is all around us. We believe that, but whether or not we are going to live that way is our choice. We choose this path and all its pain and all its euphoria. Is there any other "path" you have ever considered? Why?

The following statements are pulled from the Psalm 119. Complete each statement with your own words.

When I told of my ways _____.

Make me understand _____.

My soul melts away for _____.

Put false ways [to] _____ far away from me.

I have chosen _____.

I cling to _____.

I will _____.

Matthew 11:28–30 (NRSV)

²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

It has been said that this generation has a horrific sense of entitlement but at the same time is better at getting up after being knocked down than many generations before it. Do you think this is true? Give an example of “getting up again” on both a personal and generational scale.

Is your faith more like a hammock or a rock in your shoe? Give an example of both from your life.

TAKE HOME BAG

Look at the menu. (If you are in a classroom, use your imagination.) Count the number of beverage choices available. Write that number down to remind yourself that it’s just your choice of **drink**. How many life choices are open to you? The number is infinite. Live that way this week.



TIP

Whoever said anybody has a right to give up?

—Marian Wright Edelman

NEAT

THEME: PRACTICAL



ORDER HERE

Practical people understand that “stuff happens,” so you’d better be prepared—you get gas before you start on a long drive because you don’t know where the next station will be. Practical people do their homework in advance because something might come up.

Practical people are strong, resolute, resilient, dependable, pragmatic, and sensible. Practical people don’t sit back and wait for God to show them what to do. They “do” and then they ask God’s blessing on what they’ve done. To move ahead and trust that God will be happy with one’s actions takes great courage. It takes faith and self-reliance. It’s honorable. It’s expected. It’s practical.

START THINKING

Choose one.

- Check the ingredients before baking / Brown sugar? white sugar?
Same diff.
- Wait for a sale / Buy it or lose it
- Friday homework / Sunday homework / Monday morning homeroom homework

- Make lists / Random tasks
- Classical music / Free-form jazz
- Origami / Finger painting
- Sharpen my Crayolas / crayons, T-shirt, iron, hmmm
- Vacation Bible School singing / Old rite of Mass

TABLE NOTES

In the space below or on a separate sheet of paper, create a cooking recipe for a happy life.

1 cup _____

2 cups _____

1 tbs _____

¼ tsp _____

A full bag of _____

Mix, bake and serve with _____

SCRIPTURE MENU

Look up one or more of the sets of verses, and respond to the discussion questions that follow.

Acts 27:33–34 (NRSV)

³³Just before daybreak, Paul urged all of them to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have been in suspense and remaining without food, having eaten nothing.

³⁴Therefore I urge you to take some food, for it will help you survive; for none of you will lose a hair from your heads.”

The men on the ship with Paul have been tossed around for days in a storm, and now Paul says matter-of-factly, “You know what? Let’s eat. You’re going to need it when we’re rescued.” Do you know someone with a matter-of-fact faith? Someone like that just seems to believe in the whole God/Jesus thing as easily as you might say, “Let’s have breakfast.”

Why does it seem like little kids and old people have the “belief” thing down pat?

For many Christians, sharing a meal is a religious experience. (That’s not a joke.) What is it about sitting down together and sharing food that connects us to God?

If you think of your faith as something pliable or squishy, what events in your life have helped to solidify it? Is your faith more water, rock, fire, or wind?

Romans 15:5–6 (NRSV)

⁵May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you think of God as dependably steady and warmly personal—practical? Does God sound like a homemaker? Are you more comfortable with the idea of a God who has gallons of fingerprint or one with a mop and Windex? Explain.

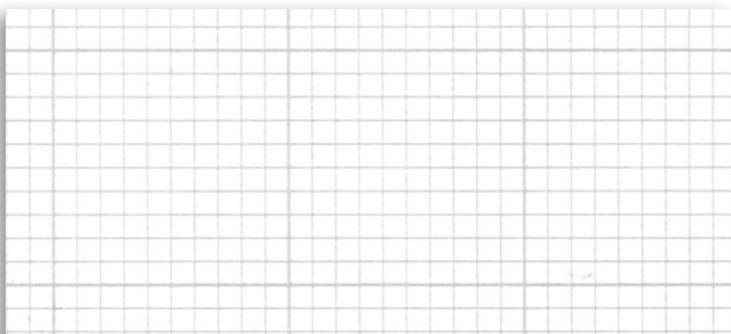
How do you sing with your life? How does it sound in unison and how does it sound when it’s harmony?

Are you more of a harmony singer or a melody singer? Choir member or soloist? (Remember, this is a life analogy.)

John 14:1–4 (NRSV)

¹Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.”

Jesus is going ahead to “prepare a [dwelling] place for you.” Do you think of heaven as a physical place? Do you get more than a dwelling place? If the “dwelling place” is just Jesus’ way of illustrating, what is he preparing for us?



PUNCHING AND JUDY

THEME: FIGHTING



ORDER HERE

At what point do you get to say “no more”? When you say “Christian,” people think of gentle-Jesus-meek-and-mild, or maybe a screaming TV pastor who’s all bluster and finger pointing. At what point are Christians allowed to say, “No, you’re not going to treat me like that. No, you’re not going to do that to my planet. No, you’re not going to hurt those kids anymore.” Sometimes the fight comes to you.

START THINKING

Rank each of the following by the amount it’s worth fighting about, with 1 meaning “no big deal” and 10 meaning “it may come to blows.”

- The check for lunch
- The tip
- My test grade is 0.5 off
- Gas money from those riding in my car
- Science Fair rules and regulations
- Curfews
- Dutch dates

- People who screw up song lyrics
- Student Council elections
- City Council elections
- Church Board meetings
- Presidential elections

TABLE NOTES

In the space below or on a separate sheet of paper, draw a series of five "Happy Bombs" (bombs with smiling faces). Label each one with something you could throw that would defuse a situation.



SCRIPTURE MENU

Have someone look up the verses and ask the questions aloud.

Deuteronomy 20:10–12 (MsgB)

¹⁰When you draw near to a town to fight against it, offer it terms of peace. ¹¹If it accepts your terms of peace and surrenders to you, then all the people in it shall serve you in forced labour. ¹²If it does not submit to you peacefully, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it....

Is “diplomacy first” always the best way between warring countries? What about warring groups of friends? What about two individuals? What would have happened if we had started feeding North Korea fifteen years ago?

James 4:1–3 (NRSV)

¹Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ²You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

What’s the difference between fighting to win, fighting to find a solution, and fighting to fight? James is speaking to an entire group of people in this passage—a generation of people.

How often do we keep fighting even when we know we are out of line?

Why is it so difficult to say, “I might be wrong”?

Isaiah 2:4 (NRSV)

**He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.**

What is an example (personally or culturally) of one resolution meeting another and creating something that never would have happened otherwise?

Matthew 5:25–26 (NRSV)

²⁵Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Imagine that arguments are rats (yes, real rats). Every argument

you have going is another rat you carry around with you. Every time you make the move to solve the situation, you lose the rat. Even if the other person doesn't want to hear it, you've still lost your rat and the other person still has his or hers. What would your school look like if this situation were literally true? What would your locker look like? What is the easiest way you could lose a rat this week?

TAKE HOME BAG

Complete these equations.

Conflict - _____ +
_____ = Resolution

Resolution + Resolution = _____



TIP

The best way out is always through.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

ITSELF

THEME: FEAR

ORDER HERE



Nothing can paralyze a person or a group of persons like fear. When people are afraid, you can get them to do almost anything. Whether it's an amusement park's haunted house or the leadership of a government (church, family, business) trying to make you afraid, you will do whatever it takes to feel safe again. Scared people are easily influenced. Fear is a weapon. Courage is...well, let's talk about that.

START THINKING

Rank the following list of things in the order in which they scare you.

- Darkness
- Rats
- Bugs
- Burglars
- Public speaking
- Squishy things
- Being buried alive
- Taking a report card to my parents
- Asking someone on a date
- Leaving home for college
- My youth minister

TABLE NOTES

Write the words “FEAR” and “SAFE” in the space below, in your journal, or on another sheet of paper. For each word, create an acronym using things that upset you and things that reassure you. An acronym is a word formed using the initial letters of other words. For example, PHAT is an acronym for “pretty hot and tempting.”



SCRIPTURE MENU

Look up one or more of the sets of verses, and respond to the discussion questions that follow.

2 Corinthians 7:5–6 (NRSV)

⁵For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way—disputes without and fears within. ⁶But God, who consoles the downcast, consoled us by the arrival of Titus....

Fear of “not knowing how it would turn out” is at some levels the base of all fears. For Paul, the arrival of Titus encouraged him. Who makes it “safe” for you? Who gives you courage?

Isaiah 43:1 (NRSV)

**But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.**

God seems to say “Do not fear” an awful lot. Is there such a thing as healthy fear? In some scriptures, the words “fear” and “awe” are interchangeable, as in “approach God with fear and trembling.” Is awe better than fear? How do they work the same? When was the last time you were in awe?

Proverbs 3:21–24 (NRSV)

**²¹My child, do not let these escape from your sight:
keep sound wisdom and prudence,
²²and they will be life for your soul
and adornment for your neck.
²³Then you will walk on your way securely
and your foot will not stumble.
²⁴If you sit down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.**

Write “wisdom” on one palm and “prudence” on the other, making the words tangible. How can you take them with you intangibly?

John 14:26–27 (NRSV)

²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as both an Advocate and a teacher. Who would you name as your chief advocate and your best teacher? What’s the difference between these roles? How is the Holy Spirit like an “Advocate”?

Matthew 10:19–20 (NRSV)

¹⁹When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to

speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; ²⁰for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Public speaking is on the top ten lists of many people's fears. There are several places in the scriptures where God promises to "supply the words." Do you like to speak in public? Who is the best you've ever seen?

What would it take to stand on the street corner and just start preaching?

What was the hardest thing you ever had to say to anybody? How did you do?

Matthew 10:28 (MsgB)

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

The music group Lost And Found wrote a song that went, "Oh them lions they can eat my body / But they can't swallow my soul." It was reported that many of the rescue/recovery workers at the World Trade Center were singing this song as they sorted through the rubble. Does fear have to look like a horror movie? What scares you without saying "Boo"?

When it comes down to it, your soul is the one thing that nobody can take from you. Give your soul a physical description. Can you hold it in your hand? Put it in a lockbox? Fly it? How is it attached to you?

Read Matthew 14:24–27.

Read Mark 4:35–41.

What's interesting here is that Jesus told them, "We're going to the other side." Does that make "Where is your faith?" a trick question? How hard is it to be brave when you are in the middle of the "storm" in your life? How do you keep from screaming?

Psalm 23:1–4 (NRSV)

¹The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

**²He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;**

³he restores my soul.

**He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.**

**⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.**

This is one of the great whistling-in-the-dark psalms (and perhaps the most well known psalm of all). Perhaps the greatest fear of all human beings is death. Perhaps the psalm read at more funerals than any other is Psalm 23. What does this say about us? About the psalm itself?

Proverbs 29:25 (NRSV)

**The fear of others lays a snare,
but one who trusts in the Lord is secure.**

How does the fear of others ensnare or trap someone? Can you give an example? Have you ever been completely “ensnared”? How do you come back from that?

TAKE HOME BAG

Jeremiah 29:11 (MsgB)

I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for.

“I know what I'm doing.” Shouldn't this be the most reassuring phrase in the entire Bible? On a napkin or the back of a place mat, write down one or two fears that are “on-going” in your life. Tear these out and stick them to your mirror or inside your locker. Every time you look at them this week, imagine Jesus' voice saying, “I know what I'm doing.”



TIP

Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear.

—Mark Twain

A large, empty, lined writing area with a vertical margin line on the left side. The page is otherwise blank.

POW!

THEME: AUDACITY

ORDER HERE



When we talk about audacity, it's often in the context of an insult. Some stuck-up person at a party, prim and proper, finds him- or herself shocked—*shocked*—by the audacity of a guest who has just done something so improper that it warrants ejection. “Can you believe the AUDACITY?!” Audacity happens when someone stands up to the long-held established traditions of what is and what isn't accepted behavior and flicks a booger at it. For generations the Pharisees had their way: this is how you walk, this is how you sing, this is how you pray, this is how you wash your hands, this who you can talk to, and this is who you can't talk to. For *years*, they were the keepers of the proper “way” to live. Then along comes this audacious carpenter and says, “I am the way.” Yeah, that can tick some people off.

START THINKING

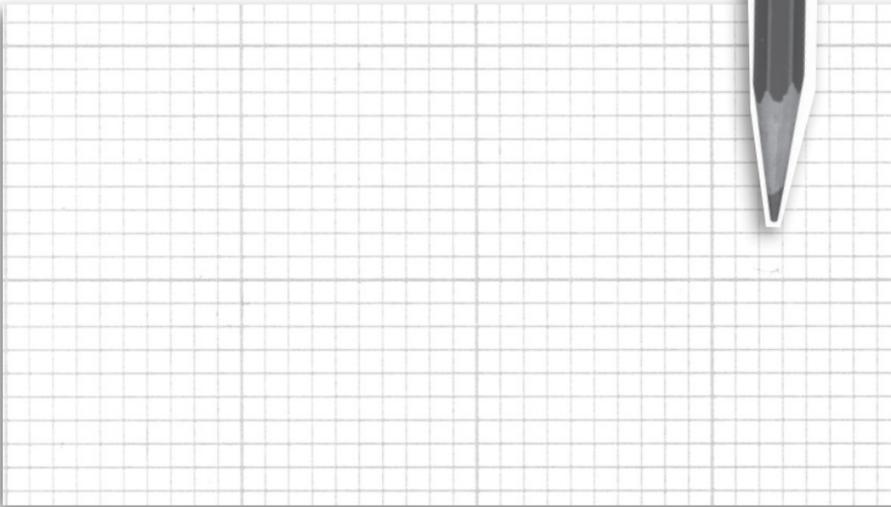
Rank each rule by the amount it needs to be broken, with 1 meaning “let it be” and 10 meaning “Break it, Break it!”

- Bodily noises in church
- Singing loud in church
- Christmas presents on Christmas Eve
- We don't serve breakfast after 10:30

- 90.5 and above is an "A"
- Right turn on red
- No "U" turn
- The Electoral College
- College entry essays count as part of the decision
- Trespasses vs. Debts
- Income tax
- Teacher tenure

TABLE NOTES

In the space below or on a separate sheet of paper, draw a picture of your own face "making a face" and being as silly as you can. (You can also give yourself a silly hat if you want.)



SCRIPTURE MENU

Read or look up one or more of the verses, and respond to the discussion questions that follow.

Romans 7:6 (NRSV)

But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

Law, rules, or fine print are referred to as holding us captive. Give an example of the “finest” fine print you’ve ever read.

What about a “fine print” rule in our culture? Your life?

Have you ever had the opportunity to be discharged from the law? What happened next?

If life’s fine-print laws are holding us captive, who holds the key? Who captured you to begin with?

Mark 6:2–3 (NRSV)

²On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offence at him.

The people were so stunned by Jesus’ audacity that they tried to throw him off a cliff. It was just too much “new” for them. Do you think we “get it” any better now? Have we closed off that opening again? Who was the last person (religiously, culturally, or politically) who even came close to that level of audacity?

Read these next two passages together.

2 Corinthians 4:6 (NRSV)

For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:4–6 (NIV)

⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Imagine all the energy that went into the “big bang” or the moment of creation itself. Paul seems to be saying that energy still exists and it exists in us. Right now. Why is something that large so hard to find? How can we make it easier for ourselves and each other?

TAKE HOME BAG

Romans 12:1–6a (NRSV)

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us



Define ordinary. Give an example. What is the opposite of that example? Do that this week.

TIP

What makes a king out of a slave? Courage!

—Cowardly Lion in *Wizard of Oz*

FIVE SMOOTH STONES

THEME: DAVID'S COURAGE



ORDER HERE

We've heard the story so many times that we gloss over it. David killed the giant. Yeah, okay. Let's get out the coloring page. No, back up. David killed a giant. This is not about little

guys doing things that big people can. This is not about camp songs.

David put a rock in a giant's forehead and then cut off his head. An *army* of soldiers would not even look this giant in the eye out of fear, and a kid with a sling and a prayer comes along and decks him. David's courage was a pure and good thing because it came entirely out of his faith. Let's look at where faith like that comes from.

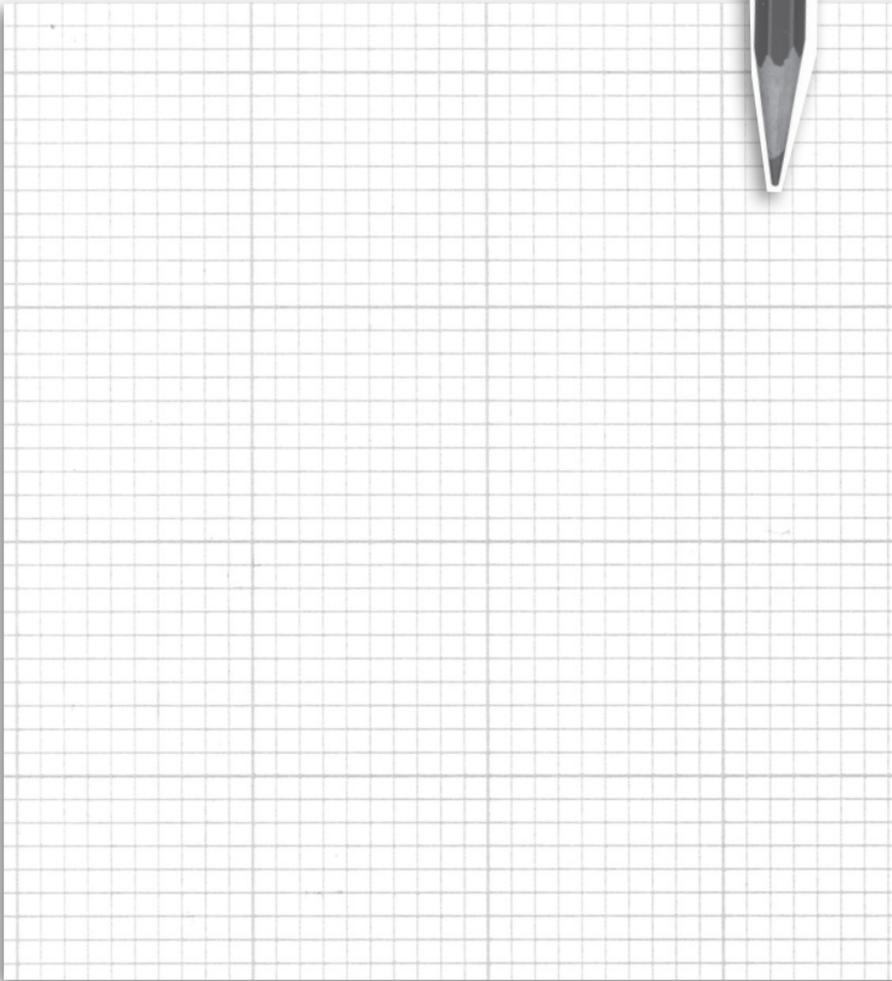
Write "Yes" or "No" for each item according to whether you think that item should be in a Sunday school coloring book.

- David getting anointed as the future king when he was a little kid
- David dancing nearly naked in the parade
- David's assistant getting "fired" for touching the ark
- David weeping for his dead son
- Saul chucking a spear at David

- David on the roof of the Palace writing psalms
- David on the roof of the palace watching a girl take a bath across the street
- David wearing his crown and sitting on his throne
- David and his band of “mighty men” hiding out in an old church.
- David in battle

TABLE NOTES

David went up against Goliath with five smooth stones. In the space below or on the back of a place mat, draw ten smooth stones. Label these with ten talents that you have or positive words that people would use to describe you.



SCRIPTURE MENU

Have someone look up the verses and ask the questions aloud.

Psalm 141:1–10 (NIV)

- ¹O Lord, I call to you; come quickly to me.
Hear my voice when I call to you.**
- ²May my prayer be set before you like incense;
may the lifting up of my hands be like the
evening sacrifice.**
- ³Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord;
keep watch over the door of my lips.**
- ⁴Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil,
to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers;
let me not eat of their delicacies.**
- ⁵Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness;
let him rebuke me—it is oil on my head.
My head will not refuse it.**
- Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers;
⁶their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs,
and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken.**
- ⁷[They will say,] “As one plows and breaks up the earth,
so our bones have been scattered at the mouth
of the grave.”**
- ⁸But my eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign Lord;
in you I take refuge—do not give me over to death.**
- ⁹Keep me from the snares they have laid for me,
from the traps set by evildoers.**
- ¹⁰Let the wicked fall into their own nets,
while I pass by in safety.**

David lived his life passionately. Do you think that the people who show great courage often put themselves in a situation to show great courage? How so?

Is there a difference between courage and “having a pair”? What is the difference in courage between facing death (Goliath? cancer?) and jumping out of a plane or doing a parkour move?

David drove off lions and bears with his sling? Why? How much does courage have to do with what you can lose?

Read Psalm 141 again. Jot down any lines that jump out at you or seem to apply to your life right now.

Read all of 1 Samuel 17:20–57. Imagine you are hearing this story for the first time.

Most of the the Bible says the stone knocked Goliath out, but David cut off the giant's head. He was still carrying the head around with him when he went to meet Saul. Why would David give Saul Goliath's head?

When does courage override common sense? Can one override the other?

What gives one or the other the "edge" in a given situation?

TAKE HOME BAG

Go back to the stones you drew in Table Notes. Choose five to keep with you that you think will be most valuable when you go up against the Goliaths in your life this week. Tear them out or draw them on a separate sheet of paper. Put them in your pocket.



TIP

Do you know what a hero is, Frank? Nine times out of ten a hero is someone who is cold enough and tired enough and hungry enough not to give a damn.

—Hawkeye Pierce in "M*A*S*H"

FACE TIME

THEME: PETER'S COURAGE



ORDER HERE

"And Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and...." Yada yada yada. Very brave. We get that.

We've talked about it before. Now imagine the person in your life who you hurt the most. Peter denied he knew one of his closest friends in order to save his own hide. Peter did nothing while his mentor, his teacher, was beaten bloody and then hung on a piece of wood to die. Have any of us hurt anyone as badly as that? Then Jesus comes back and visits Peter and says, "Look me in the eye." Imagine the kind of courage it would take to look up from your shoes and into the face of the person you hurt the most.

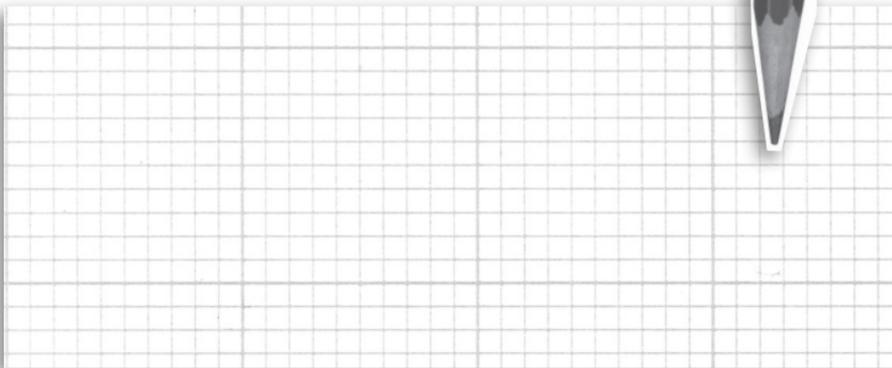
SCRIPTURE MENU

Rank each statement according to the amount of courage it required, with 1 meaning "Geeze, anyone could do that" and 10 meaning "I'll be over there, cowering in the corner."

- Peter gets out of the boat and walks on water.
- Peter tries to heal the leper.
- Peter jumps out of the fishing boat and swims to shore.
- Peter invites a guest to lunch when his mother-in-law is home sick.
- Peter tells God, "I'm not going to eat that."
- Peter cuts off the ear of a soldier.
- Peter leaves behind everything he knows in order to be a preacher.

TABLE NOTES

In the space below or on the back of a place mat, draw ten fish. Label each one with an "issue" that you have in your life right now.



Choose the one fish that is the hardest for you to catch. What is the bait that usually brings it your way?

SCRIPTURE MENU

Look up one or more of the sets of verses, and respond to the discussion questions that follow.

Read Mark 8:33–38.

The word "satan" means "obstacle" or "adversary." Jesus knew what had to happen to him and he was telling Peter, "Don't make this any harder than it already is."

Can you think of a time when the "easy way out" was open to you and you stayed put?

Was there ever a time when someone asked you to just go along, everybody does it, it's easy? In times like those why does the right way to do it usually hurt?

Jesus said, "What can a man gain in exchange for his soul." ("Simpson" fans, remember the donut?) This seems to imply that we have the choice to give it up or not. When we "give our lives," does it have to mean death? What would God want with you dead? Who do you know that has given their life to being what God wants them to be?

John 18:15–16 (NIV)

¹⁵Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, ¹⁶but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

Have you ever known someone who can sneak in the “back door” of a concert or event? How do they do that? What’s the secret of not getting caught? Peter was willing to risk his life to be there for Jesus. Yet in one moment, Peter denies he even knows Jesus. Is it possible to hurt someone when that person is not even aware you did it?

Was this a denial or a betrayal of Jesus by Simon Peter? What’s the difference?

Glorious things can happen to us all the time and we will write it off to coincidence or luck. Why do we so quickly dispel the idea of God being that involved in our lives?

Acts 10:9–16 (NRSV)

⁹About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. ¹²In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³Then he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” ¹⁴But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.” ¹⁵The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” ¹⁶This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Peter is so wrapped up in his heritage and his rules that he completely bypasses the notion that God is telling him this. God says, “Eat,” and Peter says, “No thank you, I’m on a strict diet.”

Where do we get the supposed “right” to say something or someone isn’t “clean” enough for us deal with? How do we use our religion to justify our behaviors?

TAKE HOME BAG

Go back to your drawing fish in Table Notes. Take the one issue that you identified as being the "hardest to catch." Draw it again below cooking over an open fire. Say a silent prayer while you draw, asking Jesus to meet you where you are to help you deal with this issue this week.



TIP

If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all. And so today I still have a dream.

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

MEET ME AT MARY'S PLACE (WE'RE GONNA HAVE A PARTY)

THEME: MARY'S COURAGE

ORDER HERE

Mary said, "Yes." It's one of the most beautiful parts of scripture, called Mary's Song. She sings, "My heart magnifies the Lord." But when we stop and think about what she said "Yes" to, Mary becomes one of the bravest women in history.

The courage, the faith, the trust, the belief, the conviction, the hope that she possessed must have been obvious to God or God would never have asked such a terrifying thing of a young girl. But God did ask, and Mary said, "Yes."

START THINKING

Write down the age you were or think you should be for each of the following.

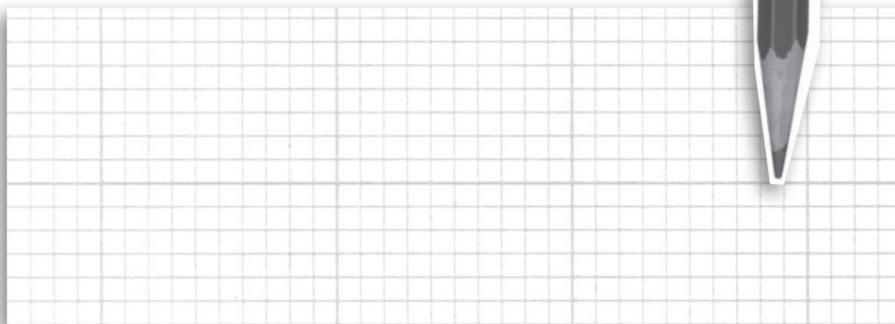
- Walking to school by yourself
- Crossing the street without holding Mom's hand
- Getting your homework done without reminders



- First alcoholic drink
- Cooking on the stove
- Getting married
- Having children
- Confirmation class
- Choosing your own religion
- Getting a part-time job
- First date
- Choosing a career

TABLE NOTES

On a separate piece of paper (no bigger than about three inches square), draw a symbol or write a word that represents the hardest thing you've ever done. Crumple that up and keep in your shoe for the rest of the day. Imagine Mary living with her decision every day of her life.



SCRIPTURE MENU

Read or look up one or more of the verses, and respond to the discussion questions that follow.

Luke 1:38 (NRSV)

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Mary had to have some idea of what was being asked of her. She had to have known deep inside, and yet she said "Yes." Have you ever started down a path that you knew would end badly?

Suppose God said, “I’ll end world hunger, war, pain, suffering, and loneliness—I’ll trade the answers for your life.” Could you give up your life for the rest of humanity?

Do not answer this question out loud. No one should have to. Could you give up your child’s life for all those answers?

Luke 1:46–50, 52–53 (NIV)

⁴⁶**And Mary said:**

“My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷**and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,**

⁴⁸**for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.**

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹**for the Mighty One has done great things for me—**

holy is his name.

⁵⁰**His mercy extends to those who fear him,**

from generation to generation.

⁵²**He has brought down rulers from their thrones**

but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³**He has filled the hungry with good things**

but has sent the rich away empty.

Who is the most joyous woman singer you listen to? Does the joy come from her words or the feeling she gives to them? Explain.

Let’s consider Mary’s Song line by line.

Some translations use the word “magnifies” or “celebrates” (vss. 46–47). How do you celebrate God? How do you use your soul to do so?

What was the longest you ever “held in” good news (v. 48)? Why does it seem as if in order for good news to be real we must share it with someone?

Mary says that God has been watching her (v. 49). God has chosen her. Why do we have a sense that we must live a certain way in order to be chosen by God? Moses wasn’t perfect. David wasn’t really a king when God chose him. Mary was “just a girl.” What would you do if you had been taught since childhood that at any moment God would just send an angel and totally turn your life upside down?

There's the word "fear" again (v. 50). How does that compare with God's mercy? Notice it doesn't say "love" or "hope" or "judgment" but "mercy." How do you think this is significant in this case?

Luke 1:52

True or False? Eventually we all get what's coming to us, good or bad. Explain your answer.

Which of these verses seems to hit home best with where you are on your faith journey?

TAKE HOME BAG

Mary's Song is in the book of Luke. She said her soul glorifies the Lord. What do you have in your life that "glorifies" God and makes God easier to see for others? Write it down here or in your journal.



TIP

Whatever tomorrow brings. I'll be there with open arms and open eyes.

—Incubus

EVERYBODY HAS AN OPINION

THEME: SOLOMON'S ADVICE



ORDER HERE

A presidential candidate was asked, "What don't you know and how will you learn it?" The candidate replied, "I ask my wife." Solomon had 700 wives, so he must have been the smartest guy around. God asked Solomon, "What do you want? Name it. It's yours." Solomon answered by asking for wisdom. So the being that created the universe itself gave Solomon what he asked for. Here's how God works—ask for a sip of water from a thimble and God will dump an ocean on you. Imagine what Solomon's wisdom was like.

START THINKING

Rank the following in order of who or what gives the best life lessons.

- Homeroom teacher
- Grandmother
- Youth worker
- Homeless guy on the corner
- Magic eight ball
- Older sibling
- Coach
- Pastor
- Best friend
- Fortune cookies
- The Bible
- Wikipedia

TABLE NOTES

In the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is a woman whose “girlfriends” are Sanity and Discretion. She lives at the corner of Righteous Road and Justice Ave. In the space below or on a separate sheet of paper, jot down the characters in a “Desperate Housewives” type TV series. Keep this analogy going. Come up with some character names (cast them with today’s actresses if you want to). Don’t forget those characters who keep trying to cause chaos for everyone else on the street.

SCRIPTURE MENU

Have someone look up the verses and ask the questions aloud.

1 Kings 4:32–33 (NIV)

³²He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. ³³He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish.

1 Kings 10:24–25 (NRSV)

²⁴The whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. ²⁵Every one of them brought a present, objects of silver and gold, garments, weaponry, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year.

The book of Proverbs is divided into three sections (basically): letters from a father to his far-away son; short sayings that sound a little like fortunes



in fortune cookies; and a section that is a dialogue between a teacher and a student.

What is wisdom worth to you? Not your own but someone else's? How far will you go for good advice?

Who gives you the best advice?

The following verses are advice from the middle section of Proverbs.

Proverbs 15:1–33 (NIV)

- ¹A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.**
- ²The tongue of the wise commends knowledge,
but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.**
- ³The eyes of the Lord are everywhere,
keeping watch on the wicked and the good.**
- ⁴The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life,
but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.**
- ⁵A fool spurns his father's discipline,
but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.**
- ⁶The house of the righteous contains great treasure,
but the income of the wicked brings them trouble.**
- ⁷The lips of the wise spread knowledge;
not so the hearts of fools.**
- ⁸The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked,
but the prayer of the upright pleases him.**
- ⁹The Lord detests the way of the wicked
but he loves those who pursue righteousness.**

Look at the list of verses from Proverbs. Put an exclamation point (!) by the ones that you think, "Absolutely!" Put an "X" by the ones that you think, "That's rarely true."

In what ways does wisdom come or not come with age?

Take your marked list of Proverbs to the nearest "older" person, and ask if he or she will give it a quick read. See if the older person agrees with your choices.

What is a sage?

When do people become sages?

MOVING GOALPOSTS

THEME: STARTING OVER

ORDER HERE

Perhaps the bravest thing anyone can do is to get up after being knocked down. Everybody loses sometimes. Nobody wins every round, every battle.

Sometimes we fail. We don't just mess things up for ourselves; we run full speed into a wall and leave

a person-shaped hole in it like those cartoons with the cat and mouse.

Sometimes we fail on a spectacular scale. Sometimes we fail and it's not our fault. The Bible is full of stories of people who were lying face down on the ground (some of them literally) in their failure. Then they summoned the courage. They took a breath. They stood up again.

START THINKING

The game pieces in the game of Monopoly can include the following. Circle the one that you think best represents you and explain why.

Race car

Horse with cowboy

Dog

Hat

Money bag

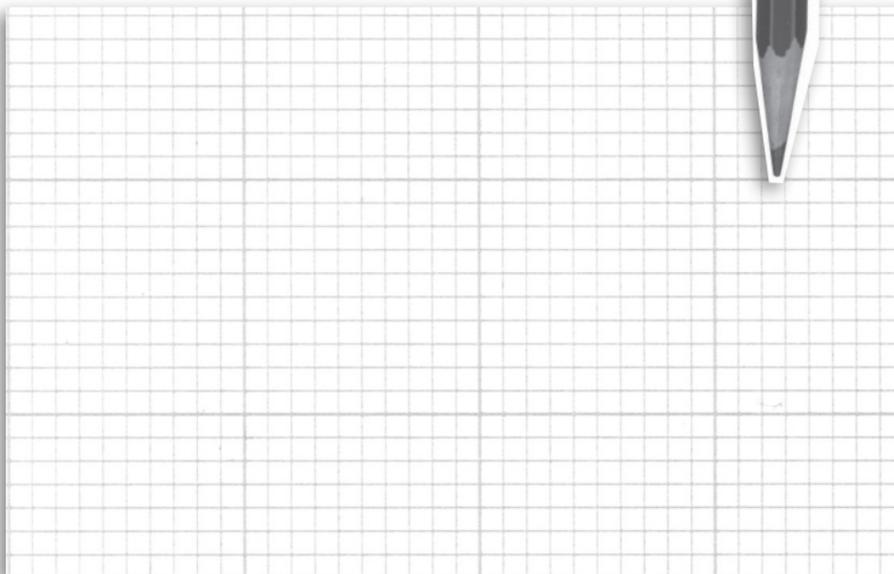
Cannon

Wheelbarrow

Battleship

TABLE NOTES

In the space below or on the back of a place mat, draw a picture of the “Go” square from a Monopoly game. Create three new rules you would add to your “life game” based on what you have learned thus far.



SCRIPTURE MENU

Look up one or more of the sets of verses, and respond to the discussion questions that follow.

1 Corinthians 1:7 (NIV)

Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

You don't lack what you need to get through. Often we think we could solve our problems if we just had *this* or *that*. Paul says you don't lack what you need to solve your problems. Do you think this is true? (Your first reaction may be “No,” but give it some thought.)

Philippians 1:6 (NRSV)

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

What work was “begun” in you? What “seeds” have been planted over the last several years that will help make you who you are. Do you have anything that has been “growing” in you since you were small?

Is your ongoing life more of a garden or a piece of artwork? Explain. How do you know when you are done?

Romans 2:6–7 (NIV)

⁶God “will give to each person according to what he has done.”

⁷To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

Is this passage about the afterlife? What if it’s about this life, this here and now?

2 Timothy 3:13–15 (NRSV)

¹³But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived. ¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

When you stop listening to those who lie to you—when you no longer follow them and move on—do they follow you or do they tend to stay behind and start lying to someone else?

This may be a simplified analogy, but...How many times do they have to screw up your order at the drive thru before you quit going to that establishment?

Have you ever sought out the “perfect” burger joint, coffee bar, pizza place, or jazz club? How far out of your way are you willing to go for something better?

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV)

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Do you need to be thanked?

Galatians 6:9 (NIV)

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Do you ever find yourself wondering, “When is this “proper time” I keep hearing about?”

Think back on your life. Has God ever said “thank you” to you for something wonderful that you’ve done? Think about that some more.

Hebrews 6:11 (NIV)

We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.

Where does inner strength come from?

Who is the strongest person you know (inner strength speaking)? Where does it come from in them? Are you born with it or can it be given, learned, cultivated? How?

James 1:4–5 (NIV)

⁴Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

“There are no stupid questions.” Do you think this is true? What keeps someone from raising his or her hand in class? What keeps people from going to God?

How does our ability to deal with failure affect our inner strength, and vice versa?

2 Peter 1:5–7 (NIV)

⁵For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

Take a problem you’ve been dealing with or an ongoing situation that you desperately want resolved. What would it look like

if you added “goodness” to it? Now take that and add knowledge. And to that add self-control. And to that add perseverance. And to that add godliness. And to that add kindness. And to that add love. (Yes, that requires some abstract thinking, but by the end you’ll have a clear direction of where to go.)



TAKE HOME BAG

Six rules for How to Deal:

1. Hang out with those who celebrate you and whom you celebrate.
2. Take constructive criticism constructively.
3. S*** happens. Accept it.
4. Random Acts of Kindness can change lives.
5. You are a unique and wonderful creation of a creator and creating God, and you are loved, right now, being who you are, by the creator of the universe. Accept that too.
6. If you fill your life with negative messages, how are you most likely to see life around you?

Spend the week creating your own “Rule 7” of How to Deal. Bring it the next gathering and share with everyone. Write down their Rule 7s, too.

TIP

Abraham Lincoln did not go to Gettysburg having commissioned a poll to find out what would sell in Gettysburg. There were no people with percentages for him, cautioning him about this group or that group or what they found in exit polls a year earlier. When will we have the courage of Lincoln?

—Robert Coles

AFTERWORD:

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book was born out of a conversation with a friend of mine at a large church in the central United States. She said that her church was going to do away with the traditional Sunday night meetings because of low attendance. They would keep Sunday morning as well as the Wednesday night Bible study. “The thing is,” she said, “I still have fifty kids in and out of my office during the week, and it’s not necessarily the same kids. What I need is a curriculum that requires no preparation—and that I can grab off my shelf, take four youth, and say ‘Let’s go over to Starbucks.’”

This book works two ways. The first is as an impromptu discussion starter to be used with five or less youth crammed into a booth at your favorite coffee shop or diner. The participants can write on place mats or napkins. Just you, a Bible (or a few, different versions), and a couple of pens, and you’re ready to go.

You can also use this book as part of an on-going curriculum. If possible, give each participant his or her own copy of this book to write in and doodle on as a journal. If youth are sharing copies, it would be great if each youth could get his or her own journal, one that’s small enough to fit into a book bag and be re-read or worked on at home.

Adapt It Up

Every youth worker has opened a book of games or discussions only to be faced with the first line, “Break your group into smaller groups of eight”—and you have a total of only six teens in the room. We’ve all had to “adapt it down” and try to make a large-group activity fit with a small group. This book is written so that a youth minister or Sunday school teacher can adapt it **up** for use with a larger group.

How to Use This Book

Each exploration is broken into six smaller sections. The activities can be followed sequentially or not.

Order Here

This is the introduction. You can read it aloud to your youth, or, if each has his or her own book, you can have them read along silently before moving on.

Start Thinking

These are quick focusing questions to get kids’ brains in the proper mindset and the discussion moving. They are mostly fun questions, meant to start things off. There are no right or wrong answers, so pay attention to the responses. If possible, ask more questions based on the answers you receive. These answers will give you a good idea of where the discussion wants to go.

Table Notes

This section encourages active participation. Youth are asked to make lists, draw pictures, and so on. Make sure they know they don't have to be artists or poets to properly participate. Sometimes discussion is easier if your hands are busy, so encourage doodling—yes, in the books! The idea is to get teens to open up and talk about what they are thinking.

Scripture Menu

Encourage your youth to bring their own Bibles. Tell them they can go out and buy a translation that speaks to them (the more variety, the better). Be open to the idea of letting participants mark and write in their Bibles—to really use the books.

This section offers up several different scriptures. Use as many as you want. Each scripture reference is followed by one, two, or several discussion questions. This time may be when you have the deepest discussion and when participants may start asking their own questions. Pay attention to these and follow their logic—this book should be merely the starting point for deeper things. The goal is to help youth learn who they are and what they think and believe, and then to share that with others.

Take Home Bag

This section is a work-at-home assignment. If your participants each have their own books, this will be easier. If they don't, let them write down the assignment on the back of a place mat or napkin. If you are using this book as part of a regular gathering, tell participants that they don't have to share their answers unless they are comfortable doing so.

Tip

The tip is a quick “big idea” for the day, like a fortune in a cookie or the memorable quote on the side of the paper coffee cup. Encourage participants to see the tip as a life hint and to pay attention to how often it comes into play during the week.

The questions in this book have been around for ages. They are part of an attempt to explain our place in the universe. They are also questions that have inflamed many arguments and caused great schisms and separations in families and churches. It has been said that the job of the clergy is not to answer the questions but to protect them. Some things we won't know about God until we can pose the question face to face. In the meantime, this book is written to create discussion. If you don't come to a conclusion . . . just enjoy the ride.

Everyone likes to work with little kids. Their hugs are freely given, and they act like they are glad to see you. Finding leaders for the adult education program is a little harder, mostly because adults don't think they're smart enough to lead a Bible discussion. In adult classes you can have adult discussions, but you have chosen to work with teenagers. God bless you. I hope these books make you even better at what you do.