



COURAGE

TRICON
EDUCATION

SMALL GROUPS

LENT 2019

COURAGE



COURAGE - Lenten Small Groups 2019

In the first three centuries, following the death of Jesus, his followers risked imprisonment and frequently execution. Followers of Jesus rejected the divinity of the Emperor and were considered enemies of the state. If you were a Jewish follower of Christ, as most were, you were often shunned by your tribe as a cultish heretic. Even today, in some places in our world, practicing the Christian faith is so risky that you may very well be arrested or even killed. In our culture however, you probably never think of your Christian faith as something that requires courage. Not many of us consider it a courageous act to gather together in these small groups. We don't generally have to sneak into church on Sunday morning. (Unless we're late.) Even still, it can be a very courageous stance to openly declare yourself as a follower of Jesus. How many of us are willing to risk talking about our faith to certain friends or even hint at a dinner party that you go to church? Even here, in the liberal epicenter of tolerance and open-mindedness, to self-identify as a practicing Christian, is a dicey act of courage.

It is impossible to speak of courage apart from fear. We justifiably fear that most people think of Christians as self-righteous, judgmental, narrow-minded, intolerant, homophobic dogmatists who should be avoided at all costs or summarily dismissed as weak-minded fools who blindly buy a fraudulent crutch-of-faith to prop up the false hope of an afterlife or to sooth some unresolved pain.

When Jesus sent his disciples into the world, he knew it wouldn't be easy. They were going to be attacked and persecuted for following his radical teachings and sharing their faith in the risen Christ. Jesus even told them, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."

As we journey through Lent this year we will unpack the underlying fears that restrain us from living fully in a faith that promises joyous liberation. How might we find the courage to accept reality as it is rather than insist on what we think it should be? Can we summon the boldness to risk our social status when we advocate for justice and social change? How do we stand firm in our faith, believing in a good and just God when uncertainty threatens the future? Where can we locate the confidence to trust in an invisible God, even when the outcome of our fervent prayer is not what we wanted?

Well to start with, it takes courage to even participate in this conversation! I hope and pray that you will discover a new liberation in these circles of trust. Like the season of Lent, for those who dare, this will be an adventurous journey toward honestly claiming your true self at all cost and graciously encouraging others to do the same. To nurture and grow an authentic faith always demands a special courage. That's probably why they call it "a leap of faith." Go boldly along the way. This is a path of freedom.

Risking faith and holding all hope,

Bob

Rev. Robert W. Brown

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opening prayer

courage and compassion

Where does your courage and compassion reside?

May these virtues be enhanced
through your time together.

I pray to have courage and compassion to:

*be faithful to a spiritual practice
even when constant duties lure me away from it*

*resist a response that blames an underprivileged group
for the injustice it experiences*

*persist in clearing my heart of its emotional armor
and tendency toward building walls*

recover self-worth after being maligned by another's harsh treatment

*change my biases, prejudices, and baseless views
about other religious beliefs*

cultivate an open mind and heart toward those I am inclined to quickly dismiss

*go beyond mere acceptance
and enter into relationship with people of diversity*

speak up for those who do not have the power or means to speak for themselves

choose to live with fewer material possessions so others' basic needs are met

enter into dialogue when angry differences and misunderstandings create division

*refuse to harbor thoughts and feelings of revenge and retaliation
toward anyone*

cultivate a spirit of gratitude and eliminate entitlement from my expectations

*accept my deficiencies
and allow them to teach me about being compassionate*

step out of my tight schedule and choose to be a caring presence with someone

*unclench and release my strong opinions
until they drop out of my padlocked grasp*

re-gather my hope for people's well-being when their situations look dismal

focus my wandering mind and listen with full attentiveness to others

stand on a firm foundation of prayer and approach all persons with compassion.



THE COURAGE TO SEEK THE TRUTH

main point

Just as the North Star is needed in order to navigate, truth is the point of reference against which we measure and steer our lives. We can never expect to know the whole Truth, but we should never stop aspiring, because truth is the foundation of trust within any community. In recent times, however, the idea of truth itself has been under assault. People are refusing to submit to truth's authority. As followers of Jesus, we are called to testify to the truth, and he gives us courage to do so.

idea

In the dictionary, "truth" is that which corresponds to real things, events and facts. This is most people's operating definition. In this sense, truth is how things actually are. It's reality. In the Bible, truth has a greater meaning. Without question, biblical truth includes real things, events, facts and all that is re-vealed in nature. But it is more. Theologian John MacArthur defines biblical Truth as whatever "is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God" and also as "God's self-expression". In other words, Truth is what God is and does. (1) As God is eternal, Truth in this biblical sense means something constant and unchangeable, something that can be relied upon now and forever. (2) And as God is good, biblical Truth also includes the realm of "oughts" and "shoulds"- the basic moral law that is declared in scripture and embodied in Christ.

All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.

Psalm 119:160 (ESV)

Truth with a capital T is something that we mortals can only *see as through a glass darkly* (1 Corinthians 13:12.) Even so, we can seek to live in the world of real things, events and facts, and follow the moral law as far as we understand it, even if this is sometimes uncomfortable or challenging. We can aspire to the human virtues related to Truth: honesty, integrity, sincerity, authenticity, reliability, trustworthiness, and faithfulness, as gifts of courage through the Holy Spirit.

*Trust those who seek the truth, but doubt those who say they "have found it."
Andre Gide*

1

How is the idea of Truth different from facts?
From knowledge? From wisdom?

2

How do you determine what is true and what is false
in your own life?
What authorities do you rely on?
How do you know whom to believe?

3

Why should we trust those who seek the truth,
but doubt those who say they've found it?

the importance of truth

Truth is important because it is how we navigate through life. It is also the basis of trust. To live together successfully, we need to know that we are experiencing the same world. Facts and truths establish our shared reality and honesty establishes trust.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

Ephesians 4:25 (ESV)

I'm not upset that you lied to me, I'm upset that from now on I can't believe you.
Friedrich Nietzsche

1

Are there examples in modern life
where increasing complexity is leading people
to experience different realities, speak different jargons
and fail to understand one another?

2

How do people live successfully in community?
Why are virtues like honesty, integrity, sincerity,
authenticity, reliability, trustworthiness, faithfulness
and truthfulness important?

Jesus and truth

Jesus is strongly associated with truth. He embodied the Word of God and was full of Truth:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. - John 1:14 (NIV)

Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' - John 14:6 (NIV)

he spoke the truth

As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God... - John 8:40 (NIV)

he taught the truth

Jesus said, 'if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' - John 8:31-32 (NIV)

he prayed for truth

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. - John 17:17 (NIV)

And at the end, He declared that his purpose in coming to the world was to bear witness to the truth:

For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. - John 18:37 (NRSV)

1

What does it mean to you to say that Jesus is the Truth?

2

Have you had an experience in which the truth set you free?

truth and power

Most people have heard the phrase, “speak truth to power.” It first became known as the title of a 1955 book by the American Friends Service Committee, but the phrase is believed to have been coined by African-American civil rights activist, Bayard Rustin, who said that *the role of a religious group must be to speak truth to power.*

This phrase “speak truth to power” perfectly captures the meaning of Jesus’ encounter with Pontius Pilate. Jesus stands for truth (for Christians this is literal, since he is the embodiment of Truth), and Pilate stands for worldly power.

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?” “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?” Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my

arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” “What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.”

John 18 33-38 (NIV)

1

When Pilate asks, “What is truth?” why do you think he doesn’t wait for an answer?

Why does he find no basis for a charge against Jesus?

2

How do you think this dialogue might have changed had Jesus agreed that he was a king?

3

Why didn’t Jesus organize a force to protect himself?

Does truth have its own kind of power?

How is it different from earthly power?

4

What does the word “testify” mean to you?

Why does Jesus say he came to testify to truth rather than to enforce it?

Believe in truth. To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power, because there is no basis on which to do so. If nothing is true, then all is spectacle. The biggest wallet pays for the most blinding lights.

Timothy Snyder (On Tyranny)



truth in crisis

These days the very idea of truth is under assault. The Oxford Dictionaries 2016 Word-of-the-Year was “post-truth,” which is defined as a circumstance where objective facts are less influential than emotions and personal opinions. In a post-truth world, objective facts haven’t disappeared, it’s just that nobody cares about them or respects their authority.

“Truthiness” is another new word recently added to the modern dictionary. “Truthiness” means “the quality of being felt to be true, even if it’s not actually true.”

Then there’s “fake news” and “alternative facts.” “Fake news” is a term that could be used accurately to describe a news story that is deliberately false or deceptive. But today it is misused as a form of name calling to discredit true stories that one simply doesn’t like. And if you do not want to admit someone lied, you can say they merely had “alternative facts.” When someone says that “truth isn’t truth” and that facts have “alternatives,” they are saying that truth and facts do not have authority. They are saying that we can simply believe whatever we want to believe.

All of these new terms reveal that truth and the very idea of a shared reality is in crisis in our modern world.

Everyone is entitled to his own opinions, but not his own facts.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan

1

How do you distinguish between opinions and facts?

2

Why is it important to live in reality?
Why should we submit to facts?

truth and lies

Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.'

John 8:42-44

Victor Klemperer was a Jewish professor living in Germany at the time of WWII who managed to survive the war. His 1957 book, *The Language of the Third Reich*, testified to his conviction that loss of truth and a language built on falsehood was responsible for that society's descent into evil.

Klemperer identified the ways in which German culture lost connection with reality and truth: First, there was open hostility to facts and evidence. People refused to submit their opinions to verifiable reality. Then there was the constant repetition of slogans, without any critical thinking about their actual meaning. Euphemisms like "removal" instead of "murder" were used, as well as dehumanizing slurs like "scum" for political opponents. Reason itself was blatantly abandoned. Obvious contradictions were thoughtlessly embraced and impossible promises believed. (George Orwell's word for this

was “doublethink” and it has also been called “magical thinking.”) Finally, faith in God or faith in unifying principles and institutions was transferred to blind faith in the all-powerful leader. In such a society nothing is above the leader’s power. The ruler’s ability to lie shamelessly is not felt as wrong, but as proof of his power. He is above reality; nothing constrains him.

A lie told often enough becomes the truth.

Vladimir Lenin

Human greatness does not lie in wealth or power, but in character and goodness.

Anne Frank

1

Why is respect for truth essential to character and goodness?

2

How do you think that society can regain its respect for truth? Does the church play a role in this?

the courage to testify

It takes courage to seek the truth and to face its implications. Truth imposes obligations to change our ways and to act. Often those obligations are hard. As Jennifer Kunst, Ph.D. said in an article in *Psychology Today*:

It takes courage to face the truth because the truth comes with all sorts of anxieties, disappointments, and responsibilities which we would rather avoid. The truth can be painful. It can be challenging. It means we must pull our heads out of the sand and do something to help ourselves—wake up, get up, stand up, pony up, man up, grow up.

This applies to our personal lives and the difficulty we have in seeing the truth about our motivations and behavior, whether we tell the truth or hide from it, and whether we become able to break the power of bad habits and addictions. Courageously facing facts about our individual flaws and accepting responsibility is often hard enough, but with Jesus as our guide, we are also drawn into the public sphere. Jesus did not simply stay home and stay out of trouble. He said, *the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth*. His testimony was a public act.

When our collective life has become disconnected from reality, we are likewise called to testify to truth even though it might mean trouble. We will still need to wake up, get up, stand up, but we will have far less control over the outcome and the risks are often much greater. So where will we find the courage?

It has been said that “courage is fear that has said its prayers.” Knowing that God is Truth and is constant, unchangeable, and with us always is the source of all courage.

When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.

John 16:13-14 (NSRV)

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Ephesians 6:14-17 (NIV)

1

How do you find courage in your life?

2

What readings or practices do you turn to?

the role of the church

So, what is the role of the church with respect to having the courage to seek the truth? You and I are not alone! We are part of a community of seekers. When it comes to discerning the Truth and courageously testifying to it, those in the church call upon the Holy Spirit, lean on each other, and join with allies in other faiths.

And the church helps us to love. As it is said in John 4:18 *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear...* Through love both our courage and our vision will strengthen.

Jesus said, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.* - Luke 10: 27

To love God is to love Truth. To love our neighbors is make our lives a testimony to our best vision of Truth in good faith, honesty and peace. Church is where we can learn to practice these virtues together.

I believe that love and truth are the most powerful forces on Earth. I believe that religion – at its best – shows up in the world as people of faith acting together to manifest love by testifying to truth in service of creating a just world at peace.

Reverend Jim Antal

(Climate Church, Climate World)

1

How can congregations work together to form a shared idea of truth and speak truth to power?

2

Describe a time when being in a community of faith helped you seek the truth with courage.

3

How did being in community accomplish this?

4

What might you do to help someone in or outside the church to courageously seek the truth?

What will you take away from tonight's discussion?

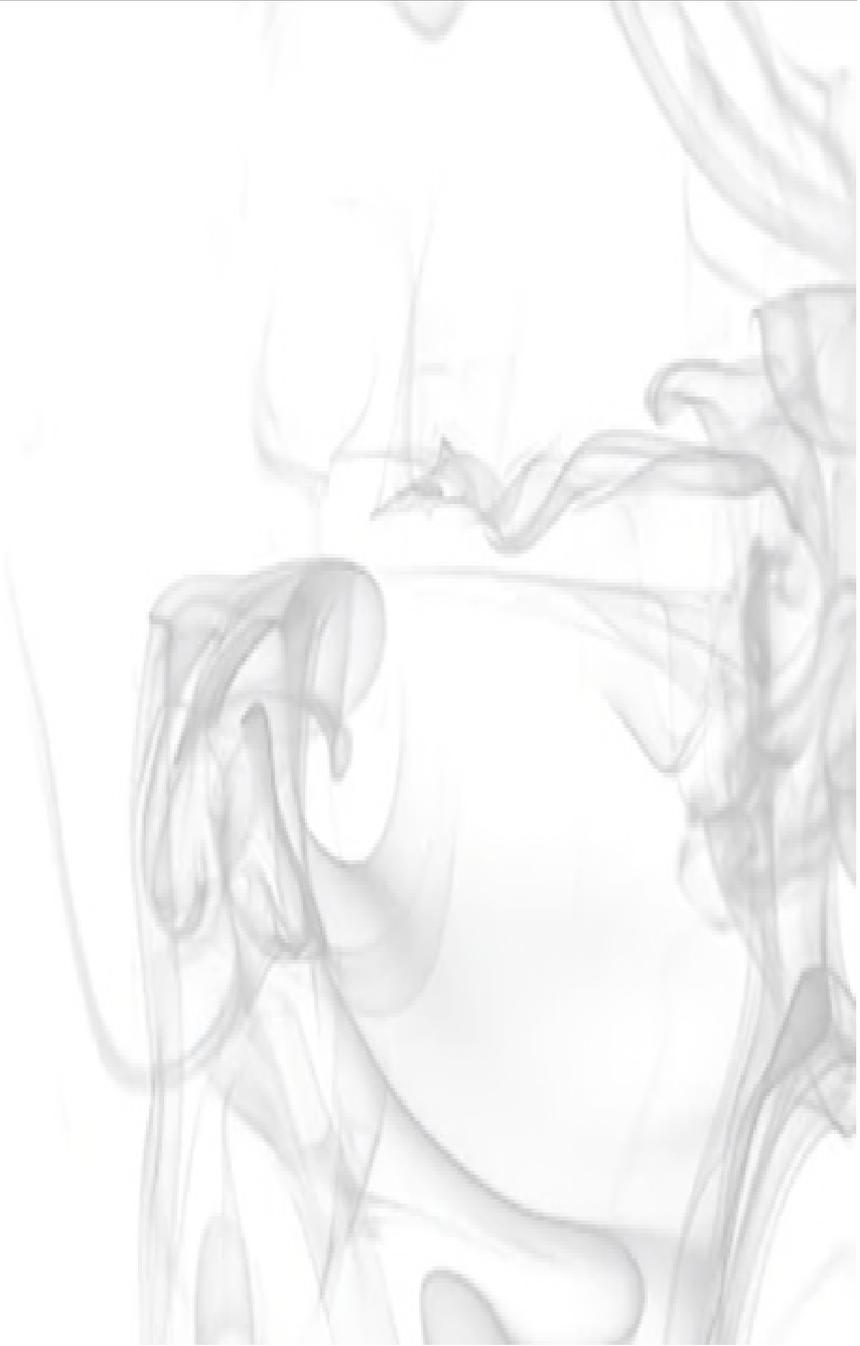
footnotes:

1.

John F. MacArthur, *The Truth War, Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception*, (Thomas Nelson Inc. Nashville TN, 2007) page 2

2.

John C.P. Smith, "Answers in Genesis: Part 1, What is Truth?"
<https://answersingenesis.org/hermeneutics/what-is-truth/>



THE COURAGE TO FACE UNCERTAINTY

main point

Nobody has all the answers and the future is unknown. Within our community of faith we strive to better understand our purpose, our faith and God.

idea

As human beings, we seek answers. Uncertainty, especially when the answer or outcome is important may be stressful and unsettling. For many, neither real life nor the spiritual world is crystal clear and faith itself can generate questions that are not easily answered. The unknown creates excitement such as when we look at the gifts that are under the Christmas tree but it causes anxiety when we await the results of a biopsy or a final exam. As we grow and acquire perspective our view of faith and our belief in God evolves. This does not mean, though, that we will ever have complete understanding of the Divine. God's involvement in human affairs may seem mysterious and the nature of the Almighty might appear ambiguous. As Christians we accommodate the unknown as we strive towards a faithful relationship with God and with each other. The courage to enter into covenant with Jesus and with God helps us live with faith in a world that is fraught with the unknown.

a human response to uncertainty

*I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.
The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.*

Nelson Mandela

You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore.

William Faulkner

1

Do you welcome or retreat from uncertainty?
Is it frightening or exciting?
Does the unknowable create anxiety for you?

2

How do you cope with those things
that are important
but for which there is no clear direction?

3

Can the unknowable be a positive motivator,
or can it foster creativity?
Does your faith make the future more inviting?

4

Has there been a period of uncertainty
when God came to you?
What were the circumstances?
Did this provide courage?

uncertainty and faith

We do not always have complete information in our everyday lives. Incomplete knowledge also marks our understanding of God. Theologians consider the courage to accommodate and perhaps welcome uncertainty as one

component of faith. Consider the following passage by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks:

Suddenly I understood that this is a significant part of what faith is in Judaism: to have the courage to pioneer, to do something new, to take the road less travelled, to venture out into the unknown. That is what Abraham and Sarah had done when they left their land, their home and their father's house. It is what the Israelites did in the days of Moses when they journeyed forth into the wilderness, guided only by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. Faith is precisely the courage to take a risk, knowing that "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me" - Ps. 23:4.

1

Even though there are more Christians
than believers of any other faith
(worldwide somewhat more than two billion),
is courage nonetheless required today to take up the cross?
Do you believe you have successfully
followed the steps of Jesus?

2

The conviction of the martyrs gave them great courage,
and the strength of their belief seems incredible.
Do you see anything comparable today?

3

What was your experience
when you have taken a leap of faith?
Would you recommend this to others?

4

Faith helps us cope with uncertainty.
Do you believe that faith is the courage to take a risk?

Saint Augustine was one of the most influential of all the Church Fathers. His writings have been passed down through the years and in the 4th/5th centuries he helped guide Church doctrine. Augustine's belief in the the authority of Jesus was vigorous.

Do you desire security? Here you have it. The Lord says to you, "I will never abandon you, I will always be with you." If a good man made you such a promise, you would trust him. God makes it, and do you doubt? Do you seek a support more sure than the word of God, which is infallible? Surely, He has made the promise, He has written it, He has pledged His word for it, it is most certain.
- Saint Augustine

And still, Augustine allowed for uncertainty.

Doubt is but another element of faith.

Saint Augustine

As with the scholars of antiquity, modern theologians and church leaders do not have all the answers. This is seen in the following quote from Pope Francis: *In this quest to seek and find God in all things, there is still an area of uncertainty. There must be. If a person says that he met God with total certainty and is not touched by a margin of uncertainty, then this is not good.*

John tells us that Jesus was the Son of God, sent to redeem humanity.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. - John 5:24 (RSV)

Yet, Matthew reports that on the cross even Jesus appeared to have his doubts:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, la'ma sabach-tha'ni?" that is, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' - Matthew 27:46 (RSV)

1

What do these scriptures about Jesus tell us about the nature of uncertainty, doubt and faith?

2

Is the Bible a source of certainty for you? If so, why?

3

Do you feel parts of the bible are open to interpretation?
Does this keep the Bible relevant in changing times and across cultures?

4

Does your faith sometimes lapse? What secures it?

5

Is faith strengthened or weakened by uncertainty and doubt?
Does doubt bring you closer to the truth or is it a dangerous misdirection?
(We spoke of truth last week.)

6

Does certainty provide conviction to take action or does it compel you towards reckless acts?
(A discussion of action is coming up.)

to know and not know God

The Bible provides very many examples of the certainty of God's commitment, presence and love. These passages provide us with support and courage in tough times and when the future is unclear.

Have no anxiety about anything ... And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
- *Philippians 4: 6-7: (RSV)*

There are also passages in the Bible that tell us it is pointless to try and understand God.

Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea...Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable. - *Job 11: 7-9, 36: 26 (RSV)*

1

The author of Job states that God is unknowable.

Do you disagree and feel it is in fact,
possible to truly know God?

2

Does greater understanding bring you closer to God?

You might consider a period of brief quiet reflection after reading the next couple questions.

1

How do you envision God?

Has your view of God changed over time?

2

Do you believe in an ethereal God?

Do you worship an earthy God
who is intimately connected with your affairs?
Is God simultaneously both? Something else?

uncertainty and greatness

Uncertainty need not lead to immobility. Moses and Abraham Lincoln were two of the greatest leaders of all time. Yet both did not know if they measured up and whether they had what it takes to overcome enormous challenges. Shortly after being approached by God, Moses expresses self-doubt and asks, *Who am I that I should go to pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?* Part of God's response, meant to provide courage was, *I will be with you.* Early during the Civil War Lincoln was unsure whether the southern slaves should be freed or if it was most important simply to maintain the unity of the United States. Later, on January 1, 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation Lincoln unambiguously stated *that all persons held as slaves within rebellious states are and henceforth shall be free.* God's words emboldened Moses and New Testament scripture inspired Lincoln, a devout man. Faith and the assurance of God helped overcome doubt and guided these two men to momentous achievements.

1

What do you do to courageously welcome uncertainty?

2

At the time he was called by God, Moses tended sheep for his father-in-law. At least by vocation, Moses was not an obvious choice to lead the people of Israel out of slavery.

Yet, Moses accepted the charge. Have there been times when you have felt called by God to perform a difficult task?

3

During a time of hatred Lincoln beautifully said to the South, *We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.* What echoes of Lincoln's faith do you hear?

a community of seekers

The courage to talk about challenging and interesting ideas such as how we engage the unknown and unknowable, the nature of our Christian faith, and our view of God helps to bring these things into sharper focus and grounds us in a better understanding of some of life's mysteries. The church is a community of seekers. As is evident in our attendance today, all of us feel it is good to consider relevant and important faith-based ideas with each, and not in isolation. We depend upon each other for perspective, insight and support. While we will never fully understand the ways of God, through thoughtful pursuit of the truth we can approach and come increasingly close to a full relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

1

Describe a time when being in a community of faith helped you face uncertainty with courage.

2

How did being in community accomplish this?

3

What might you do to help someone in or outside of the church to find the courage to face uncertainty?

What will you take away from tonight's discussion?

If life were predictable it would cease to be life, and be without flavor.

Eleanor Roosevelt

For my part I know nothing with any certainty, but the sight of the stars makes me dream.

Vincent Van Gogh

THE COURAGE TO CHANGE COURSE

If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.

Lao Tsu

main point

It takes great courage to change the direction of our lives. Changing course involves a turning away from one path and a turning towards a truer path: what we call repentance.

idea

We can often find ourselves stuck in patterns of living that worked for us in the past. We can feel the pull to break out of these habits but sometimes it feels easier to keep doing what we know rather than to step into a new way of being, through the unknown, as we discussed last week. We have a choice to follow the path of least resistance – the path always taken – or choosing a new way of being. It takes great courage to choose to change, to choose that new path.

Repentance is ultimately faith-based change and a worthy spiritual discipline during lent. Many of us have the belief that repentance is only about stepping away from a sin or something that we should not be doing, or giving up something, something we feel guilty about. Looking more closely at the concept, however, repentance is not just a turning away from, but more importantly, a turning toward something else. It is all about that ‘aha’ moment when a new path has been revealed to us. It is about a turning toward. It is about that insight that shows us that we must change – that moment when we realize we must change course in order to be true to ourselves and to our God. It is a step toward life.

The Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Reinhold Niebuhr

If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got.

Henry Ford

1

Why would I want to change?

2

What would drive me to initiate a change?

3

What is in it for me?

John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.

John the Baptist:

Acts 19:4 (NRSV)

I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me...

Matthew 3:11 (NRSV)

Repent, the kingdom of God has come near.

Matthew 3:2 (NRSV)

John's practice of baptism was a symbolic representation of changing one's mind and going in God's direction. The baptism demonstrated a desire for spiritual cleansing and a commitment to follow God's law in anticipation of the arrival of Jesus. The baptism demonstrated a change in direction for each life. For Jesus, baptism represented his commitment to follow God's call, and the descending dove, divine confirmation.

1

What is your experience of repentance
and how do you feel about it?

2

What encourages repentance,
and can we repent on our own?

3

Reflect on your baptism.
Can it give you courage to make a change even now?

4

How can we "prepare the way" for the Lord
today or during Lent?



the story behind amazing grace by John Newton

It often takes more courage to change one's opinion than to stick to it.

Georg C. Lichtenberg

The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers.

M. Scott Peck

I always believed that Amazing Grace, one of the most beloved of hymns, had been written by a slave. That turned out to be far from the truth. It was actually written by a former slave trader, John Newton.

John Newton lived on the sea, starting at the young age of eleven. He gained a reputation for profanity and coarseness even beyond what might be expected of a seaman at that time. He was a slave trader and a nonbeliever. For many decades he did not see anything wrong with the slave trade and his role within the cruel practice.

Then, on March 21, 1748, a fierce north Atlantic storm hit his ship, and for over a week, it almost sank. Newton was lashed to the helm in order to try and keep the ship on course. John Newton marks this day as his conversion to Christianity. He always said of that day: *The Lord sent from on high and delivered me out of deep waters.* In that moment his life was transformed. He eventually left slave trading, took up the cause of abolition and began preaching the Gospel. He wrote many years later that only God's amazing grace could take a coarse, slave-trading sailor and turn him into a follower of Jesus. During his tenure as a preacher he wrote Amazing Grace:

Play and listen to the beginning of *Amazing Grace* as a group.
If the group desires, feel free to sing together.

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.*

1

How do you feel when you hear this song?
How does it impact you?

2

What is its message for you?

3

How is music a commanding force for change?
Can you think of some songs that have served
as the backdrop to social movements
in the United States, giving participants courage?

John Newton's transformation

1

Have you ever experienced a change in view
regarding a certain issue?

If so, how and why did you change your perspective?

2

Have you ever experienced a complete turnabout
in your life?

What were you turning away from and toward?

What was easy and difficult about executing this change?

3

How has faith given you courage to change the direction
of your life? Has the support of other Christians, prayer,
scripture, and/or worship helped?

4

What cause or direction do you feel that God is calling
you to follow now?

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2 Peter 9

Paul's (Saul's) change of course:

Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:13-14

When we least expect it, life sets us a challenge to test our courage and willingness to change.

Paulo Coelho

Saul, in a moment of fear and awe, understood that Jesus was the Messiah and that Saul had helped to murder and imprison innocent people. In that moment Saul's old life was left behind and he began a new life as a follower of Jesus. God's call reached even the hard-hearted Saul.

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Acts 9: 1-2 (NRSV)

And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you.'"

Acts 22: 19-20 (NRSV)

While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon, a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' Then he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. I asked, 'What am I to do Lord?' The Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on to Damascus, and there you will be told everything that has been assigned for you to do.'

Acts 22: 6-10 (NRSV)

Blinded, vulnerable, and confused, Paul was led to Damascus. Ananias, a member of the church, courageously followed the instructions in a vision, and healed Paul. He and the disciples in Damascus cared for Paul and oriented him to the Christian faith. They helped Paul to actually make the change.

1

What could Jesus do through you if you surrendered
as Paul did and listened to his call for your life?

2

Is repentance always sudden and dramatic,
or might it be a process that takes time?

3

Can you be of support to one who is changing course?
How might you help them have courage?

individual change of course

The process of changing course is a good practice during Lent. Lent is about active discipleship, changing course, choosing to follow Jesus, letting go of what hinders us, and making adjustments into new life.

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

Maya Angelou

Anyone can stay the same. It takes courage to change.

John Assaraf

Only I can change my life. No one can do it for me.

Carol Burnett

Please break up into pairs and discuss the following questions:

1

How do you know when it is time for you to change direction?

2

Think of a time where you successfully made a change?

What did you leave behind or let go of in order to make the change?

What were the elements in your success?

3

Think of a change you want to make in your life?

What is holding you back from making this change?

What will you be stepping towards when you make this change?

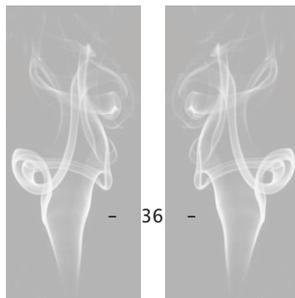
How might you ask the church for assistance?



Man in the Mirror

Michael Jackson

*I'm gonna make a change,
For once I'm my life
It's gonna feel real good,
Gonna make a difference
Gonna make it right
As I, turn up the collar on
My favorite winter coat
This wind is blowing my mind
I see the kids in the streets,
With not enough to eat
Who am I to be blind?
Pretending not to see their needs
A summer disregard,
a broken bottle top
And a one man soul
They follow each other on the wind ya' know
'Cause they got nowhere to go
That's why I want you to know
I'm starting with the man in the mirror
I'm asking him to change his ways
And no message could have been any clearer
If you want to make the world a better place
(If you want to make the world a better place)
Take a look at yourself, and then make a change.*



the role of the community in changing course

Twelve Step recovery programs understand the power of group support for those who are exiting one kind of life for another. They provide an understanding, listening ear and accountability for sobriety. Congregations can be a great help to individuals to find the courage to change course. This occurs through resources of faith in God and through nurturing relationships with others. To serve faithfully and be relevant in its mission, the church itself needs to repent and change. Societal change is a challenge too. Consider, for example, the massive change of mind and action that is required of the public to stop global warming!

1

What repentance may be required of this congregation?

2

Describe a time when being in a small group or a community of faith helped you find the courage to change course.

3

How did being in community accomplish this?

4

What might you do to help someone in or outside the church to change the course of his/her life?

What will you take away from tonight's discussion?

I 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. Do 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.

Romans 12: 1-2 (NRSV)



THE COURAGE TO TAKE ACTION

If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.

Lao Tzu

main point

Our faith, anchored in the teachings of Jesus, offers us examples and reasons to act as Christians to promote social justice, feed the hungry, house the homeless and stand up to evil.

Lent is a good season to develop the courage to take action.

idea

The recipe for growing one's courage to act includes:

spiritual guidance from the Bible, especially from Jesus' ministry

*living and historical examples of Christians
taking a stand against hate and injustice*

and

*finding a community of Christians
with whom you can take courageous action together.*

Howard Thurman, the African American theologian and civil rights activist, might be best known for his work *Jesus and the Disinherited* in 1949. Ten years later he wrote this in his book *Footprints of a Dream*:

The movement of the Spirit of God in the hearts of men and women often calls them to act against the spirit of their times or causes them to anticipate a spirit which is yet in the making. In a moment of dedication they are given wisdom and courage to dare a deed that challenges and to kindle a hope that inspires.

1

What about Thurman's words rings true to you today?

2

What daring deed is the Spirit stirring in you?

biblical roots for finding the courage to act

In chapter nine of the gospel of Luke, Jesus' ministry takes an important turn. He has been preaching, teaching, and healing in the towns and villages, and he has been patiently working with the disciples so that they too can go out in his name. Meanwhile, conflicts with the religious authorities have been mounting, and the political rulers have been keeping an eye on Jesus' actions. It seems that the time was ripe for Jesus to make his way toward Jerusalem, the seat of power and influence. The scripture says that Jesus was determined to take this action:

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem, and he sent messengers ahead of him. - Luke 9:51-52

James, who identifies himself as the writer of the letters in the Book of James, is thought to have been Jesus' brother and was a pastor of the Jerusalem church, where his emphasis was on vital Christianity, characterized by good deeds and a faith that

necessitated action. Here are two passages to read aloud and consider:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. James 2:14-16

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. James 1:22-26

1

Have you even known that the time was right to make a decision and follow through on it, no matter what?

2

Do you agree that "faith without works is dead?" What do you think this phrase means?

3

Have there been times when you couldn't enjoy a luxury (a fancy meal, a vacation) because you knew there were others going without food or a roof?

4

How do we as people of privilege find balance between good works and the "good life"?

5

Can you think of a time when you took a Christian action and you were blessed by the doing?

courage to act in difficult times

When you think of the courage to act, what names come to mind? Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, Malala Yousafzai, Rachel Carson, Nelson Mandela and Henry David Thoreau all have much to teach us. But Bonhoeffer might be the ultimate Christian pacifist-turned-activist for his time.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in 1906 in Breslau, Germany into a large and well-educated, aristocratic family. His father was a psychologist, his mother a teacher, his older brother a famous chemist. At age 14, young Dietrich announced to his family that he wanted to be a theologian. By age 21, he was preaching and writing his dissertation. Too young to have a church, he first continued his studies in the United States but returned home as Hitler rose to power, joining Karl Barth and Martin Neimoller to form the Confessing Church, a religious group that gave its allegiance to Jesus Christ and repudiated Hitler's teachings. By 1937, he had completed *The Cost of Discipleship*, a book that challenged comfortable Christians.

Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. ... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Banned from teaching theology openly, he began instructing pastors in an underground seminary until it was closed by the Nazis. A pacifist until Bonhoeffer realized that passive resistance and moral persuasion were not working, he joined the SS as a double agent and became a part of a plot to overthrow Hitler. He wrote:

We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.

Arrested for helping Jews, he spent two years in prison before being transferred to Flossenberg concentration camp where he was hanged just two weeks before Germany surrendered. His Letters from Prison were published posthumously because courageous and sympathetic guards smuggled them out uncensored. They serve as an incredible map of a man living out his life with courage in the darkest of times.

1

Who are the heroes today
who are driving spikes into the wheels of injustice?

2

Do you believe that when Bonhoeffer chose to die for
or his principles, he died with hope?
If so, what was the nature of that hope?

3

Even if this were on a much smaller scale, is there a part
of you that might look to emulate Bonhoeffer
if circumstances were dire enough? What would it take?
Have you already? (no need to be modest.)

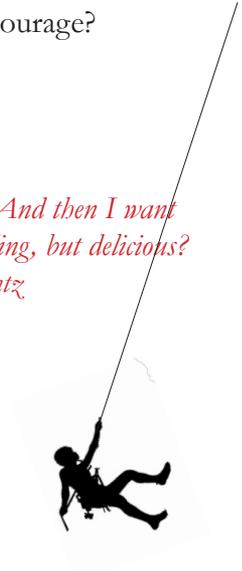
4

How would you look to God and others for courage?

lessons from living in a “faith works” community

I want to possess enough courage to fill a Campbell's soup can. And then I want to use my courage to feed the homeless. Isn't courage not only filling, but delicious?

Jarod Kintz



We are blessed at TriCon by the legacy mission work, by the commitment of our pledge money to mission, and by the volunteer opportunities TriCon offers. None is more beloved than our Youth Group Mission Trips. Each trip is unique, each one has offered youth and adults the opportunity to work side by side with members of communities far away from Concord and to build relationships with them.

The congregation looks forward each year to the Mission Trip dinner and service, during which trippers share stories of their experiences. Gratitude pours out of the participants, who gain wisdom by walking in someone else's shoes. The students are careful to respect the people they meet and appreciate their stories. These "faith works" give birth to our faith by providing us the opportunity to work alongside other Christians and try to practice Jesus' teachings.

If we want to understand the power of mission trips to build an authentic, interactional faith, just ask a mission tripper. Their pure love shines through each year, and these youth have much to teach the rest of us about faith and compassion.

Carly, 2016

I'd like you all to close your eyes and imagine paradise...I don't care what it looks like, I care what it feels like. Because if there's one thing I've learned on these trips, it's that paradise is not a place, it's a feeling. It's love, compassion, it's the absence of outside obligations buzzing into the present, it's the lightless of limitlessness with the exciting weight of challenge. Breathe in that feeling for just a minute. This is what a mission trip feels like. These trips remind me that paradise, the Kingdom of Heaven, is always right here right now if we only let ourselves enter into it. This is why I chose year after year to follow wherever TriCon calls me to go and to serve with these people and the incredible people we meet. To come in contact with others' lives and leave knowing both their lives and our own have just gotten

a little bit better. To rediscover that when people want to do something, we will get it done. That feeling of paradise... Together, we are capable of so much more than we could ever imagine.

Gillian, 2016

Mission trips have taught me a truer meaning of happiness. Through the lives of the people we've met, I have seen a light that no darkness could ever extinguish. I have learned that true happiness is carried in your soul. On my journeys to Kentucky, to New Mexico, to Jamaica, and finally to West Virginia, I have met people who, by our standards, have nothing, but who carry love in their souls. And I have met people who have everything, but seem to carry monsters in their souls; sometimes I carry them myself. Mission trips have taught me to let go, and to carry love instead.

Cam, 2015

Each night in New Mexico, we would gather for an evening worship service after dinner. One prominent feature of these services was the "Yay God" section, in which one member of each care group would share a moment in which his or her group experienced God's presence that day. The second time I experienced God on the mission trip was on Wednesday. Each day we broke at noon in order to eat the brown bag lunches we had packed that morning. That day, however, at lunch we were informed that the family we had been working for had prepared a traditional Navajo meal for us to have for lunch – a meal that we later learned cost upwards of \$13, and which they, an absolutely destitute family, had cooked for every volunteer group. By giving to us so generously and freely, the family touched us all deeply, and through their kindness, I saw God.

Grace, 2016

I've talked to people before who don't believe in the idea of "service trips" for various reasons. But let me say this, the reason I go on these trips is not to paint a bedroom. It's not to insulate an attic. Anyone can do that. It is to know and experience humanity, all forms of it. It is to be reminded of all that I have that I often take for granted. And most importantly, it is

to experience these instances of love and connection and to come back home and spread these feelings forward, to start my own ripple effect of kindness and joy, if you will.

1

Considering Carly's view of paradise, can you share a time where you have acted and felt the love, connections, and absence of outside obligations?

2

What do you think creates the "true happiness" that these mission trippers experience? Have you experienced it working within our church community? If so, give an example.

3

Cam saw God working through a family who shared everything they had with the volunteers. Share a "Yay God" moment you have experienced.

4

Grace speaks about the "ripple effect." How do you see the ripple effect from actions that TriCon has taken?

5

Do you think the mission trips have made our youth and by connection the adults in our community more willing to take courageous action?

One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.

Proverbs 11:24-25

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

James 1:22

But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works,” and I will show you my faith by my works.

James 2:18

what action are you being called to take?

First, a few steps of discernment:

Think about the current context and the needs that you see around you. Is there one that tugs at your heart?

Contemplate the gifts and resources that you or the congregation has that could be put to use to meet the needs you see.

Imagine an action you might take to use those resources to meet the need you identified

Ask what makes you come alive and then go do it.

Howard Thurman

1

What fear or hurdle stands in your way?

Talk it over with your group. Is there a way that you might support each other or act together?

2

Make a simple plan, and when you follow through and finish the action, celebrate!

I now see how gifts like courage, compassion, and connection only work when they are exercised. Every day.

Brene Brown



THE COURAGE TO TRUST

main point

Trust is the foundational building block on which to build an authentic, active and resilient faith in the living God.

idea

Developing the courage to completely trust in a loving God who is entirely reliable is the essential spark that ignites a fiery hope that can never be extinguished. Fear, anxiety and uncertainty are neutralized in its flame. Genuine faith is purified from the toxins of abstract theologies and weak religiosity or the deceptive pursuit of spiritual perfectionism. The one who risks trusting wholly in God is truly liberated, no longer imprisoned by the insatiable, false pursuit of security and safety as the prerequisite of happiness.

faith + hope = trust

We tend to think of knowledge as solely an intellectual pursuit. From our earliest days until now, it is our minds that develop and shape our understanding of what is true and how we perceive reality. We believe that we gain understanding, find meaning and define truth exclusively through detached, rational, intellectual pursuits. However, prior to modernity, knowledge was primarily thought to be apprehended more through our emotional experiences. It was the feelings that faith and love evoked that validated one's perception and orientated their reality. How the heart felt primarily guided the way a mind understood. It was commonly accepted that true knowledge and wisdom was derived primarily from emotional experiences with a living God. The stories and poetry found in Hebrew and Christian scriptures confirmed one's personal experience of a God who was utterly reliable.

People of faith know that the mind alone can never satisfactorily rationalize or fully explain what is mystical. Christian faith always begins with some kind of inexplicable, personal experience that affirms Jesus' divinity. It's a feeling more than an understanding. There is an emotional assurance that mysteriously rises up from the depths of your innermost being. This is a faith that defies tidy logical explanation and transcends even religious dogma, doctrine, orthodoxy or theology. To possess this personal, experiential faith is to know that God is the ever-present and active energy *in which we live and move and have our being.* (Acts 17:28) And also, to thoroughly believe that God's single desire is for you and all humanity to thrive in the fullness of this life.

This kind of experiential faith is the fuel that powers a turbo-charged hope, a hope that is completely confident in God's reliability and purpose, even when we can not understand it. Faith and hope are the essential elements that formulate an unwavering trust. Trust in God becomes more than wishful

thinking. It is in a definitive sense that, in any situation and every condition, God is with you and for you and will, eventually, always see you through. When life begins to unravel and anxiety unleashes our worst fears, trust is what summons the uncommon courage to take the next right step. Trust believes that even our missteps will be used to redeem us. Trust in a benevolent universe created by a loving God who sees you as precious is the entire orientation of any practicing Christian.

Thus says the Lord: Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

To have faith requires courage, the ability to take a risk, the readiness even to accept pain and disappointment. Whoever insists on safety and security as primary conditions of life cannot have faith; whoever shuts himself off in a system of defense, where distance and possession are his means of security, makes himself a prisoner. To be loved, and to love, need courage, the courage to judge certain values as of ultimate concern – and to take the jump and to stake everything on these values.

Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving

1

Is it necessary to check your mind out
in order to trust God with your heart?

2

Do you view the intellect as separate from emotion
or are they two sides of the same coin?

3

What emotional experience have you had
that was undeniably true but couldn't be explained?

4

Why do you believe that God is reliable, or why not?

5

What role does your intended outcome play
in your ability to trust in God?

6

Talk about a time you had to rethink your idea
about God's reliability.

7

In what do you trust most?

the tenacity of Job

Visiting a church in L.A., I met an elderly woman named Maria. As we were chatting, she told me an amazing story about how she fled her beloved Cuba shortly after the Castro led revolution in 1959. The day after the overthrow, Maria discovered all her assets and accounts had been frozen. The bank where she worked in middle management had been seized and shut down. Unemployed and penniless, she was forced to sell her gleaming red Cadillac convertible for next to nothing. Being a hot-blooded, independent woman, she paid a visit to the local authorities to petition for the release her funds. Less than 10 minutes later, while walking home, Maria was arrested on the street as if she just robbed a 7-Eleven and immediately imprisoned. The very next day the state seized her home and confiscated all her possessions. In less than three months Maria spiraled from a comfortably affluent, joyously predictable life to becoming homeless, penniless and totally alone in a window-less jail cell. Day by day her hope for rescue faded to the point where she could no longer even imagine a future. Then without warning, after several solitary months of unexplained incarceration she was inexplicably released! Somehow, in the weeks that followed, she found her way to Florida and began to rebuild, eventually gaining U.S. citizenship.

Maria was remarkably calm and peaceful as she told me her story. She betrayed not the least regret or resentment for what

had been done to her. I couldn't help but notice the brilliantly sparkling cross she wore prominently around her neck. She also clutched her well-worn Bible in both hands. I was compelled to ask her how it was that she still came to church and worshiped God. *Didn't you feel that God abandoned you in your time of grave need?* I asked. *You lost all that you thought defined your life. You were up against an insurmountable injustice and any hope of a positive outcome had vanished!* For a long moment, Maria silently looked down at her Bible and gently rocked back and forth. Slowly she looked back up at me. With tear-filled eyes she quietly said these words that I will never forget. *God's presence was never more real than in that lonely cell. After a while, nothing what-so-ever mattered except Jesus sitting with me. Before that experience, I could never have imagined that Jesus was all I needed until Jesus was all I had left.*

Like Job, who lost his family, all his property and finally even his health, Maria found that she could join that broken man and defiantly proclaim, *As for me, I know that my redeemer lives.* - Job 19:25 I don't think calamity and innocent suffering is a prerequisite to attaining an uncompromising trust in God, but these kinds of stories speak of a heroic courage that is released by an unwavering trust. Even when your back is against the wall, God will be your refuge and rescue.

1

What have you lost
that challenged your ability to trust in God?

2

What do you make of Maria's claim that Jesus
was all she needed when Jesus was all she had left?

3

Tell your story of a leap of faith that you once took.

Was it forced on you or did you choose it?

How did it end up?

the courage to trust

The first King of Israel, David, was no stranger to insurmountable obstacles. From the time he slew Goliath with a sling-shot, until his dying day, he was continually battling powerful adversaries, running from life-threatening dangers and sometimes suffering the grave consequences of poor moral choices.

Yet, at every turn, he would cry out to his God like this:

In you, O Lord, I take refuge;

let me never be put to shame.

In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;

incline your ear to me and save me.

Be to me a rock of refuge,

a strong fortress, to save me,

for you are my rock and my fortress.

Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,

from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.

For you, O Lord, are my hope,

my trust, O Lord, from my youth.

Upon you I have leaned from my birth;

it was you who took me from my mother's womb.

My praise is continually of you.

Psalm 76:1-6

We don't know what Jesus actually knew when he walked into Jerusalem except what everyone else knew. It wouldn't be good. The politically powerful temple leaders were enraged and threatened by his influence and radical teaching. Israel's Roman occupiers were merciless when it came to enforcing strict order in the city. It was unlikely that he didn't know that a violent end was guaranteed. Yet Jesus trusted God beyond his own security, honor, or vain attempts to preserve any power or success. Speaking with his disciples the night before he was killed, Jesus said to them, *Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me.* - *John 14:1* For Jesus, ALL things were in God's loving hands. He trusted completely that God will always pull us through. Relying totally on that trust, he bet his life!

The shadow of that cross continues to fall across every life at one time or another. Dreams are dashed or we crash in utter failure. Betrayals harden our heart, making love an impossible risk. Past rejections, fear of abandonment, or even extended unemployment can undermine our sense of self-worth. Sometimes we are crushed by the loss of a loved one. Unresolved grief often leads to isolation, loneliness and self-pity. Before long we become deaf to anything but our own pain. This idea of trusting in a loving God feels like another betrayal or worse, a cruel joke.

Trust does not resolve our confusion, illuminate the darkness, vanquish uncertainty, and redeem the times. Our trust does not bring final clarity on this earth. It does not still the chaos or dull the pain or provide a crutch. When all else is unclear, the heart of trust says, as Jesus did on the cross, 'Into your hands I commit my spirit.'

Luke 23:46 - Brennan Manning



1

What do you risk
when you completely surrender to trust?

2

Have you ever had your trust betrayed?
How was it resolved?

3

Is it possible that trust might ignite an uncommon courage?

4

How would your day to day life be different
if you truly trusted God?

5

How can we prepare ourselves to trust in God
even at our lowest point?

and finally - - -

the gospel according to Etta James

The hit song, *Trust in Me*, is arguably one of the greatest love songs ever recorded. Reaching out and pleading to her beloved, Etta James bears her soul wide open. Imagine, in the context of tonight's conversation, that Etta is the voice of God pleading with you. *How will you respond?*

*Trust in me in all you do
Have the faith I have in you
Love will see us through, if only you trust in me
Why don't you, you trust me?*

*Come to me when things go wrong
Cling to me daddy, and I'll be strong
We can get along, we can get along
Oh if only you trust in me*

*While there's a moon, a moon up high
While there are birds, birds to fly
While there is you, a you and I
I can be sure that I love you....oh....*

*Stand beside me, stand beside me all the while
Come on daddy face the future, why don't you smile?
Trust in me, and I'll be worthy of youoh yeah, yeah*

*Why don't you trust in me in all you do?
Have the faith that I... I have in you
Oh And love will see us through
If only you trust in me.*



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