

Study and Leader's Guide for COURAGE: PERSEVERING IN THE FACE OF FEAR (JON JOHNSTON)

A Word to the Leader

The questions and assignments found here are intended for small-group study. They are meant to serve as a resource for the group leader.

You'll soon recognize the active nature of these study sections. The more you give, the more you'll get. Each section contains material designed to complement and enhance your understanding of the chapters. Feel free to pick and choose from the various suggestions. If something is not appropriate for your group, perhaps you could develop a more pertinent task or question.

Please note that some of the study sections require homework assignments—so be sure to look at the material a week ahead.

Your group success depends on participation and preparation. Members must faithfully read the assigned chapters and be ready to interact with others. The leader must always be a step ahead of the group. Read, study, and prepare in advance. With these individual and corporate components in place, you'll be enabled to discover the meaning of courage and begin championing the causes that are near and dear to the heart of God.

CHAPTER 1

1. The author writes that “no word excites and motivates the human spirit more than *courage*.” Recall an incident in your life when you exhibited courage or saw it demonstrated in a significant way by another person. Describe the situation to others in your small group. Based on these various stories, try to come to a consensus on a working definition of *courage*.

2. We all need daily doses of encouragement—“courage transfusions.” Examine the list below, and add your own suggestions for encouraging one another. Try to consider “courage transfusions” that would be particularly applicable to the significant others in your world: coworkers, friends, spouse, children.

- Daily Bible reading
- _____
- Thank-you notes
- _____

- Giving compliments
- _____
- Conflict resolution
- _____

3. How would you rate your faithfulness as a Christian on a scale in which 1 = wimpy and 10 = courageous? Undoubtedly many of us would take the safe way out and rate ourselves a 5 to both save face and remain humble. However, courage at the very least means a commitment to faithfully live in light of God’s commands. Whatever your score, commit yourself again to living courageously for the Lord.

4. Pray together as a group, asking God for a “courage transfusion” as you read and study this book together and seek to practice its implications.

CHAPTER 2

1. In this chapter’s opening illustration, the general’s “retreating to establish a better position” exemplified a negative battle strategy. However, in the battle of life, a strategy of retreat to regain composure, meditate, and plan for the future can be an effective resource. Rate yourself in the following categories on the life inventory scale:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| ● Work | ● Church |
| ● Personal life | ● Recreation |
| ● Family life | ● Spiritual growth |

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Dissatisfied Satisfied

Where your score should be higher, consider how a dose of courage might help you improve.

2. Reexamine the subsection “A Quality That Distinguishes.” Courage should not be confused with

- a. impulsive reaction
- b. indifference to fear, pain, or stress
- c. heroic action

Can you think of examples of times you’ve seen courage misunderstood—when someone’s reaction, indifference, or action was wrongly viewed as admirable? Share them with the group.

3. Now that you’ve read chapter 2, reconsider your discussion and definitions from chapter 1, question 1. Examine them in light of the author’s “Courage is” section in chapter 2. Maybe you’ll surprise yourself; courage is not simply displayed in overt and explicit ways but sometimes evidenced in the simple and implicit. Share an event from the past week when you demonstrated courage.

CHAPTER 3

1. In this chapter the author describes four forms of courage: (1) fortitude, (2) bravery, (3) valor, and (4) resoluteness. Write down the author's definitions, and discuss the different aspects of courage they encompass.

2. Both Psalms 27 and 31, prayers for deliverance written by David, end with the plea "be of good courage" (KJV). Read these psalms out loud, discuss the unique problems David was facing in each situation, and focus on how his response of courage enabled him to endure the crises.

3. If you feel ambitious, read Stephen Crane's novel *The Red Badge of Courage*. Although Crane was a naturalist, the soldier in the story emerges as a sort of hero gaining a sense of self-confidence. Discuss the paths taken by the protagonist in his journey of self-revelation.

4. Divide your group into twos. Have each individual pray for the other, focusing particularly on an area in which he or she needs to show courage in the coming week.

CHAPTER 4

1. Have your group read aloud the Beatitudes of Jesus (Matt. 5:3-12). Each of the eight Beatitudes has both a present and future fulfillment. Discuss how courage plays a role in the nurture and practice of each of these spiritual ideals. Give each member a piece of paper on which to complete his or her own personal beatitude (below) on courage, and ask members to share their responses with the group.

Blessed are the courageous, for

2. If Jesus is our "holy Knight" whose courage (in the form of chivalry) transcends the four types discussed in

chapter 3, what was His highest expression of that chivalry? Discuss how we may imitate His holy example of sacrificial living in our everyday lives.

3. Reflecting on examples of Jesus' ministry described in this chapter as well as in the Gospels, have each member share a favorite incident from the life of Christ when He exhibited courage.

4. G. K. Chesterton wrote, "Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live, taking the form of a readiness to die." Discuss this two-sided nature of courage with the group, and have members verbalize an area in which they need to take a stand for courage.

CHAPTER 5

1. Assign each group member one chapter in John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage*. Have the individuals report back to the group on the contents of the chapters and any new insights into courage they may have gained.

2. God's people have always been populated with "significant insignificants," as evidenced by the lives of Rahab and Ananias. Consider the "significant insignificants" in your local church or fellowship. Share about the job or ministries these people perform and the effect they have on the people around them.

3. Take time to read the stories of the other "significant insignificants" mentioned in this chapter:

- Nathan
- Ruth
- Caleb
- Mordecai
- Joseph
- The widow
- Lydia
- Barnabas

Discuss how the actions of these biblical characters evidenced courage.

4. Many significant parachurch ministries demonstrate courage by ministering in quiet (seemingly insignificant) and nondescript fashion. Select one of these socially oriented organizations—World Vision, Samaritan's Purse, Compassion International, World Relief—learn about the nature of their ministry, and finally, put your pocketbook where your study is: Take a special collection among group members, and send the funds to your selected group.

5. "We'll never have ideal conditions that will make Christian courage seem attractive, easy, or convenient. There's always a heavy price to pay—a cross to bear."

Discuss the implications of the author's thesis. Are you willing to commit to courage?

CHAPTER 6

1. Examine three meanings for *courage* found in the New Testament and described in chapter 6: (1) courage to speak, (2) courage to do, and (3) courage to be. Discuss the various nuances of the word *courage* that you discover.

2. Invite someone whose job daily calls for courage—such as a fireman or policeman—to address your group on the topic of courage in the workplace. Afterward, ask questions of the guest, reflecting on what you've learned about courage thus far.

3. Recall the biblical principles of courage mentioned in this chapter:

- (1) remembering God's victory in the past
- (2) affirming God
- (3) possessing a stalwart faith

(4) shaping by trial and persecution

(5) becoming adverse to the spotlight

Have each member share an incident of courage from his or her life that mirrors one of these biblical principles.

4. All of us show courage, at least part of the time. The trick is to learn to endure and persevere in courage. The author offers eight reasons why we frequently shy away from courage. Examine the list, and have each member choose one or two of the reasons with the group, and have each write a private prayer to God asking for help in overcoming his or her fears.

- fear
- authority figure
- "sheep complex"
- "psychic overload"
- crisis motivation
- "shovelers"
- "spectator-itus"
- "heart void"

CHAPTER 7

1. Consider the quotation from James Dobson. Are things really getting worse in our society? Has there been a loss of integrity? Cite some examples from your own experience.
2. What does the Bible say about *integrity*? Look up the word in a Bible concordance. Review the passages in which the word is mentioned, and discuss its meaning in context.
3. Study the six stages of moral development as noted by Lawrence Kohlberg. Using his model, have members reflect on a recent important decision that they made. What developmental stage was reflected in their decision-making process? Discuss the implications of Kohlberg's insights for those seeking to develop courage.
4. Create a role play for the group. Center it on a difficult ethical decision that must be made. Have members brainstorm for a possible solution to the dilemma. Work to come to a consensus on the problem. After doing so, look at Kohlberg's preconventional, conventional, and postconventional development stages. Were any of them reflected in the decision-making process?
5. Read the poem "Myself" out loud. Have group members commit to reading the poem once a day for the following week as an exercise in "courage transfusion."
6. Have members discuss the three things integrity can do for us.
7. Lewis B. Smedes writes, "No wrong choice . . . can persuade God to love you less. Believe this, and you will have new courage to make choices, even when you are not sure they [are] the right ones." Can members accept Smedes's claim? Have them write down a choice (commitment) in a letter to God, address it to themselves, and give it to the leader. In three months the leader will send out the letters.

CHAPTER 8

1. *a.* Consider your relationships at work, home, or school. Do you display compassion in these varied areas of your life?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Never				Sometimes					Always

- b.* To what extent does your score indicate that your "compassion quotient" is deficient?

- c.* Discuss as a group steps you might take to begin exhibiting compassion in your lives. Plan strategies for raising your "compassion quotient."

2. Look up the following Bible verses. Assign one verse

each to three group members, and have them explain its relevancy to the topic of compassion.

- Neh. 9:17
- 1 Pet. 3:8
- Col. 3:12

3. Review the story of Ted Stallard, whose life was touched by the caring attitude of Miss Thompson. Have participants think about influential people from their pasts—perhaps a teacher, roommate, minister, or other friend. Have you ever taken the time to thank that person? Encourage them to contact (by letter or phone) this person from the past and thank him or her for the inspiration and caring he or she provided.

CHAPTER 9

1. A big part of developing courage is learning to take risks. Yet many of us are seemingly paralyzed by “the spoilers”—attitudes that inhibit thinking. Have the group examine the 10 “mental locks,” and share which of these limit their potential for risk taking at work, home, and in the Church. Consider the roots of these limiting factors. Keep in mind: “Doubt is *never* a bad starting point if we’re not content to remain there.”
2. Review the list of biblical heroes who were world-class doubters but who went on to become courageous venturers. While you consider their stories, try to recall other heroes of the faith who had their moments of doubt but went on to take great risks for God—people such as Peter and Paul. Have members write key characteristics in the lives of these men and women of faith.
3. If we’re to learn to be courageous by taking risks, we must learn to dream good dreams. Using the author’s

paraphrase of Phil. 4:8, have group members plug in the people, ideas, and dreams they identify with when meditating on this passage: “Whatever is *true*, whatever is *noble*, whatever is *right*, whatever is *pure*, whatever is *lovely*, whatever is *admirable*—we will *dream* on these things.”

4. How can we begin to take risks? Examine the suggestions in this chapter. How can members add to that list? Have them look at their responses to question 3. Are they taking any risks with these people, ideas, and dreams that they hold so dear? If not, here’s an opportunity to begin.
5. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18, KJV). With this passage in mind, divide the group into pairs, and have them commit one on one to a risk-taking (dream) activity this next week.

CHAPTER 10

1. The cost of courage is frequently segregation; the result of taking a stand is often solitude. This was certainly evident in the lives of the various biblical leaders mentioned in this chapter. But what about the 20th century? Have a group member research the life and death of German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred under the rule of Adolf Hitler during World War II, and report back to the group.
2. Look on the world landscape today. Do you see other examples of men and women taking courageous stands because of their faith? Who are they, and what are they doing?
3. Today’s courageous Christian must have “sufficient inner resources to stand alone—even to face fierce opposition—in obeying the Lord.” Talk about these inner resources and how we can develop them in one another.

4. Examine and discuss the three attitudes for survival we all need in our S.O.S. kits:

- We must always remember that ours is a chosen loneliness.
- We must accept our loneliness without “excess baggage.”
- As our courage is God’s gift, so our loneliness is borne by His grace.

Have the group share which of these attitudes they have the most difficult time accepting/understanding.

5. Pair off into prayer partners, and have members pray for the courage to stand alone when God calls for such a commitment.

CHAPTER 11

1. Christian courage requires great commitment. It's evidenced by our relationships to (1) a Person, (2) people, and (3) principles. Take time to examine these three areas of your life. If you're truly serious about them, then this should be expressed regularly. Answer the following questions with this in mind:

- Do you daily spend a "quiet time" with God?
- Do you faithfully set aside "quality time" to spend with family, coworkers, and friends?
- Do you regularly practice a "quiz time" to examine yourself and the commitments you hold dear?

2. Look at 1 Thess. 5:11-18. Turn to the "checklist for encouragers" in this chapter. Have the group go through the 13 examples in the checklist, attaching the names of people, where appropriate, whom they can involve in

the suggested application. Have members make a list of these people, and commit them to prayer in the coming week, asking God for the opportunity to encourage them.

3. The chapter makes a strong case for convictions. Courageous Christians will express their commitment to God by the convictions they hold and practice. The author suggests several of his personal convictions. Go around the group, having participants share their personal convictions and explain why they're important to them. How do individuals stand up for these beliefs?

4. Have the group consider all they've learned in their study so far. How does the call of Christ affect your commitments to courage? If you're unhappy about this area of your life, what must you do to renew your commitments to the Lord and His people?

CHAPTER 12

1. Divide the group into two: have one group discuss blind loyalty and the other one convinced loyalty. Brainstorm for examples from the lives of group members. Have the two groups come together and explain their discoveries.

2. Review the subsection "Fool's Gold." The author mentions job, family, and money as primary loyalty areas. Consider these three along with others mentioned below. What are some kinds of fool's gold that many of us grasp for? Have the group place a check beside areas of temptation, and discuss them.

Job	___	Celebrities	___	Home	___
Family	___	Nature	___	Sports	___
Money	___	Hobbies	___	Cars	___
Friends	___	Service clubs	___	Food	___

3. Have the group pair off and share responses to the following questions.

- What does loyalty mean to you?
- What is the price of loyalty?
- How can Christians show loyalty in this generation?

4. "Perhaps it's under conditions of persecution that we achieve our closest intimacy with, and greatest loyalty to, the Savior." Have group members reflect on the author's statement and write down a time in their lives when they felt a special intimacy with the Lord. Then discuss as a group what fostered this intimacy. Was it the result of persecution, suffering, or something else?

5. Pair the members off again, and have each group of two pledge an oath of loyalty to one another. This loyalty oath may be expressed in (a) a commitment to regularly pray for the other person, (b) a promise to help another with a task, or (c) a pledge to perform some Christian service together.

A PARTING WORD

1. Read and reflect as a group on the following prayer penned by Reinhold Niebuhr. You may be familiar with it already, but what new insight do you bring to understanding it after your study on courage?

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

2. The author closes with the challenge of a critical choice we must make. Will we be sedentary “settler” believers? Or will we be courageous “pioneer” Christians? Ask individuals what their decision will be.

3. As a group, have members share the benefits they gleaned from this book and study. Write them on a chalkboard or overhead transparency.

4. Conclude with a time of corporate prayer and encouragement. Use it as an opportunity for a “courage transfusion.”

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