

An abstract, vibrant painting with a mix of colors including yellow, orange, red, green, blue, and purple. The brushstrokes are thick and expressive, creating a sense of movement and energy. The text 'UNCOMMON COURAGE' is overlaid on the center of the image. 'UNCOMMON' is in a bold, black, sans-serif font within a yellow rectangular box. 'COURAGE' is in a white, hand-drawn, brush-stroke font below it.

UNCOMMON

COURAGE

This Journal Belongs to:

If Found, Please Return To:

LET THE JOURNEY BEGIN

I'm honored that you have joined me for our 21 days of prayer and fasting as we begin this new year together. It all started with prayer! That moment when 120 believers gathered together after they heard the compelling words of Jesus to be witnesses to the ends of the world, the first thing they did was pray! The story of Renovation Church was birthed through prayer walks around Topsail High School of what could be. From the very beginning, prayer has been at the core of who we are as a church family. We are a church that believes in the power of prayer, which is why every year we collectively take time as a faith community to pray and fast together, in community with each other!

It's a moment for us to posture our hearts to be fully aware of the things that are important to God so that we become more and more like Jesus through seeking after the heart of our heavenly Father! Time after time we see this example in the life of Jesus. He would empty himself as he served people, and then he would withdraw by himself in prayer, giving him all that He needed to serve the Father through serving people!

I believe what God has for us to accomplish in reaching every, man, women, and child will only be accomplished through prayer! My prayer is that from this season of prayer and fasting we would move into 2023 with UNCOMMON COURAGE! I fully believe that for us to accomplish the mission and vision of reaching every man, women, and child, it is going to require courageous faith—a faith journey possibly like never before as we say yes to all God has for Renovation Church!

Don't miss this collective season of prayer and fasting for the things God wants to accomplish in and through our lives as we serve Jesus faithfully in 2023! I believe there's no better time than now to have a fresh start, and I'd love to invite you to participate in 21 days of prayer and fasting at any time. You can find out more about prayer and fasting by visiting **www.renochurch.org/21days**.

May God bless our new year as we live out UNCOMMON COURAGE!

Pastor Jonathan Cockrell

How to S.O.A.P.

Over the next 21 days we will be studying *Uncommon Courage* through the lens of various Bible characters. This journal is designed to help you dig into these stories and truly begin to embody them day to day. One of the most impactful ways we can do this is by studying Scripture. To help us with this practically, we will be using the S.O.A.P. method of Bible study.

S - Scripture

Write out the Scripture and read it two or three times slowly.

O - Observation

Write down what stands out to you in the Scripture.

A - Application

Write down the implications of the Scripture for your life and how you can apply it.

P - Prayer

Ask God to help you implement truth from his Word into your life.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING

Ever feel overloaded with information but lacking in transformation? It's time to move what we know in our heads to our hearts through a dedicated season of Prayer and Fasting. Join us for 21 Days of Prayer & Fasting and experience a spiritual breakthrough in your walk with Jesus.

21 Days of Prayer & Fasting is a time where we intentionally seek God every day in prayer as we believe for Him to move in powerful ways.

The goal of fasting is to draw nearer to God. Biblical fasting always has to do with eliminating distractions for a spiritual purpose; it hits the reset button of our soul and renews us from the inside out! It also enables us to celebrate the goodness and mercy of God and prepares our hearts for all of the good things God desires to bring into our lives. Remember, your personal fast should present a level of challenge, but it is very important to know your own body, your options, and, most importantly, to seek God in prayer and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do.

TYPES OF FASTS

COMPLETE FAST

This fast calls for drinking only liquids, typically water with light juices as an option.

PARTIAL FAST

This fast is sometimes called the Jewish Fast and involves abstaining from eating any types of food in the morning and afternoon. This can either correlate to specific times of the day, such as 6:00 am to 3:00 pm, or from sunup to sundown.

SELECTIVE FAST

This type of fast involves removing certain elements from a diet. One example of a selective fast is the Daniel Fast, during which you remove meat, sweets, or bread from your diet and consume water and juice for fluids and fruits and vegetables for food.

MEDIA FAST

This fast is common for those who do not have much experience fasting foods. Someone might select to abstain from using social media or watching television for the duration of the fast—and then choosing how to carefully bring that element back into their life in an orderly fashion.

DAY ONE

DATE:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because the joy awaiting Him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame..." Hebrews 12:1-2b, NLT

JESUS, THE PERFECTOR OF OUR COURAGE



We don't walk this life alone. There is no doubt the enemy of our souls would like us to believe our struggle is unique, unseen, and unknown by any other person. In isolation, fear creeps in, freezing our wills and causing us to doubt. Take heart! Before us have walked great men and women of faith—above all, Jesus Christ, the perfecter of this faith.

Perhaps the best example, when considering the human courage necessary for Jesus to complete His earthly mission, is found in the story of his desperation in the Garden of Gethsemane the night he was arrested. Jesus wrestled and contemplated the task that was set before Him. Has there ever been an act of obedience requiring more courage than to take on the sins of humanity, past, present, and future? And yet, even in all this distress, all this anguish, the cry of Jesus' prayer was, "Not my will but yours be done."

How can we follow in Jesus' example? He gives us a hint in Mark 14:38 when he challenges Peter, James, and John, who had fallen asleep rather than praying with their Rabbi, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Jesus acknowledged the weakness of His own flesh, but even in His sorrow, His trouble, His grief and distress, He declared, "Not my will but yours be done."

Equip yourself today by declaring, "Not my will but yours be done." Repeat it often until it is the cry of your heart in all things.

DAY TWO

DATE:

"Some time later, the Lord spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great.'" Genesis 15:1, NLT

COURAGE TO BELIEVE



At times, courage in the face of adversity looks like taking two steps forward, one step back. Consider Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel. In Genesis 12, God lays out to his promises to Abraham. He will be a great nation. He will be blessed by God. His name will be great. Every person on earth will be blessed through him. This blessing required something of Abraham: obedience. Courageously, Abraham would need to leave all he knew and become a nomad encountering doubt and fear, failing and faltering, but all along the way receiving glimpses of the fulfillment of the promises and God's faithfulness.

God's promises aren't based on our obedience or lack thereof. His promises to us are realized because His love is so great and wide. He is unchanging and eternal, so we can be confident that His promises are already fulfilled, whether we can comprehend them or not. Our failures or lack of courage don't sway God's promises because God's faithfulness is not bound to our faithfulness. Thank goodness.

After failing in so many ways to trust in God's plan, God reminded Abraham one more time that Isaac, his son, would indeed be the father of Abraham's offspring. Finally, with courage, Abraham was willing to trust God's promise as he faced the unthinkable, the sacrifice of Isaac.

As Abraham courageously took step after step in obedience to what was unfathomable, the crushing of the promise, he feared God above all else.

What area of your life are you failing to trust in the unseen, attempting to handle a situation based on your power? Where do you need to remember that God is faithful in his promises?

DAY THREE

DATE:

"I came naked from my mother's womb, and I will be naked when I leave. The Lord gave me what I had, and the Lord has taken it away. Praise the name of the Lord! In all this, Job did not sin by blaming God." Job 1:21-22, NLT

COURAGE TO TRUST



Even if you aren't an avid Bible reader, no doubt you have heard the phrase, "the patience of Job." It's true. Job patiently waited for God to show him the "why" of his loss. But let's not neglect the courage it took for Job to endure. In case you aren't familiar with the story, in the first two chapters of Job, God, in His sovereignty, allowed all Job had amassed and loved to be taken from him—his children, his livestock, even his own health. All was lost. Even then Job didn't curse God. The next 35 chapters are an exchange between Job and his friends debating and reasoning, his friends convinced Job must have done something wrong to deserve what had happened to him. Job courageously stood his ground, faltering only slightly in his resolve but never once denying God's goodness and sovereignty.

Nothing requires more courage than to face hardship of any kind and still proclaim God's goodness. Faith and hope are grounded in our courage to trust God in the unseen and the unknown. This is the lesson of Job. It takes courage to detect the truth from a lie. It takes courage to stand firm in the hope of Jesus.

Paul says it well in Romans 5:1-5. Because of our faith in Jesus, we rejoice in afflictions. We can be confident that whatever comes our way it will be used to produce in us both endurance and character.

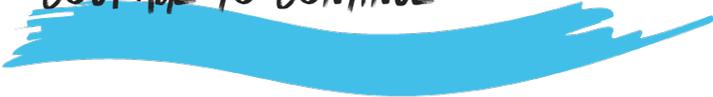
Can you, like Job, find the courage to praise God when you can't see His purpose or plan? Can you rejoice when you are faced with afflictions and trials?

DAY FOUR

DATE:

“So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up.” Galatians 6:9, NLT

COURAGE TO CONTINUE



Life sometimes seems to throw us hit after hit, while everyone else around us—those who cut corners or live selfishly—seem to glide through life with little to no worries.

Take Joseph, for example, whose backstory is recorded for us in Genesis 37. Favored by his father and gifted by God with dreams and visions, Joseph finds himself thrown in a pit, left for dead by his brothers, and then sold into slavery at the age of 17. The story picks back up in Genesis 39 where we find Joseph living peacefully, yet in slavery.

And then just when life seemed to be predictable, Joseph was put in a compromising situation. His courage and resolve were put to the test.

What did Joseph do when faced with sin? Joseph ran in the opposite direction!

Let’s pause and contemplate the courage it took for Joseph to run from sin. Temptations present opportunities for courage. When everything around us seems to be making it easy to fall into sin and compromise our integrity and beliefs, courage reminds us to stand firm regardless of the outcome.

Throughout hardship, Joseph was able to recognize that what man intended for his harm, God intended for good.

In what areas of your life might you be short-sighted? Where are you believing the worst rather than courageously allowing God to work out his plan for you? Take a moment to pray that God would give you eyes to see His kindness and goodness and the courage to continue even when you think you aren’t able.

DAY FIVE

DATE:

"That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:10, NLT

COURAGE TO LEAD



How do you feel about leading? Some are born leaders. For others, the thought of leading feels like a death sentence—you would rather follow the lead than rock the boat.

After leading over 600,000 people through the wilderness toward their Promised Land, Moses went down in history as one of the greatest leaders of all time. We would assume that since he led so many people through such harrowing times and challenges that he must also be the most courageous man of all time, right? Wrong.

From the start, Moses hid his face in fear. God attempted to lay out His plan of salvation for His people, the Israelites, and Moses threw excuse after excuse back to God for why God must be mistaken in choosing him to lead. Now, based on what you know or have heard about God, does he have the reputation for making mistakes? Spoiler alert! The answer is a definite and resounding, "No!" Remember, God is all-knowing. He's not surprised by our deficiencies. And because God is also all-powerful, He is able to use our weaknesses and deficiencies in ways we cannot even imagine. He doesn't ask us to become skilled; He asks us to have the courage to say, "Yes." We don't have to have the details, and we don't have to know the play-by-play. We just have to submit our wills to His will.

It takes extreme courage to lead, and no doubt about it, we are all called to lead. We lead our families, we lead those who are newer in their faith through discipleship relationships, and we lead ourselves. How can you allow God to use your weaknesses to accomplish His plan?

DAY SIX

DATE:

"His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries." Psalm 112:8, ESV

COURAGE FOR RESOLVE



Imagine being appointed as a spy in an elite team of twelve. You are being sent out to determine feasibility for untrained, unskilled, nomadic people to overtake a well-established city. Its powerful, mighty, and strong inhabitants are shocking to you and you quickly realize your teammates have made the same observations. You have a decision to make. The information you bring back with you informs the entire future of your nation. Decisions and tactics will be made based on your report. If you embellish the truth, downplaying the danger, those you love could be in danger. And if you fail to see weaknesses in your opponent, your influence could deter a much larger plan and purpose. There is only one other person on your team who has the same resolve as you—to proceed with the plan and invade. In spite of your own understanding of the situation, the opinions of the ten others on your team, or even the fear of those you are reporting back to, you are confident that the original vision and mission will prevail.

Joshua and Caleb lived out this scenario. What differentiated them from the rest of the twelve spies was their ability to trust in the supernatural over what their other five senses were communicating. They had the courage to take God at his word.

In his final days, Moses commissioned Joshua to be the new leader of the Israelites. Moses reminded Joshua to be strong and courageous, relying on God's strength and faithfulness. The same that was true for Joshua is true for you and me today. Our resolve is directly related to our ability to remember God's past faithfulness and to recognize that He is the one who wins the battles we are facing.

Is there an area of your life that you are allowing the opinions of those around you to keep you from following God's plan for your life? Is the fear of what you can see bigger than the truth of God? Pray that God would give you the courage to follow His plan over all others.

DAY SEVEN

DATE:

"No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us." Romans 8:37, NLT

COURAGE VERSUS CONFIDENCE



Confidence is the feeling or belief that one can rely on someone or something; firm trust.

Courage is the ability to do something that frightens one.

Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is acting in spite of the fear.

Gideon is a prime example of a man who was called to courage, yet lacked confidence. When we first hear of Gideon, he was hiding out in a winepress threshing wheat so he wouldn't be noticed. Suddenly (isn't it funny that in moments of needed courage, there often seems to be a "suddenly"?), an angel of the Lord burst on the scene and names Gideon a valiant warrior, a mighty hero, a man of valor. I can picture Gideon looking over both of his shoulders expecting to see someone else in the winepress with him. He knows he's no valiant warrior. He lacks confidence not only in his own strength but the strength of his entire family as well. What follows is a long account of the angel proving to Gideon that he was who God said he was. Sign after sign occurred until finally Gideon had enough confidence to lead an army against the enemy that had been plaguing his nation for the last seven years. Gideon's newfound confidence fueled his courage so much so that at the end of the story Gideon was able to confidently stand on the battlefield with just 300 men, jars of light, and trumpets.

God is patient enough to grow our confidence until we remember who is on the Throne. God sees us, hears us, and responds to us, even in our disobedience. Our confidence may be weak. Based on our own strength, we will inevitably fail. But when our confidence rests on who God is and all He has declared, our courage is ignited. When our confidence is rooted in God's faithfulness, we are more than conquerors.

DAY EIGHT

DATE:

"But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31, ESV

COURAGE TO WAIT



Waiting is the worst, isn't it? In this age of instant gratification, to wait for longer than a minute for our answer seems like torture. But timing is everything, and God's timing is perfect. When we try to force God's hand, we inevitably run into trouble. King Saul knew a little something about the consequences of lacking patience.

The Israelites were at war against the Philistines, and they were outnumbered. The majority of Saul's troops were in hiding, scared for their lives. Saul's entire kingship was on the line, and rather than trusting, Saul acted in fear and failed to obey God. Samuel, the priest, had promised he would come in seven days and present a sacrifice on behalf of the Israelites. God's established way only allowed for priests to present sacrifices. Saul waited. He waited the seven days but didn't see Samuel coming; all he could see was his troops abandoning him. Fearful, he took matters into his own hands and presented the offering himself. It was JUST at that moment that Samuel arrived. In his haste, Saul lost the throne in one single moment.

There is a reason "patience" is a fruit of the Spirit. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to wait on God. We need the reminder that God's timing is perfect, the reminder that God, who is all-knowing and knows the right time to act, will indeed act according to His promises.

In what area of your life are you trying to force the hand of God? Where do you need to resist the temptation to act on your own accord instead of courageously waiting for God?

DAY NINE

DATE:

"We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, NLT

COURAGE TO REMAIN ROOTED



Distraction from truth is one of the enemy's most effective tools. How many times have you felt everything was going right and confident that you are right where God wanted you to be for that particular moment in time, when out of nowhere you began to doubt your call? Or someone said something to make you believe that what you were doing was insignificant or even downright wrong?

Paul gives us a glimpse in Romans 1:5-6 of what "calling" means. Our true calling as believers is to bring others to Christ. However, the methods and means look different for every person because each of us is uniquely created by God for this purpose. It's what makes the Church body so amazing—all of us walking in our calling to reach every man, woman, and child with repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the gospel of Jesus.

Elijah knew a little something about the battle of the mind. Interestingly enough, his battle came right after God had proven Himself faithful and powerful. Perhaps Elijah was battle weary, but his mind got the better of him, and he allowed fear to dictate his actions. He ran and hid and even went so far as to want his life to be over. In his despair he began to believe he was the only person left in the entire world who was devoted to God. Calmly, yet powerfully, God reminded Elijah of the truth. He urged Elijah to get back to the task at hand.

Where can you see deception attacking your roots, either subtly or outright? Take a few moments to pray and ask God to give you the courage to fulfill what you know is your calling.

DAY TEN

DATE:

"For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:1, NLT

COURAGE TO FACE CHANGE



Minutes turn into hours, hours into days, days into months, months into years. Change is unavoidable, yet many of us are prone to resist change. We like things to be predictable and reliable. Inevitably, changes happen and disrupt our patterns and rhythms.

Ruth knew about change. Her whole life was disrupted by the death of her husband—suddenly she needed to choose between what she knew (her home and her religion) and what she didn't know. Ruth courageously chose to allow change to take her to a new land and engage in a new faith. In doing so, she realized God's plan was much, much bigger than she could have ever imagined.

Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, found themselves relying on the kindness of others, rooted in the tradition of God's unchanging plans. The command God gave to the Israelites centuries before to provide for the poor and destitute became a benefit to Ruth and Naomi. The command God gave to the Israelites centuries before provided a redeemer for the widow. What had been a season of bitterness and despair became a new and better season for Naomi and Ruth, one they couldn't possibly have dreamed of or imagined.

When things change—when we encounter new seasons, new hopes and dreams, and new challenges—we can remain courageous because our God does not change. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

What change may be on the horizon in which you will need to remember that God has planned all things for your good? How can you remember in the season you are in today that a new season will bring hope and joy in its time?

DAY ELEVEN

DATE:

"How great is our Lord! His power is absolute! His understanding is beyond comprehension!" Psalm 147:5, NLT

COURAGE TO SLAY GIANTS



It's the small steps of faith that amount to a life of courage. The first decision to trust leads to the next decision to trust and obey because past experiences are the biggest indicator of the unknown. King David knew this to be true at a young age. He proved it in one of his well known acts of valor, the slaying of the giant Goliath.

David entered the battlefield as a "go-fer" of sorts, ordered by his father to deliver food to his bigger, stronger brothers while they were warring with the Philistines. David didn't delay in taking action when he heard the taunts of Goliath. He didn't let the mocking of his brother deter him from acting. And when he was pressed by the king he spoke of his past experiences as a shepherd protecting his flock, explaining the source of his courage (1 Samuel 17:34-37).

Each of us face proverbial giant—events that loom over us, taunt us, and speak lies that tell us our giants are bigger than God. Perhaps others have already retreated in fear because of the intensity of the giant. Perhaps there are people in your inner circle who doubt your God-given abilities, who doubt your calling and your purpose. Maybe you believe you don't have the means to advance against your giant—the right tools or weapons. Guess what! The good news is that your ability to defeat the giants in your life is not based on your might or your power. Your God is the God who is able to take a measly pebble and topple a nine-foot-nine, fully armored giant. That is who your God is, mighty and powerful. Just as David recognized the audacity of Goliath to stand against the God of Armies, you too can courageously proclaim that the Lord who rescued you before will rescue you now.

DAY TWELVE

DATE:

"God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Matthew 5:6-7, NLT

COURAGE TO ACT JUSTLY



The ability to see situations objectively, ascertain what is morally right and fair and, to take it one step further, intercede on others' behalf is no light matter. Justice and mercy take an enormous amount of courage. Following in Jesus' footsteps when it comes to justice means placing ourselves in the place of the oppressed. The story of Abigail paints a beautiful picture of someone who humbled herself and courageously put herself in a precarious situation for the sake of others.

Abigail knew her situation. She knew her husband was mean-spirited, spiteful, and not all together intelligent. When her household servants told Abigail that her husband refused a simple request from the future King David, Abigail knew she needed to take matters into her own hands in order to save the lives of her entire family and household. The narrative tells us that she "wasted no time." She rushed to intercede because of her husband's cruelty.

Our willingness to promote justice by stepping into the place of those who are put in peril because of the selfishness of others is perhaps the epitome of courage. It is a clear example of what Jesus ultimately did when He bore each and every one of our sins on the cross—the sinless one becoming sin for the sake of the world He loves. It's who He is even now as He intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father.

Justice is often a lonely and risky path, but be encouraged; we are not alone. We are seen and known by our Savior.

Who in your circle of accountability needs to experience the mercy and justice of God? How can you courageously intercede for them? Pray for your One, the person God has placed in your life who is close to you but far from God. Ask God to open your eyes to opportunities to share your faith.

DAY THIRTEEN

DATE:

*"So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever."
2 Corinthians 4:18 , NLT*

COURAGE TO RECOGNIZE THE UNSEEN



Have you ever wondered about all the things that you are not able to see? What is happening in a black hole? How many species are unknown in the ocean?

The unseen can cause fear, just as it did for the servant of Elisha.

Elisha was a man of God who seemed to always know the unknown. He even knew the enemy's move before a move was made. But if Elisha knew the enemy's every move, why didn't he flee when the enemy positioned themselves in the night to surround the city and capture him? Again, by God's power and might, Elisha was able to see the unseen, to know what wasn't known.

Elisha's servant trembled in fear when he discovered they had been surrounded. Spotting his servant's fear, Elisha prayed that God would open the eyes of his servant so he was able to see the unseen.

Imagine the courage you would have if you truly grasped God's love for you. Imagine how boldly you would behave if you knew for certain that you couldn't lose because your ultimate good was safe and secure in God's plan!

Where do you need the blinders to be removed from your eyes so you would be able to see the bigger picture? Pray that God would give you insight into his bigger plan as you walk in courage.

DAY FOURTEEN

DATE:

*"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."
John 10:27, NLT*

COURAGE TO HEAR FROM GOD



Often in desperate situations we cry out to God asking him to reveal himself. But are we ready to experience His revelation? Do we have the courage it takes to behold him? Or are we simply looking for a performance, a quick solution to the current problem we are facing? It takes courage to hear from God because it may mean that He will ask us to step out of our comfort and trust him in what feels like the impossible.

As Daniel faced the threat of a den of lions, he did it boldly and without hesitation (Daniel 6:10-24), but when he was entrusted with visions of the Almighty and the future, he was terrified (Daniel 7:15, 28; 8:17,27; 10:16-17). The visions rocked him to the core. Why? Because God's power and might are simply beyond anything we could think or imagine. And yet, God still desires us to draw near.

We all experience seasons when we have desperately desired to hear from God. We needed direction, we needed His comfort. God is not far from us, and if you courageously draw near to Him, He promises to draw near to you. Our courage to approach His throne is found in the One who sits at His right hand, Jesus. Hebrews tells us right now Jesus is interceding on our behalf.

What prayer are you avoiding praying because you are afraid of an answer that will cause a shake up in your life? Will you courageously surrender yourself to God today? Will you confess and believe He is for you?

DAY FIFTEEN

DATE:

"Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins." Romans 3:24, NLT

COURAGE FOR GRACE AND TRUTH



Have you ever had to deliver bad news to someone? To tell them that what they are doing isn't going to work out well for them? It's a daunting task, and it could mean the risk of losing a close relationship or your position and status.

Proclaiming truth was the life work of Jeremiah, the prophet. It wasn't something he signed up for; it was something he was appointed to. And the kicker? He had to refuse to be intimidated by those he prophesied to or else God would cause him to cower. No one believes in a coward. No one changes their mind and their way of living when a coward is the one warning them.

For 40 years Jeremiah delivered "bad news" that was actually meant to point the Israelites to the good news. Those forty years were wrought with turmoil. Jeremiah's own family plotted to kill him, and he was beaten, attacked by a mob, threatened by the King, thrown in jail, and thrown in a pit. Throughout it all, Jeremiah was commanded to courageously remain faithful to share the truth of God's words.

Not much has changed in the last 2500 years. People still need to know the truth about God's forgiveness, but the truth comes with some very harsh realities. We are all sinners in need of a Savior. Jesus, full of grace and truth, modeled well for us. He never compromised the truth by extending grace, yet he didn't lack grace for those who were repentant.

God has called each of us to courageously proclaim grace and truth. How is this done? By first living a life of grace and truth. When others are able to see how we courageously pursue truth and the resulting grace of God in our lives, His love is incarnate in and through us.

DAY SIXTEEN

DATE:

"These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold - though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world." 1 Peter 1:7, NLT

COURAGE IN THE "EVEN IF"



Perhaps when we think of the most courageous Biblical heroes of our faith we think immediately of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the story of the blazing furnace. These men of courage lived in exile in a land full of idolatry, Babylon, where the God of Israel played no part in the hearts and minds of its people. Instead, all focus and worship were given to its king, Nebuchadnezzar. The culture of Babylon saw no problem with giving all their allegiance to the king and raised no issue when the decree was passed stating that when the signal was given all were to bow in worship to the massive golden statue of King Nebuchadnezzar he had created of himself.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego weren't interested in compromising their allegiance to the one true God, even though the penalty for not following along with the rest of culture and bowing in honor to a statue was immediate death. The king was flabbergasted. "Who can save you?" he asked them. Courageously Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood their ground fully convinced that God was able to save them, but **EVEN IF** He chose not to, they still refused to bow to any other god.

What courage it takes to face the "even ifs" of our lives! It takes courage to proclaim that even if we lose friends and followers, even if we lose position or power, even if we lose wealth or comfort, we will not bow or bend! Following Christ is certainly worth the risk of the "even if."

DAY SEVENTEEN

DATE:

"But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else." Mark 10:43-44, NLT

COURAGE TO SERVE



Serving others means you go head-first into the mess. Serving others means you take a step forward while others may take a step back. Nehemiah displayed this very type of servant leadership, and it certainly required courage. What caused Nehemiah to be so brave? Why did Nehemiah risk asking the king for his blessing and funding to rebuild a wall in another land? What caused Nehemiah to brave the travel through scary terrain to reach a land that was rundown and exposed to the enemy? Where did Nehemiah get his motivation? The answer is simple: love. You can't love someone without serving them.

There is risk involved in serving. Serving always comes at a great cost. There's the cost of your time. In a world where "time is money" rings true for a lot of people, time is a precious commodity. What if people don't appreciate how you've served? What if others mock you for serving, just as Nehemiah was mocked?

Culture tells us it's more valuable to care for ourselves before caring for and serving others. Jesus turned this sentiment upside down stating, "Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me." Can you imagine that we might get more joy from serving others than providing for our own happiness in superficial ways? Here's a challenge: take courage to step out and serve someone selflessly and see the blessing that you receive on the other end!

DAY EIGHTEEN

DATE:

"But who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us!" 1 Chronicles 29:14, NLT

COURAGE TO GIVE



God's plan for our finances is so counterintuitive. While the Israelites were in the desert, God laid out a plan for them to avoid poverty. It was really quite simple but not easy. The Israelites were to give to anyone that was needy. They were to leave margin in their fields for others to glean, they were to forgive debt, and they were to give to those in need.

In the early days of the Church, its people lived by the same generosity. Everyone had everything in common. People like Barnabas sold their land and gave the proceeds to the apostles to be distributed as needed and without stipulations. How were people like Barnabas able to courageously give? Because they recognized that God is a God of abundance, and He has challenged us to give and see the return.

The same fears people have with giving financially could plague them when giving of their time and talents. What if we spend all our time serving others without being served in return? What if our time goes unappreciated or unrecognized? What if we're not gifted in a way that is needed. God has created the Church to be a body of people, giving their time, talents and treasures in order to see His Kingdom advance. What you have and what you give hold a value far surpassing anything you can realize this side of heaven.

Ask God to show you the areas in your life where fear may be keeping you from giving. Ask Him to give you the courage to trust Him as you open your hands and your heart to give toward His Kingdom.

DAY NINETEEN

DATE:

*"Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."
Ephesians 4:32, NLT*

COURAGE TO FORGIVE



Forgiveness is no small feat, yet a courageous life is one full of forgiveness, remembering hour by hour the gospel of Jesus, that even in your offense against God, He chose to send His only Son to take your place in death. Only with our eyes on Jesus are we able to forgive others who sin against us.

Stephen modeled perfectly how this is done. As he stood before those who were taking his life because of the gospel he preached, he was able to see the glory of God in heaven. Perhaps it was as his eyes fell on Jesus standing at God's right hand that he remembered Jesus' prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." The last thing Stephen ever said was, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!"

On the other hand, what's at stake with unforgiveness? Bitterness. Bitterness becomes a poisonous root and has the power to affect all those around you. The Mayo Clinic has found that forgiveness can actually lead to healthier relationships, improved mental health, and less anxiety and stress. Isn't it amazing that God has created our bodies to respond positively to forgiving others?

Who do you need to courageously forgive today? Ask God to reveal to you any place that bitterness has taken root and to forgive those who have offended you.

DAY TWENTY

DATE:

"The little that the righteous person has is better than the abundance of many wicked people." Psalm 37:16, CSB

COURAGE TO BE CONTENT



How much of our time is spent chasing? Chasing the better job, the better body, the nicer car, the latest fashion trend? How often have we caught up to what we were chasing only to recognize that the prize left us just as empty and wanting for something more?

The apostle Paul knew what it was like to chase something. Paul's desire was to "press on" until he reached the end of his life and realized the prize God had prepared for him. His days were spent laboring for the benefit of others, that they would come to know Christ and Him crucified.

While Paul was under house arrest, he wrote about his contentment in order to encourage the Church. His contentment wasn't passive; it was courageously practiced. Throughout his ministry Paul practiced contentment. When he faced hardship, he looked to the example of Christ who humbled Himself, and Paul likewise humbled himself in order that the gospel would be proclaimed.

Paul knew the secret to contentment. He knew that God is a God of abundance. God is able to take the measly and make it mighty. He took the staff of Moses and performed miracles. He viewed the widow's small offering as more than that of the rich Pharisee. He took a few fishes and loaves and fed a multitude. We too can be content knowing that if God is for us, there is no one or nothing that can stand against us. If all we have is faith, we have more than we need.

What are you chasing? How can you find contentment in the abundance of Christ?

DAY TWENTY-ONE

DATE:

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me." Matthew 16:24, NLT

COURAGE TO DENY YOURSELF



What is the biggest threat to our courage today? Could it be our own desire for self-preservation? The culture around us screams that truth is in the eye of the beholder. It lures us to extreme comfort by calling us to ignore the needs of those around us and focus on self-gratification. We look for justification in what we are able to accumulate and how quickly we are able to accumulate it. But Jesus has a simple thought on this mindset, lose your own wants and ambition for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Follow Him.

Where was it Jesus was going? His eyes were fixed on the cross. We end where we first began, with Jesus, the perfecter of our courage. We have a decision to make, and it's a daily resolve. No doubt it requires uncommon courage.

It takes courage to speak out in justice for the unseen.

It takes courage to serve others.

It takes courage to loosen your hands on your possessions so that God's kingdom will be advanced.

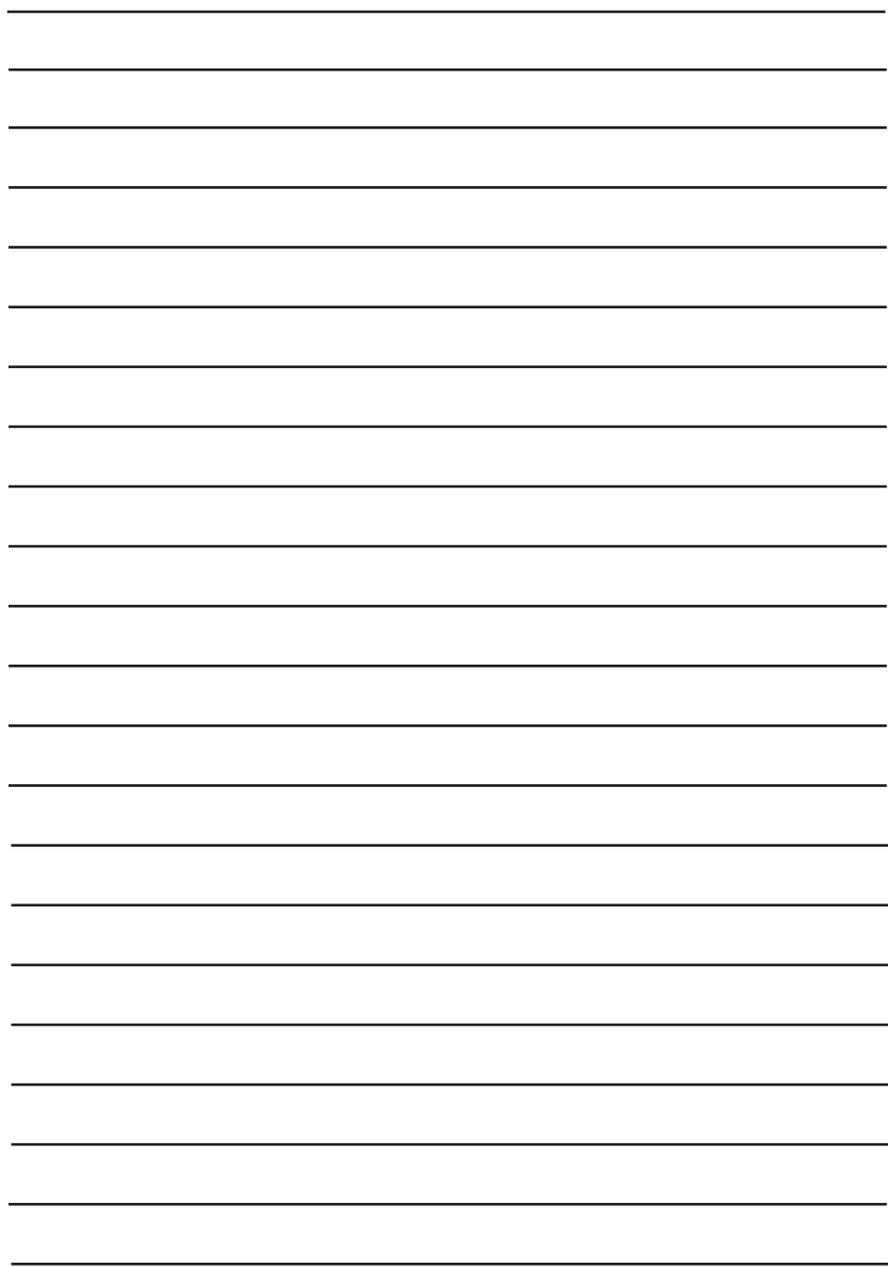
It takes courage to walk in humble obedience to all God calls you to.

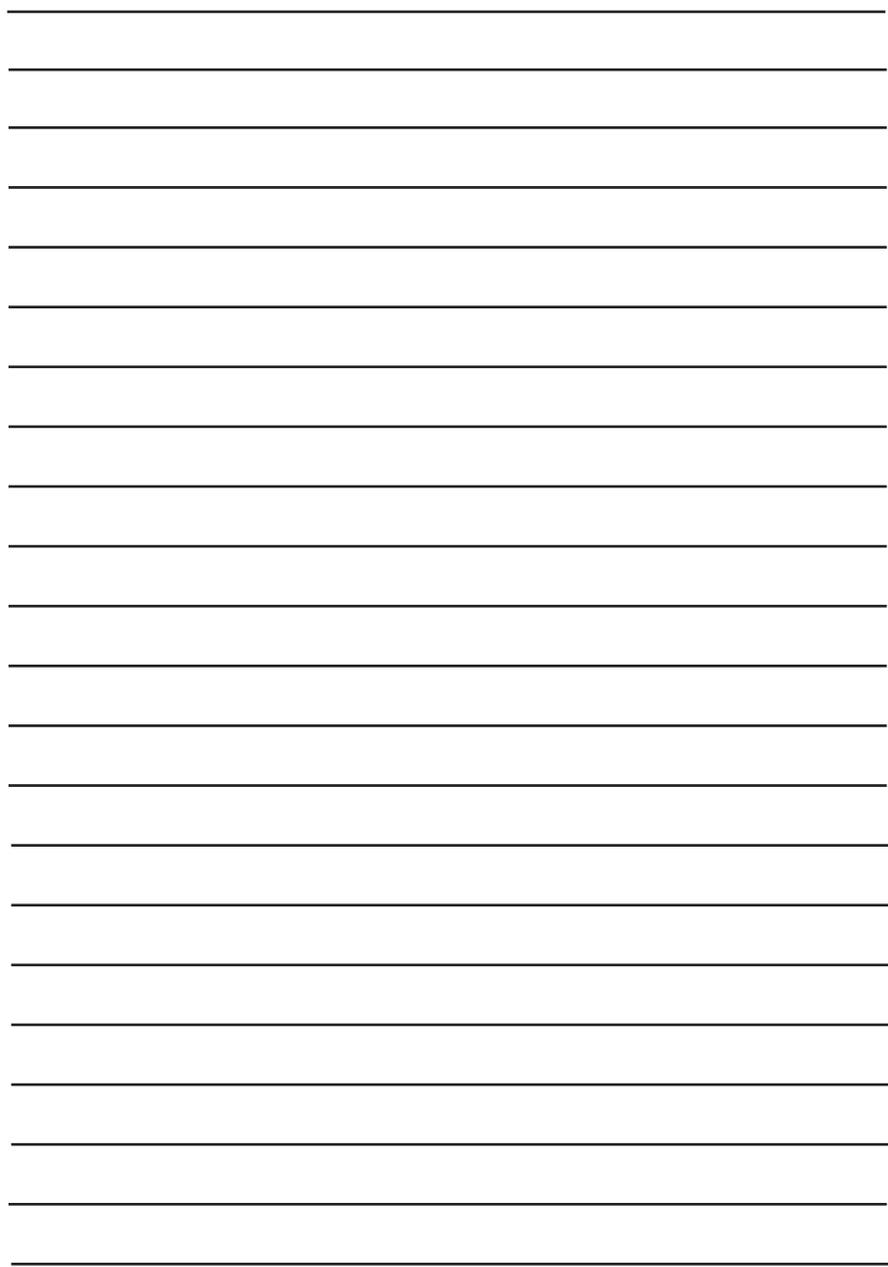
It takes courage to believe that what God has purposed you for He is able to see you through.

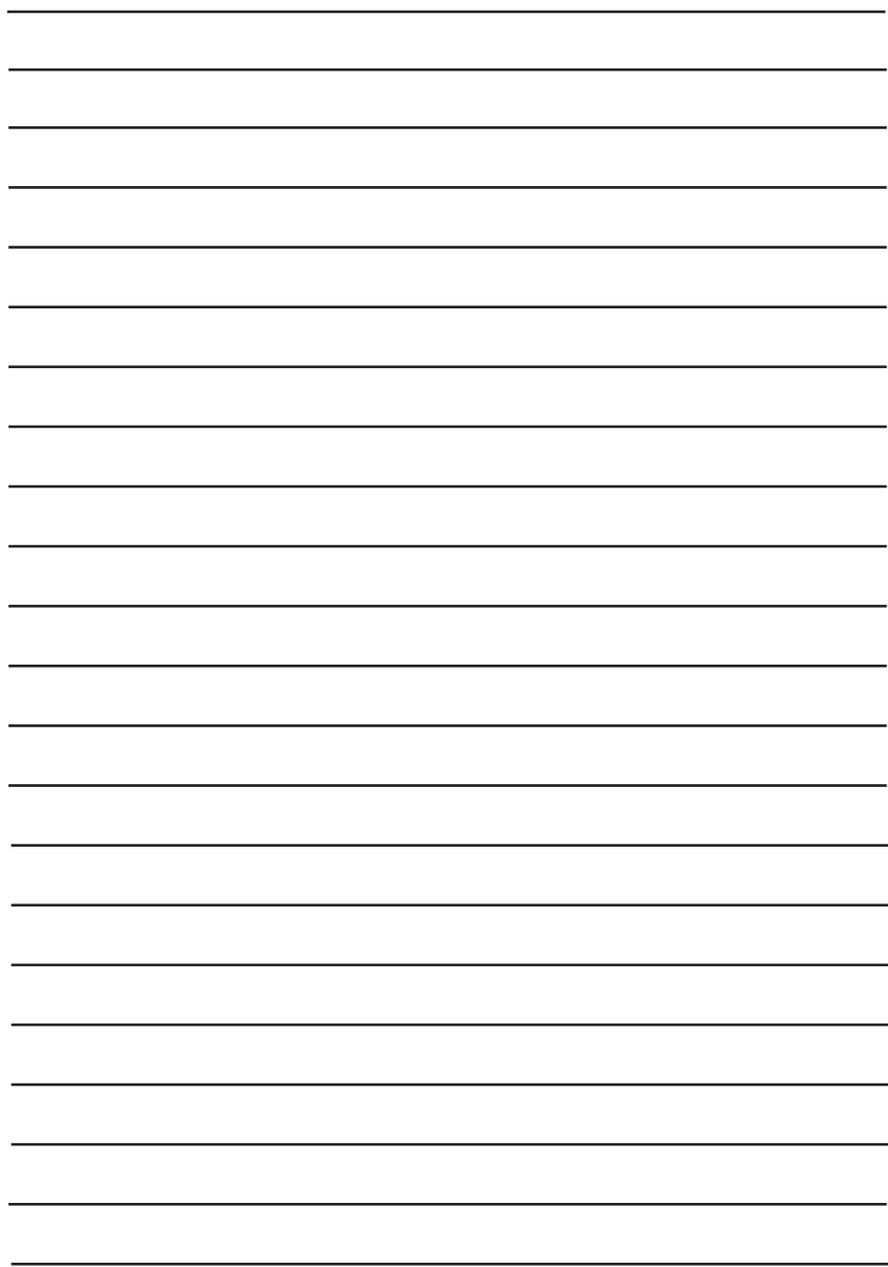
It takes courage to wait patiently on God's timing and promises.

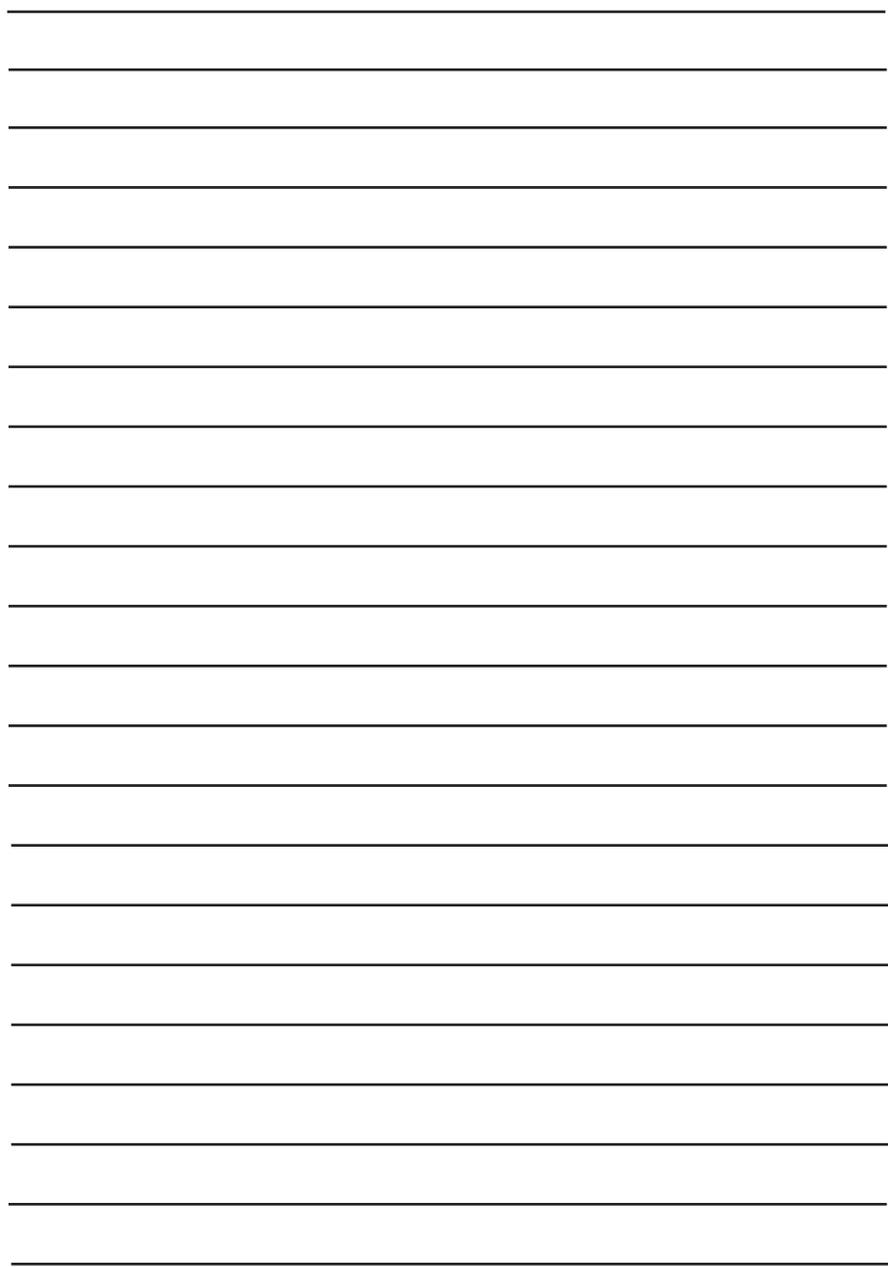
It takes courage to fight the good fight of faith when others walk away or shrink in fear.

Choose uncommon courage. It's well worth it.











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