

# PRAYER of Good Courage

## Small Group Curriculum

WEEK 3: October 6-12

### “By Paths as yet Untrodden, through Perils Unknown”

#### OPENING PRAYER:

O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where impossibilities close every door and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

#### WARM-UP QUESTION:

Share an experience where you faced a situation in which one or both of these phrases from the Prayer of Good Courage well described to your circumstance (“by paths as yet untrodden, through perils Unknown”). What gave you strength/courage to proceed in that circumstances. Share as you are comfortable.

#### BIBLE REFLECTION:

In this week's reading from Philippians we hear Paul thank the church at Philippi for their concern for him in his imprisonment. Read this together as a group. As you do notice Paul's statement about contentment in all circumstances.

*Phil. 4:10-14 (The Message Version)*

*“I'm glad in God, far happier than you would ever guess- happy that you're again showing such strong concern for me. Not that you ever quit praying and thinking about me. You just had no chance to show it. Actually, I don't have a sense of needing any thing personally. I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am. I don't mean that your help didn't mean a lot to me- it did. It was a beautiful thing that you came alongside me in my troubles.”*

Scripture Question: In your own words, sum up the main point of these verses. What leads to him making these statements about being content?

- Have you ever known someone who you would describe as content? Why were they that way? Was it from ease of life? Was it from having a particular amount of resources? Was it from the ability to not have too many cares? Compare your description of someone you know (or a time that you felt content) to what Paul states.
- In light of this passage, what do you think Paul's definition of courage would be? Invite each person to write their own definition and then share with each other. Does this definition of courage connect to the POGC where we confess that God has “called us to paths as yet untrodden through perils unknown”?

## The Common Good in Our Lives

1. Watch the video linked on the website or the first 5 ½ minutes of the TED Talk link below entitled "We need to talk about an injustice" by Bryan Stevenson (end clip with 18:05 minutes left).

[https://www.ted.com/talks/bryan\\_stevenson\\_we\\_need\\_to\\_talk\\_about\\_an\\_injustice?referrer=playlist-the\\_pursuit\\_of\\_justice#t-67074](https://www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice?referrer=playlist-the_pursuit_of_justice#t-67074)

- In this section Stevenson shares a story of his grandmother to illustrate the power (courage?) that comes from identity. Do you have a story from your life (can be joyous, painful or other) that has strongly shaped your identity? If comfortable share with the group. How has this influenced who you are?
- Compare Stevenson statement about the power of identity with Paul's statement "I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am." Have you connected your identity in Christ with courage in your life? Why or why not?

2. Read the excerpt entitled "The Telos Crisis" which comes from the book The Second Mountain: the quest for a moral life by David Brooks (See page 3).

- Reflect on attached excerpt. Are there portions of this that seem true to your experience of life? Share with one another.
- A favorite quote for Brooks is the one from Nietzsche. "He who has a 'why' to live for can endure any 'how'. Again, compare this to Paul's statement named in the previous question. Does this seem true in your experience? If you were to write a statement of the "why" of your life, what would it be? Would your faith be a part of the "why" that helps you endure the "how's"? If so, what language would you use to describe your "why" that allows you to journey down "paths as yet untrodden" and to endure "perils unknown".

### SUMMARY QUESTION

Are you facing a peril known or unknown? Do you feel called to a "path untrodden" in your life or in your relationships? Break up into pairs and share with one another. After each person shares have the listener say a brief prayer for courage and strength for the speaker. Then, lay your hand on the person's shoulder and say these words. "(Name), remember that you are a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever". Then switch roles.

### PRAYER OF GOOD COURAGE

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## THE TELOS CRISIS

A telos crisis is defined by the fact that people in it don't know what their purpose is. When this happens, they become fragile. Nietzsche says that he who has a "why" to live for can endure any "how." If you know what your purpose is, you can handle the setbacks. But when you don't know what your purpose is, any setback can lead to total collapse. As Seamus Heaney put it, "You are neither here nor there, / A hurry through which known and strange things pass."

In my experience, a telos crisis comes in two forms, walking and sleeping. In the walking form, the sufferer just keeps trudging along. She has been hit by some blow, or suffers from some deep ennui, but she doesn't know what she wants or how she should change her life, so she just keeps on doing what she was doing—same job, same place, and same life. She is living with the psychological awareness that she is settling. I had a friend named Casey Gerald who was being interviewed for a job. At the end of the interview he turned the tables on the interviewer and asked her a question: "What would you do if you weren't afraid?" The interviewer burst out crying. If she wasn't afraid, she wouldn't be doing HR for that company. That's a walking telos crisis.

The second kind of telos crisis is the sleeping kind. In this version, the sufferer is just laid low, crawls into bed, and watches Netflix. His confidence is shot. He is paralyzed by self-focus. He has this weird and unwarranted conviction that it's too late for him; life has passed him by. Other people's accomplishments begin to bring real pain, as the distance between their (apparent) swift ascent and his pathetic stasis begins to seem hopelessly wide.

David Foster Wallace noticed it in a lot of his friends: "Something that doesn't have very much to do with physical circumstances, or the economy, or any of the stuff that gets talked about in the news. It's more like stomach-level sadness. I see it in myself and my friends in different ways. It manifests itself as a kind of lostness." Beneath the psychological manifestations, Wallace noticed that the fundamental cause was moral directionlessness. "This is a generation that has an inheritance of absolutely nothing as far as meaningful moral values."

And it's hard to know how many people are suffering in this sort of crisis because people have become so good at masking it. As the young writer Veronica Rae Saron put it, "Conversation after conversation, it has become more and more clear: those among us with flashy Instagram accounts, perfectly manufactured LinkedIn profiles, and confident exteriors (yours truly) are probably those who are feeling the most confused, anxious, and stuck when it comes to the future. The millennial 20-something stuck-ness sensation is everywhere, and there is a direct correlation between those who feel it and those who put off a vibe of feeling extremely secure." Eventually there's no escaping the big questions. What's my best life? What do I believe in? Where do I belong?