



Week 1 Preaching Resources | Courage to be Vulnerable

Scripture Passage: Philippians 2:5-11

Focus Statement: Jesus shows us that there is courage in being vulnerable and calls us to follow his example.

ME: Tell a story about a time when you witnessed courage in vulnerability, being sure to respect the privacy of everyone involved and asking permission to share others' stories. For example, public speaking requires being vulnerable by putting oneself in front of others; a time when someone had the courage to ask for help; asking someone out on a first date, risking rejection; even more traditionally courageous acts (like fighting fire) require being extremely vulnerable for the sake of others.

WE: Most people think courage is being strong, resolute, and it is, but it all begins with being vulnerable. We can probably all think of someone in our lives who has shown courage by being vulnerable. Maybe we (or people in our congregation) have done so ourselves. Yet, the world often tells us that being courageous involves being tough or hard, that it requires superhero strength. Jesus, the hero of our faith story, showed the ultimate courage through vulnerability.

GOD: In the Roman Empire, divine and human power were asserted through strength, dominance, and war. Being "courageous" meant winning out over one's opponents. But Jesus does the exact opposite. This passage, an early Christian hymn, talks about how Jesus, who is God ("in the form of God," "equality with God"), did not assume to be better than everyone else. Instead, he became humble, gave up the privileges of his divinity, "emptying himself" into human existence.

Through Jesus' courage to be vulnerable, he became like those he came to save, so that we could know the heart of God is for humanity and not over/against it. Jesus courageously became vulnerable to the point of death for the sake of others, for the sake of all, instead of trying to overpower his opponents. Paul used this hymn to teach the Philippians who were in conflict among themselves and with outside groups. Paul is advising the Philippians to have everyone's interest in mind, as Jesus did, rather than trying to prove themselves right or better.

The hymn ends with God exalting Jesus, giving him the name that is above every name, so that all might come to bow before him. Instead of intimidating people into following him or winning out over others, Jesus' vulnerability brought people around to recognizing his true power. This true power, "the glory of God" shown in Jesus, turns the world's definition of power upside down. Jesus' power is in being *for* others and *with* others. It is much less courageous to remain closed off from others, especially those with whom we disagree.



YOU: When Jesus became vulnerable to the human experience, he came to be *with* us, bring healing to our relationship with God (reconciled) and set us on a path to become our full selves (redeemed). Vulnerability is an invitation to togetherness and strength. When someone becomes vulnerable, others can join in. They can be vulnerable together but also bring strength for everyone. What relationships or groups are you a part of where your vulnerability might help someone else feel safe to be vulnerable too? Is there a conflict in your life where having the courage to be vulnerable might just lead to healing and growth for all involved?

WE: Identify areas in your church and/or community where people can grow in vulnerability and courage – (e.g., small groups, joys & concerns, possibly areas of tension/conflict) and describe how this could change the dynamics and relationships in a positive way. Remember vulnerability wouldn't be vulnerability if it didn't involve risk. There are no guarantees the risk of vulnerability will pay off, but if it does, wonderful change can happen. Check out Brené Brown for illustrations. ([TED Talk – power of Vulnerability](#) & [Netflix show – Call to Courage](#)).



Week 2 Preaching Resources | Courage to be Gracious

Scripture Passage: Philippians 1:2-14

Focus Statement: In hard situations, God's grace can give us courage. As we allow God's grace to shape us, we can become courageous enough to give others grace too.

ME: Tell about a time when you experienced or witnessed gracious courage. For example, it could be a situation of conflict when it would have been easier to take revenge or retaliate, but instead someone had the courage to give grace or forgiveness. Or you could talk about a ministry or service rooted in grace that requires courage (e.g., Doctors without Borders, disaster relief, essential workers who require courage to go to work every day for the sake of the larger community).

WE: We all have been in situations where we needed grace from others and from God and where we had the opportunity to extend grace to others. We've all faced that choice between taking revenge, hanging onto resentment, or having the courage to be gracious.

GOD: Paul is writing this letter to the Philippians from prison. It probably would have been easier for Paul to turn inward in this time in prison, to become defensive, jaded, or vengeful with the situation in which he found himself. Or perhaps it would have been easy for him to feel he deserved this. Remember that in his "former life" as Saul, Paul was a persecutor of Christians. Instead of either of these reactions, Paul grounds himself in the grace and peace that God provides through Jesus (verse 2). He has first received forgiveness from God and now lives out of that mindset rather than harboring resentment or feeling guilt in this difficult situation.

Paul recognizes that God has given him the courage to live through these struggles through the gracious support of the Philippian community. Paul is not in this alone; he writes to the Philippians, "you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel." Paul was saying that through suffering we become the community of grace.

This shared grace in community isn't just a *comfort* to Paul, doesn't just give him courage to *survive* current situation. It goes further than that. Paul is able to extend that grace to others, to give himself over to God and allow God to use him to expand God's mission in the world. Instead of resenting his prisoners, Paul gives them grace. He shares the gospel with them: "it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard...that my imprisonment is for Christ," (verse 13). Seeing the way God is working through Paul despite his imprisonment has inspired others to courageously spread the good news of Jesus too (verse 14).



We often think of courage as a heroic act, but long-term courage, like that of Paul, invites others in to be courageous too. If it's gracious courage, it is not proud or self-centered but looks outward to other people and into the world to see where the need is and to meet it, even when it's not easy or is met with resistance.

YOU: One of the important ways we receive and give grace is through forgiveness. Being able to forgive others flows out of being able to accept forgiveness from God and to forgive ourselves. Are there things you need to ask forgiveness for (from others, God, or yourself)? Are there areas where you need to let go of resentment and hurt and move toward forgiveness (again, of yourself, others, or God)? Forgiveness takes courage! But it also can free us to be more courageous.

WE: Identify how your church has received and been formed by grace collectively. This could be framed more theologically (Jesus calls us into community and we support each other through small groups, remembering that grace in Communion, etc.) or refer to specifics of your congregation's experience (e.g., generous donation received to fix the roof, start a ministry, etc). Share ways that receiving grace can help the congregation extend grace to others and further God's work in the world (particular mission/ministry, being welcoming to all, letting go of past resentments that still have a hold on the community).



Week 3 Preaching Resources | Courage to be Last

Scripture Passage: Philippians 2:1-5

Focus Statement: Sometimes, we are courageous for our own sake and to achieve our own comfort. But how can we be courageous for the sake of others and their wellbeing?

ME: Have you ever had to be strong for someone else? Or stand up for someone else? Share a time when you had to speak up for someone. Maybe it was a little brother or sister, kid at school, or just someone being overlooked. Remember to keep the focus of the story about the other person and not just you.

WE: There are points in life where there are clear “It’s not about me” moments. Some people’s lives are centered around those moments. When you think of firefighters putting their lives at risk each day to save others or an ombudsperson in a nursing home whose purpose is to make sure the needs of patients are being met and they are getting the proper care they deserve. And then there are moments in our own lives when we get the opportunity to put others before us, to show mercy and compassion. Those moments arise sometimes in a parking lot, or on the job. Others in the wake of rising oppression. Sometimes it’s in our own families or communities. Other times it’s with perfect strangers. These are the moments where we make the decision to have the courage to be last.

GOD:

1) The joy in living and loving as a Christian (v. 2) – Throughout Christ’s ministry, he was constantly making it his business to see the overlooked, to show mercy and compassion to the outcast and downtrodden, to break the social norms and even religious laws just to love, heal and save people. Paul says to us in this text, that there is an unspeakable joy that comes with living and loving like Jesus: when we push past the pressures of society and the busyness of life and take time to actually see people and to show them some genuine compassion, when we choose not to be afraid to stand up for people, to celebrate others. There is a true joy that comes with that.

2) It’s not about us – Paul stresses in verse 3 the importance of doing for others, but making sure that when do, that it’s not about us. So often, people give money, do community service, help others...for personal gain. There may even be times in our own lives when we have been guilty of helping someone else or standing up for someone else so we can get noticed or perhaps some sort of pat on the back. But Paul reminds of the challenge to be blessed by serving with humility, “to regard others as better than ourselves.”

3) The mind of Christ – The last verse (v.5) of this text calls us to “Let this mind be in us, that is in Christ Jesus”. Verses 7-11 go on to explain that Christ was so humble and so committed to serving others, that he took on human form, and was obedient to the point of death on a cross and because of this, God highly exalted him. Christ’s relationship with God deepened and Christ found even more favor in the Creator’s eyes because all that he did was for the good of others, and brought glory to God, our Maker.



YOU: This is a mindset that we should all aspire to have, to serve with joy and humility, to have the mind of Christ that boldly stands up for others, the mind that has the courage to speak up and show compassion and mercy, the mind that seeks out and sees the overlooked. This is the mind of the Christ, the mindset that brings glory to God. So, what is God calling you do in this text? Who are you to serve or stand up for? Or is this the text admonishing to self-evaluate how you're serving to ensure that you're doing so with humility and joy and with the mind of Christ?

WE: There is room for all of us to grow in the way this text calls Christians to live. And there is room for all of us to be blessed, both by serving and thereby deepening our relationship with God. So, let us begin to discern how God is calling us to serve, to love, to reach out, and let us pray for the mind of Christ as we do so.



Week 4 Preaching Resources | Courage to be First

Scripture Passage: Philippians 3:10-16

Focus Statement: It takes courage to take the first step forward to face evil, to dare to be extraordinary for God.

ME: Share a story about a goal you worked hard to reach, even in the face of obstacles and adversity. Share how your faith in God and your trust in and dependence on God helped you stay the course to reach the goal.

WE: We all have goals we desire to reach in our lives. There are things we want to accomplish, glass ceilings we want to break or perhaps walls or barriers that need to be torn down, or trying to do what others thought impossible. It takes courage to press forward in the face of doubt and adversity. It takes determination and even hope to stand out, to attempt the impossible. But with Christ, we can do all things.

GOD:

1) Resurrection power – To press toward our goals with resurrection mindsets is to understand that even pressing through the pain, sometimes agony, obstacles, evildoers, naysayers, and hills, we have to climb...that victory awaits at the end of all that. Imagine Christ even in the garden praying, “Let this cup pass from me,” in other words saying, if there’s any other way besides this road I am about to trod and the pain I am about to endure to reach this goal, please let it be so. But then he recognized and yielded to the divine plan of God and said “not my will but yours.” And at the end of that journey, there was victory for all that He had endured. Paul says to us in this text (v. 10) that we ought to know Christ and know Him in the power of the resurrection and in the sharing of his sufferings. As recipients of the resurrection, this is our call and privilege: to know Christ, to know the sufferings of Christ, to know the power of the resurrection, and to know that we have that same resurrection power living within us.

We can endure difficulties. We can press through pain and suffering. We can fight in the face of evil. We can reach the unreachable. And we can bounce back even when others might think all is lost. That is resurrection power.

2) Pressing on – In trying to reach our goals and accomplish what we set out to do, it’s often easy to look back. Sometimes looking back even tempts us to go back. You may remember even the Israelites when they were escaping slavery and bondage trying to reach the Promised Land were tired, hungry frustrated, and so discouraged at one point that they said to their leaders, “At least back in bondage we had food to eat and knew where we would be sleeping at night”. What they didn’t know when they said that, was that they were right on the edge of the Promised Land; but fear and doubt almost caused them to turn back and give up. Paul says, though, that we ought to forget what is behind us and focus our thoughts on what lies ahead of us. We press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.



3) The high calling – v.14 reminds of the high calling we have in Christ. These goals, gifts, tasks, challenges, calls from God are just that – from God. We have to remember that this is bigger than us. It is bigger than any person or any to do list or bucket list. We have a call from God. And think of this, if God calls us to do it, then God knows we have the ability, the strength, and the courage to do it.

YOU: What is God calling you to do? Who is God calling you to speak up for? What goal is God challenging you to reach?

WE: What is God calling our church to do? How do we reach our goals with resurrection power and the mindset of the high calling?