



Courage

Small Groups: January 2015

Last April, Worship Associates and Small Group Ministry facilitators gathered to brainstorm the themes we would explore each month this year. To guide our conversation, one question we asked was “What qualities does Unitarian Universalism inspire or challenge us to live in our lives?” Many people mentioned courage. One person said, “UUism gives me courage to try things I previously couldn’t do, it gives me courage to learn new things, and fosters my growth.”

So what do you think? Do you think Unitarian Universalism inspires you to be courageous? My answer is a strong and definitive, yes! Perhaps it grows out of one of my earliest memories of being put on the margins. I was in elementary school when I shared with my friends that I didn’t believe in God. One of my close friends told me I was going to hell. However, I wasn’t diminished. I told her that didn’t bother me because I didn’t believe in hell either. I know some kids in our congregation have these experiences today. It wasn’t easy, but already at 8 years old, I felt strong enough to say what I believed and stick to it, even when it put me on the outside. I see some of those same things in my own son. In Kindergarten, he was the only boy to take ballet, and he was teased, but he stuck with it. He didn’t take ballet the next year, but he saw it through and told stories of being teased and not taking it to heart.

This year our 7th and 8th grade youth have been busy with Coming of Age (COA), a curriculum that invites our young people to wrestle with ethical challenges, interview the Lead Minister, interview adult members of the congregation and do community service both inside and beyond UUCP. At the end of the program, they each write a personal credo, a statement of their beliefs and guiding principles and then share these from the pulpit in a service before the congregation. This takes courage! But more than this, in the interviews I have with our young people, many of them share stories of courage, of standing up when they see someone being bullied, or the courage to be who they are, even if others disagree.

In so many ways, our faith tradition teaches us to keep our minds open, to keep on learning and growing and trying new things. And too we teach the importance of knowing who you are, being who you are, being clear about what you value and affirming that in your life. I suppose if we only taught the latter, we’d run the risk of teaching arrogance. The combination of encouraging an openness to always learning, listening, stretching ourselves, with the strength to share who we are and work for the things we believe (even when it is not popular, or puts us at odds with others) seems the right recipe for courage.

This month, as we explore the theme of Courage, I invite you think about how UUCP and Unitarian Universalism inspires courage in your life.

Yours in love,
Rev. Susan



Living the Theme: Courage

Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience courage and what you learned from the practice.

A. Take a day or two and live out your best “counter-cultural self.”

Each of us have counter-cultural leanings that we don’t lean into as fully as we might wish. Set aside a day or a weekend or even a week in which to be your counter-cultural self. Maybe it’s no TV, or eating vegetarian, or buying nothing, or wearing a Pride T-shirt to the gym. Maybe it’s asking a friend to UUCP. Whatever it is, just try “leaning in.”

B. Have the courage to “stop and listen” rather than “stand and shout.”

We so often associate courage with aggressive acts...doing, challenging, pushing through, fighting, and demanding. But sometimes the most courageous thing to do is be quiet and listen deeply to the other side. Sometimes what’s needed is for us to bravely be open to them changing us. Sometimes staying takes more courage than leaving.

C. Thank someone for their courage.

Figure out a way to celebrate the courage of someone else. Thank the people whose courage inspires you. Write a letter, give a gift, say it aloud for once...find a way to tell them that their bravery is seen and that it matters.

D. Reflect on a time when courage failed you.

Figure out how best to do this reflection...through writing, or art, or conversation. Consider why your courage failed you...what happened, what led up to that moment?

Ask yourself what you wish you had done. Create a movie in your head of how you wish it had gone. What would have enabled you to do the courageous thing?

Finally, ask what you can do now. If you can’t go back and make up for it, how might you return to it in some other way?



Some Questions to Live With: Courage

As always, don't treat these questions as "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and find one that "hooks" you most. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into – and break open – your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your small group prepared to share that journey with the group.

- 1. What does courage look like?** Think of: our forbearers and those who journeyed to make homes in a new land; soldiers and victims of war; those suffering from and living with illness and/or disability; those advocating and acting for social change; those living in poverty; those coping with loss; the elderly; those living with feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- 2. Courage may change an unfortunate event into an auspicious one.** Has this ever happened to you?
- 3. What distinguishes courage from foolhardiness?**
- 4. How are you courageous?**
- 5. What is the most (or one of the most) courageous things you've done?**
- 6. What prevents you from acting courageously?**
7. Some people have the ability to overcome fear and carry on productively, while others don't, or worse, turn to negative behavior. **Is courage a quality that can be developed? If so, what practices or teachings/learnings can help one develop courage?**
- 8. Do you have courage in some types of situations, but not in others?**
- 9. What is the role, if any, of support systems** (family, friends, religious communities, 12-step programs, unions, buddies-in-arms, etc.) **in encouraging courageous behavior?**
- 10. Is courage the same as "never give up stubbornness?"**
- 11. Whose courage has inspired you?** Has their courage been contagious?
- 12. Are you as "courageously vulnerable" as you'd like to be?** Has there ever been a time when being vulnerable took courage?
- 13. When have you had the courage to admit you were wrong?**
- 14. Have you ever turned your back on courage?** Is there any way to make up for that now?
- 15. When have you been surprised by your own courage?** Where did that courage come from?
- 16. Do you have the courage to ask for help?** Is that courage needed in your life right now?
- 17. Who has been courageous on your behalf?**



Recommended Resources

These are **not** required reading. We will not dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started and offer different ways to see and explore the theme.

First Thoughts and Wise Words

Courage: the ability and willingness to confront fear, pain, danger, uncertainty, or intimidation. Physical courage is courage in the face of physical pain, hardship, death, or threat of death. Moral courage is the ability to act rightly in the face of popular opposition, shame, scandal, or discouragement.

With courage you will dare to take risks, have the strength to be compassionate, and the wisdom to be humble. Courage is the foundation of integrity.

Keshavan Nair

Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.

James Neil Hollingworth

And now let us believe in the new year that is given us -- new, untouched, full of things that have never been born.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Worry has been defined as the act of borrowing trouble from the future for present-day consumption; and courage has been defined as the act of borrowing hope from the future for present-day consumption...One of the by-products of religious faith is the hopeful outlook described by Isaiah (26:3): Those of steadfast mind, You keep in perfect peace because they trust in You.

Rabbi Chaim Stern

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

Martin Luther King Jr.

The terrorists thought that they would change my aims and stop my ambitions, but nothing has changed in my life, except this: weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage were born.

Malala Yousafzai

Self-control is the chief element in self-respect and self-respect is the chief element in courage.

Thucydides

Courage is as contagious as fear.

Eleanor Roosevelt

After looking at different quotes on courage, they all seemed to boil down to one thing: "inner strength plus motivation equals courage" One without the other doesn't seem to work. There are many examples of great courage in history, religious and otherwise: battlefield courage, running-into-a burning-house-to-save-someone type of courage, but what interests me most is the quiet courage of ordinary people getting through a challenging day or a difficult time.

Small Group Facilitator

Courage is grace under pressure.

Ernest Hemingway

Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities because it is the quality that guarantees all others.

Winston Churchill

One isn't necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.

Maya Angelou

How did the rose ever open its heart and give this world all of its beauty? It felt the encouragement of light on its being, otherwise we all remain too frightened.

Hafez



I Care and Am Willing To Serve and
Work To Protect All Children

*Lord I cannot preach like Martin
Luther King Jr.*

*or turn a poetic phrase like Maya Angelou and
Robert Frost,
but I care and am willing to serve and stand
with others to build a movement to protect all
our children.*

*I do not have Harriet Tubman's courage, or
Eleanor Roosevelt's and Wilma Mankiller's
political skills,*

*but I care and am willing to serve and stand
with others to save all our children.*

*I cannot sing like Marian Anderson or Fannie
Lou Hamer*

*or organize like Ella Baker and Bayard Rustin,
but I care and am willing to serve and stand up
with others to build a powerful nonviolent
movement to protect all our children.*

*I am not holy like Archbishop Tutu,
forgiving like President Mandela, or disciplined
like Mahatma Gandhi,*

*but I care and am willing to serve and stand
with others to protect all our children.*

*I am not brilliant like Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois or
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or as eloquent as
Sojourner Truth and Booker T. Washington,
but I care and am willing to serve and stand
with others to protect all our children.*

*I have not Mother Teresa's saintliness, The
Dalai Lama's or*

*Dorothy Day's love or Cesar Chavez's
gentle tough spirit,*

*but I care and am willing to serve and stand
with others to save all our children.*

*God it is not as easy as the '60s
to frame an issue and forge a solution,*

*but I care and am willing to serve and stand
with others to protect all our children.*

*My mind and body are not so swift as in youth
and my energy comes in spurts,*

*but I care and am willing to serve and stand
with others to protect all our children.*

*I'm so young
nobody will listen*

*I feel invisible and hopeless, and I'm not sure
what to say or do,*

*but I care and am willing to serve and stand
with my peers and adults to save myself and all
our children.*

*I can't see or hear well
speak good English, stutter sometimes*

*and get real scared, standing up before others,
but I care and am willing to serve and lift my
voice with others to save all our children.
God, use me as You will to save Your and our
children today and tomorrow and to build
a nation and world where every child is valued
and protected.*

Marian Wright Edelman

*Courage is summoning strength in the face of
life's difficulties or, sometimes, life's horrors. It
means proceeding in spite of pain, cost, or risk.
Courage is not the absence of fear, but the
deliberate decision that action is necessary
regardless. Courage acknowledges uncertainty,
but perseveres because of conviction and
resolve. It offers us focus and self-possession so
we can call up our competencies to meet our
challenges.*

*Courage is not necessarily an outward act of
heroism; it can be purely internal, such as
making the decision ...to adhere to values
different from those around us, or to give
something another try.*

WisdomCommons.org

*You gain strength, courage and confidence by
every experience in which you really stop to look
fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself,
"I have lived through this horror. I can take the
next thing that comes along" You must do the
thing you think you cannot do.*

*People grow through experience if they meet life
honestly and courageously. This is how
character is built.*

Eleanor Roosevelt

*Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the
form of every virtue at the testing point.*

C.S. Lewis

*Success is not final, failure is not fatal. It is the
courage to continue that counts.*

Winston Churchill

*Courage is like love- It must have hope for
nourishment.*

Napoleon Bonaparte



Cowardly Lion: All right, I'll go in there for Dorothy. Wicked Witch or no Wicked Witch, guards or no guards, I'll tear them apart. I may not come out alive, but I'm going in there. There's only one thing I want you fellows to do.

Tin Woodsman, Scarecrow: What's that?

Cowardly Lion: Talk me out of it!
The Wizard of Oz (film)

Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far they can go.

T. S. Eliot

The Journey

*One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice-
Though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do-
determined to save
the only life you could save.*

Mary Oliver

*Courage is an inner resolution to go forward despite obstacles;
Cowardice is submissive surrender to circumstances.
Courage breeds creativity; Cowardice represses fear and is mastered by it.
Cowardice asks the question, is it safe?
Expediency ask the question, is it politic?
Vanity asks the question, is it popular?*

But conscience asks the question, is it right? And there comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because it is right.

Martin Luther King Jr.

How does an alcoholic find the courage to stop drinking? "One Day at a Time."

Bill Wilson, founder of AA

To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily. Not to dare is to lose oneself.

Søren Kierkegaard

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

Courage can't see around corners but goes around them anyway.

Mignon McLaughlin

*Emerald cool we may be
As water in cupped hands
But oh, that we might be
As splinters of glass in cupped hands.*

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

To me, courage means doing something extraordinary, WAY outside of one's comfort zone, standing up for justice and your own truth. But some days, I feel that it takes courage to get up in the morning and face the world as it is.

Small Group Facilitator

To live life to the end is not a childish task!

Boris Pasternak



Courage

*It is in the small things we see it.
The child's first step,
as awesome as an earthquake.
The first time you rode a bike,*

*wallowing up the sidewalk.
The first spanking when your heart
went on a journey all alone.
When they called you crybaby
or poor or fatty or crazy
and made you into an alien,
you drank their acid
and concealed it.*

*Later,
if you faced the death of bombs and bullets
you did not do it with a banner,
you did it with only a hat to
cover your heart.
You did not fondle the weakness inside you
though it was there.
Your courage was a small coal
that you kept swallowing.
If your buddy saved you
and died himself in so doing,
then his courage was not courage,
it was love; love as simple as shaving soap.*

*Later,
if you have endured a great despair,
then you did it alone,
getting a transfusion from the fire,
picking the scabs off your heart,
then wringing it out like a sock.
Next, my kinsman, you powdered your sorrow,
you gave it a back rub
and then you covered it with a blanket
and after it had slept a while
it woke to the wings of the roses
and was transformed.*

*Later,
when you face old age and its natural
conclusion
your courage will still be shown in the little
ways,
each spring will be a sword you'll sharpen,
those you love will live in a fever of love,
and you'll bargain with the calendar
and at the last moment
when death opens the back door
you'll put on your carpet slippers
and stride out.*

Anne Sexton

*Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's
courage.*
Anaïs Nin

*Everyday courage has few witnesses. But yours
is no less noble because no drum beats for you
and no crowds shout your name.*
Robert Louis Stevenson

*It takes courage to grow up and turn out to be
who you really are.*
e.e. cummings

*Courage is being scared to death but saddling
up anyway.*
John Wayne

*Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak;
courage is also what it takes to sit down and
listen.*
Winston Churchill

*Courage starts with showing up and letting
ourselves be seen.*

*Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like
courage. Truth and courage aren't always
comfortable, but they're never weakness.
Vulnerability is the birthplace of love,
belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and
creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy,
accountability, and authenticity. If we want
greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and
more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is
the path.*

Brené Brown, Daring Greatly

*You can't test courage cautiously, so I ran hard
and waved my arms hard, happy.*
Annie Dillard, An American Childhood

*Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things
will happen. Don't be afraid.*
Frederick Buechner

*At times he regarded the wounded soldiers in an
envious way. He conceived persons with torn
bodies to be peculiarly happy. He wished that
he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage.*
Stephen Crane, Red Badge of Courage



What Kind of Times Are These
*There's a place between two stands
of trees where the grass grows
uphill
and the old revolutionary road
breaks off into shadows
near a meeting-house abandoned by the
persecuted
who disappeared into those shadows.*

*I've walked there picking mushrooms at the edge
of dread, but don't be fooled
this isn't a Russian poem, this is not somewhere
else but here,
our country moving closer to its own truth and
dread,
its own ways of making people disappear.*

*I won't tell you where the place is, the dark mesh
of the woods
meeting the unmarked strip of light—
ghost-ridden crossroads, leafmold paradise:
I know already who wants to buy it, sell it, make
it disappear.*

*And I won't tell you where it is, so why do I tell
you
anything? Because you still listen, because in
times like these
to have you listen at all, it's necessary
to talk about trees.*

Adrienne Rich

*"You know, I'd like to try another lion,"
Macomber said. "I'm really not afraid of them
now. After all, what can they do to you?"*

*"That's it," said Wilson. "Worst one can do is
kill you. How does it go? Shakespeare. Damned
good. See if I can remember. Oh, damned good.
Used to quote it to myself at one time. Let's see.
'By my troth, I care not; a man can die but once;
we owe God a death and let it go which way it
will he that dies this year is quit for the next.'
Damned fine, oh?"*

*He was very embarrassed, having brought out
this thing he had lived by, but he had seen men
come of age before and it always moved him. It
was not a matter of their twenty-first birthday.*

Ernest Hemingway, "The Short Life of Francis
Macomber"

*Courage is the self-affirmation of being in spite
of the fact of non-being. It is the act of the
individual self in taking the anxiety of non-being
upon itself by affirming itself...in the anxiety of
guilt and condemnation. ... every courage to be
has openly or covertly a religious root. For
religion is the state of being grasped by the
power of being itself.*

Paul Tillich

Additional Resources

Books:

Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be
Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love,
Parent, and Lead by Brené Brown

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Films:

Selma (In theaters this January 2015)

Trailer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6t7vVTxai>
[c](#)

To Kill a Mockingbird (1962)