



Soul Matters

Courage



Small Group
October 2026

Welcome to Courage

"Courage doesn't always roar."

- Mary Anne Radmacher

Courageous people change the world. So many names fall easily from our lips: Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sojourner Truth, Harvey Milk, Marsha P. Johnson. The list goes on and on.

We rightly honor such giants. But the problem is most of us aren't that tall.

Or are we?

Here's what we have to help each other remember: In addition to the heroic acts that alter history, there are also the daily choices that prevent history from altering us! Bending the arc of the universe toward justice deserves praise, but so does the ordinary work of integrity and not allowing *yourself* to be bent.

We need to make room on the stage for these common acts of courage. The bravery of embracing your beauty even when it doesn't fit the air-brushed images surrounding us. The courage of calling out microaggressions that occur daily for many of us. And what about resisting the persistent seduction of status and stuff? Simply put, the list is long: Turning down that drink one day at a time. Making yourself get out of bed when depression tells you to stay. Holding your partner's hand in public. Make no mistake, there are dozens of ordinary acts of bravery we embody every day!

Or maybe we should say there are dozens of ordinary acts of bravery we help each other embody every day. This we need to remember as well. Courage is not only noble; it's contagious! The bravery that makes it into the history books may save the world, but it's our ordinary courage that keeps each other going. Watching someone else make it through another day helps us endure. Witnessing someone else confront bigotry allows us to bravely be more open about who we are. They say that courage is found by digging deep, but most often it is passed on. It doesn't arise from within as much as it arises from the connections between us.

So don't worry so much if you haven't changed the world yet. And certainly let's stop comparing ourselves with those giants. Our work rests less in looking up to them and more in looking over at each other. And in remembering that others are also looking over at us.

Spiritual Exercises

It's one thing to analyze a theme; it's quite another to experience it. By pulling us out of the space of *thinking* and into the space of *doing*, our spiritual exercises invite us to figure out not just what we have to say about life, but also what life has to say *to us*!

With that in mind, pick and complete the one exercise that speaks to you the most. **Come to your group ready to share why you picked the exercise you did, how it surprised you and what gift it gave you.**

Option A *My Teacher: Fear*

Fear is a teacher. Don't skip class.

- Anonymous

Fear serves us well. Evolutionarily, it is what protected us from that tiger in the bushes. Its function has been to point out threats that need to be destroyed or run away from.

But as many wise ones tell us, that is not the whole picture. Sometimes - possibly most times - fear isn't a threat; it's a teacher. Sometimes it isn't pointing to something that needs destroyed, but something that needs to be understood. Sometimes it's not a danger to what we value most, but a reflection of what we value most. Sometimes what serves us best is to see it, not as a caution sign, but as a clue.

So this month, let's try to make this shift to connecting to fear as a clue and a teacher.

Simply put, your task this month is to **find the fear that is trying to teach you something!**

Here are your instructions:

- **Dig In:** Start by reading a little bit and learning how others have reframed their understanding of fear. Three articles we suggest can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- **List a Bunch:** Spend some time listing the biggest fears in your life *currently*. Don't analyze at this point; just list.
- **Narrow it Down:** With your takeaways from the articles in your head, read through your list of fears and pick *the one* that feels most like it has something to teach you. This is a gut thing. Figuring out if a fear is a threat or a teacher is a tricky thing. Let your brain do some of the work, but be sure to lean into your intuition.
- **Identify the Lesson:** This is where the work becomes a spiritual practice. With intention and imagination, put yourself in a different headspace and relate to your fear as a teacher, clue, or even an open door. Ask yourself questions such as: What lesson is this fear trying to teach me? How is this fear a clue about a "[helpless part of me](#) that never got their needs met"? What unaddressed need or hunger is underneath this fear?
- **Have a Conversation with Rilke:** The brilliant and beloved Austrian poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, has perhaps the most powerful articulation of viewing fear in a new light. Bring this quote into conversation with your fear's lesson. See what additional insight emerges. Here's [Rilke's quote](#): "*Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love.*"

Option B

Dear Fear...

Like exercise A, this exercise is also about relating to fear in a new way.

Often, when it comes to intense and complex emotions like fear, we get overwhelmed. And fear is especially overwhelming. It hits us hard and overtakes us like a tidal wave. Our thoughts, emotions and body get caught up in the disorienting swirl of its chaotic and violent power, causing us to lose any critical distance from it. It is as if there is no distance between where the fear ends and we begin.

One of the ways we can regain some critical distance from our fear is through the practice of writing a letter to it. The power of this approach lies in its ability to help us step back. Instead of experiencing the fear as something possessing us; we are suddenly communicating with it. With this critical distance, fear's grip loosens and we are able to move into a freer space from which we can *tell it* what we want our relationship to be.

So this month, give it a try: Write a letter to fear.

And to help you along your way, here are some examples:

- [Elizabeth Gilbert's letter in written form](#). And in [video form](#)
- [A letter from Carla putting her fear on notice](#).
- [A letter from Lubna telling her fear that she's going to ghost it](#).
- [Aundi writes her fear a love letter](#).

Option C

Step Outside Your Comfort Zone

Often the enemy of courage is not fear but our comfort zones. Yes, those comfortable emotional spaces and regular routines support and structure our lives, but they can stifle and shrink them as well.

So this month, let's bravely resist this seduction of routine. Your instructions are simple: **Pick an activity that pulls you out of your comfort zone!**

To help you on your way we've created **a list of courageous, anti-comfort zone actions**. Pick one from the list or use the list as inspiration to identify an anti-comfort zone activity of your own. Here's the link to the list:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ck3iHDKpGiIm_m5E2GDSAsUpqr1IMcTlzlqOAp3bMHo/edit?usp=sharing

Once you are done, bring your experience with this exercise into conversation with how you've danced with risk and comfort throughout your life. How did your exercise experience shed light on your relationship with comfort zones?

Come to your group ready to share:

1. Why you picked your chosen activity - share a bit about how your comfort zone has become problematic.
2. How your activity emboldened you, and hopefully changed you.
3. How do you plan to stick with it - what skills or new ways of thinking did you learn that will keep you from falling back into your unadventurous rut?

Option D

Ask Them About Courage

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to have conversations about them with people who are close to you. It's also a great way to deepen our relationships! Below is a list of questions to guide your conversation. Be sure to let your conversation partner know in advance that this won't be a typical conversation. Telling them a bit about Soul Matters will help set the stage. *Remember to also answer the questions yourself as they are meant to support a conversation, not just a time of quizzing them.*

Come to your group ready to share what surprised you about the conversation and what gift or insight it gave you. As always, keep a lookout for how your inner voice is trying to send you a message of comfort or challenge through these conversions with others.

Courage Questions:

- What fear took root in your younger years that continues to today?
- Who is the most courageous person you've met? How has their courage rubbed off on you?
- What was your bravest moment of not running away?
- Have you ever taken a "leap of faith"?
- Has courage gotten easier or harder as you've grown older?
- How do you think your future self will look back on who you are today and rate your courage?
- Can you tell me a story about bravely facing your "[shadow side](#)"?
- What seems more dangerous these days? Pessimism or optimism?
- In what way do you wish your generation had been more courageous?

Option E

Which Companion Piece Speaks to You?

Sometimes we come across a quote, song, article or movie and it perfectly captures what's going on for us right now or allows us to view our current circumstances in a new light.

With this in mind, spend some time this month going through the Companion Pieces section below to find the one piece **that speaks most powerfully to you.** (Or "[shimmers](#)" most strongly for you.)

Come to your group ready to share the piece you picked, why it called to you and what insight, memory, or message of comfort or challenge it offered you.

Finding Your Question

This list of questions is an aid for [deep reflection](#). How you answer them is often less important than the journey they take you on.

So, read through the list of questions 2-3 times until **one question** sticks out for you and captures your attention, or as some faith traditions say, until one of the questions “[shimmers](#).” Or as we like to say, “Read over them until one of the questions **picks you**.”

Then reflect on that question using one or all of these questions:

- What is going on in my life right now that makes this question so pronounced for me?
- What might my inner wisdom be trying to [say to me](#) through this question?
- How might this question be trying to wake me up or get me to realize something through this question?
- How might Life or my inner wisdom be trying to offer me a word of comfort or challenge through this question?



1. What fears did your family of origin pass on to you?
2. What is the greatest act of courage that you directly witnessed? And how did it change you?
3. What was your bravest moment of not running away? How are you being called to bravely not run away today?
4. What do you know now about courage that you didn't know when you were younger?
5. How do you think your future self will look back on who you are today and rate your courage?
6. What fear takes up more space in your head and heart than you want?
7. How has your life partner made you braver?
8. What will it take to finally have that conversation that scares you so much?
9. Is it time to tell someone how scared you really are?
10. Is safely tiptoeing around “it” making you ill?
11. Where are you saying “yes” when you need to courageously say “no”?
12. Is comfort luring you away from courage?
13. What if the secret to [feeling less fear](#) is to stop trying to keep yourself safe?
14. Is fear making your world too small?
15. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to find it.

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. Nor are they intended to be analyzed in your group. Instead, they are here to companion you on your personal journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of embodying this month's theme in your living and loving.

Word Roots & Definitions

The word 'courage' comes from the old French word *cœur* meaning 'heart.' So 'courage' is the measure of your heartfelt participation in the world... The human way is to hope that there's a way to take that courageous step – without having one's heart broken. And it's my contention that there is no sincere path a human being can take without breaking his or her heart.

[David Whyte](#)

Wise Words

Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Do not be afraid.

Frederick Buechner

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

Ambrose Redmoon

When I dare to use my strength in the service of my vision, it becomes less and less and important whether I am afraid.

Audre Lorde

The hero is no braver than an ordinary person, but he or she is brave five minutes longer.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Courage is the power to let go of the familiar.

[Raymond Lindquist](#)

You can choose courage or you can choose comfort, but you cannot have both.

Brené Brown

Only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking it.

Audre Lorde

If you possess enough courage to speak out what you are, you will find you are not alone.

[Richard Wright](#)

Courage, it turns out, isn't one dramatic leap. It's the daily, unglamorous decision to keep authoring your own life instead of accepting the draft everyone else already wrote for you.

[Leena Wilde Ryan](#)

It takes courage ... to endure the sharp pains of self-discovery rather than choose to take the dull pain of unconsciousness that would last the rest of our lives.

Marianne Williamson

Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says I'll try again tomorrow.

Mary Anne Radmacher

Softness is not weakness. It takes courage to stay delicate in a world so cruel.

Beau Taplin

There are two forms of courage in this world. One demands that we jump into action with our armor on. The other demands that we strip ourselves bare-naked and surrender.

[Jeff Brown](#)

If you want to feel less fear, stop trying to keep yourself safe.

[Andrea Gibson](#)

White supremacy culture's number one strategy is to make us afraid. When we are afraid, we lose touch with our power and are more easily manipulated by any promise of safety.

[Tema Okun](#)

We've been trained to be afraid of our own yes, and what feels good in our lives. Get curious about that. Who benefits from you being terrified to be happy?

[adrienne maree brown](#)

If you cannot sit with your own fear, you will project it and act it out on the people you love.

[Jeff Foster](#)

Do you want me to tell you something really subversive? Love is everything it's cracked up to be. That's why people are so cynical about it. It really is worth fighting for, being brave for, risking everything for. And the trouble is, if you don't risk anything, you risk even more.

[Erica Jong](#)

Daring to set boundaries is having the courage to love ourselves even when we risk [disappointing](#) others.

[Brene Brown](#)

If you feel safe in the area that you're working in, you're not working in the right area. Always go a little further into the water that you feel you're capable of being in. And when you don't feel that your feet are quite touching the bottom, you're just about in the right place to do something exciting.

[David Bowie](#)

Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love.

[Rainer Maria Rilke](#)

I will not die an un-lived life. I will not live in fear of falling or catching fire. I choose to inhabit my days, to allow my living to open me, to make me less afraid... to loosen my heart until it becomes a wing.

[Dawna Markova](#)

Videos & Podcasts

Don't Run Away From Fear. 'Agree' With It

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2mb4tTwAqo>

On the Courage to Love Life in the Face of Losing It

https://www.instagram.com/reels/C1c_xjMubZZ/

How is Lovingkindness an Antidote to Fear?

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/JiDheo-K-dk>

How is Curiosity the Antidote to Fear?

<https://www.instagram.com/reels/DbGr8tuxURk/>

On the Courage to Allow People to Feel Their Feelings

<https://www.instagram.com/reels/DAYzbkxOBVu/>

Blessing of Courage, Turning Towards Life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9b1oKXuz8E>

The Many Flavors of Courage from Model Strangers

- On [the courage to trust yourself](#) and find your own way
- On [the courage to claim joy](#) while going through a rough patch
- On [the courage to embrace loneliness'](#) call to know yourself

On the Courage to Set Boundaries

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRXMRJ-2Vmk>

How Frankenstein Reveals the Real Monster to Fear

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1444406653453679>

The Courage of Ordinary People

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJZ3sEO3AV4&t=3s>

On the Courage to Criticize the Country You Love

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtkmwBFWZDo>

Is the Trump Administration Trying to bring Back the Lavender Scare?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAbnL_QLUak

Articles

On Needing Courage that is Stamina, not Spectacle

Rev. Cameron Trimble

<https://www.pilotingfaith.org/p/the-long-work-of-courage>

The Physics of Vulnerability and What it Really Means to be Brave

Brene Brown

<https://www.dailygood.org/story/1973/the-physics-of-vulnerability-brene-brown/>

Fear Is the Fulcrum

Scot Nakagawa

<https://antiauthoritarianplaybook.substack.com/p/fear-is-the-fulcrum>

The Quiet Courage of Changing Your Mind

Thom Hartman

<https://wisdomschool.com/p/the-quiet-courage-of-changing-your>

Music

Our thematic playlists - on [Spotify](#) and [YouTube](#) - are organized as a journey, so consider listening from beginning to end and using them as a personal musical meditation.

Click [here](#) for the **Spotify** playlist on Courage.

Click [here](#) for the **YouTube** playlist on Courage

Books

[On Courage](#): How to Be a [Dissident](#) in an Age of Fear

[Comfortable with Uncertainty](#): 108 Teachings on Cultivating Fearlessness and Compassion

[Daring Greatly](#): How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead

[So Many Stars](#): An Oral History of Trans, Nonbinary, Genderqueer, and Two-Spirit People of Color

[Things Fall Apart](#)

Movies

[Come See Me in the Good Light](#)

[The Lives of Others](#)

[Good Night, Good Luck](#)

[Small Things Like These](#)

[Shut Up and Sing](#)

[Defending Your Life](#)

[Project Hail Mary](#)

More Monthly Inspiration from Soul Matters!

Our Facebook Inspiration Page: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Our Instagram Page: Find us as "soul_matters_circle"

Packet Introduction Credit Note: Unless explicitly noted otherwise, the introductions of these packets are written by our Team Lead, Rev. Scott Tayler. Rev. Scott gives permission for his pieces to be used in any way that is helpful, including in newsletters, worship and online service/recordings.



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