



# *Soul Matters*

---

## The Path of Courage



Materials for Individual Reflection

October 2022

# Welcome to The Path of Courage

*"Courage doesn't always roar."*

- Mary Anne Radmacher

Courageous people change the world. So many examples of that this month. October's celebration of LGBTQ+ history month reminds us of the many who bravely moved (and continue to move) our world toward greater acceptance and affirmation. The revolutionary prophet of peace, Mohandas Gandhi, was born on October 2. Our Christian friends celebrate Reformation Day and Martin Luther's courage that changed how we all think about religious authority. We rightly honor such giants. 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 path 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 the depression tells you to stay there. 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 our ordinary courage 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.

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 looking over at and needing strength from us.

# Our Spiritual Exercises

## Option A

### *Step Outside Your Comfort Zone*

Often the enemy of courage is not fear but our comfort zones. Yes, those 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 or use it as inspiration to identify something of your own imagining. Here's the link to the list:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ck3iHDKpGiJm\\_m5E2GDSAsUpqr1IMcTlzIqOAp3bMHo/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ck3iHDKpGiJm_m5E2GDSAsUpqr1IMcTlzIqOAp3bMHo/edit?usp=sharing)

**Come to your group ready to share:**

1. Why you picked your chosen activity - share a bit about how your comfort zone had become "dangerous."
2. How your activity emboldened you, and hopefully changed you.
3. How 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 B

### *Finally Say "No."*

Courage is often about bravely saying "yes," but sometimes saying "no" is what is needed. Opening ourselves to new experiences enriches us but putting our foot down and setting boundaries often saves us. So this month, you are invited to identify and lean into a brave "No!"

- Here's an article to get you thinking: <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2018/mar/18/the-power-of-saying-no-change-your-life-psychology-william-leith>
- Here's one that tackles some of the myths that make it hard to say no: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/meganbruneau/2016/09/30/if-you-have-trouble-saying-no-say-this-instead/?sh=5048fae938b0>
- And if you want to take a deep dive, here's a book: <https://medium.com/@NickCalabs/the-power-of-no-book-review-b7c8650b3496>

## Option C

### ***Strengthen Your Courage to Apologize & Forgive***

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is known as the holiest day of the Jewish year.

Working up the courage to make amends or forgive is never easy. It's scary. So often we run from it. Often at the expense of a wounded heart, ours or another's.

This exercise invites you to stop running, to carve out the time and focus to understand - just a bit better - what makes it so hard for us.

Below are two podcasts about forgiving and apologizing. Engage them this month in the spirit of discernment and spiritual practice. In other words, don't just try to learn from them, but also allow them to take you back to that place in your life where the work of forgiveness or apology remains unresolved. Find in them a skill or invitation to make at least one step toward the work of repair.

**The Power of Mercy:** <https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/the-power-of-mercy/>

**The Power of Apologies:** <https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/the-power-of-apologies/>

A few extras:

- It may help to know you are not alone this month. In early October, our Jewish friends will be honoring [Yom Kippur](#), the Day of Atonement, known as the holiest day of the Jewish year. If you want to explore stories of forgiveness from the perspective of this tradition, you can find them [here](#).
- The Buddhist teacher Jack Kornfield has a beautiful forgiveness meditation. It might also be helpful in your journey this month. You can find it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbHKCy4f6Dk>

## Option D

### ***Which Courage Quote Calls to You?***

Sometimes we read a quote 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 reading through the quotes in the Companion Pieces section below to ***find the one that best illuminates your journey with Courage.***

We encourage you to use the same discernment practice with these quotes as you with the packet's list of questions:

- **Read through the list** a few times, noting which ones "shimmer" (i.e. call to you or have an emotional gravitational pull for you). It often helps to circle or star these quotes that stand out.
- With each reading **narrow your focus** in on those that stick out, until you finally **settle on the one** that pulls at you the most.
- Then make space to **reflect** on the gift, challenge or insight your chosen quote is offering you.
- Some of us may want to **go further** and capture your reflections with journaling or creative expression.

Come to your group ready to share your quote and the journey it took you on.

## Option E

### Ask Them About Their Courage

Our monthly themes offer a chance to take our relationships to a deeper level. Even among those we're closest to, there's so much of our stories that goes unshared. Like NPR's well-known [StoryCorp Project](#), this exercise invites you to use some or all of the below "courage questions" to honor the stories of and enrich our connection with those we care deeply about.

You can make this as simple or complex as you like. Some of us may just bring up one of the questions informally while out to dinner, over coffee or even while washing the dishes together. Others of us may use it as an opportunity to take a deep dive by asking them to sit with you for an hour and go through multiple of the questions.

Come to your group ready to share what surprised you about the conversation and what gift or insight it gave you.

#### Courage Questions:

- What was your earliest memory of being scared?
- What has life taught you about "true courage"?
- Has bravely not running away ever produced surprising results?
- Who is the most courageous person you've met?
- Has courage gotten easier or harder as you've grown older?
- Have you ever taken a "leap of faith"?
- Can you tell me a story about bravely facing one of your demons?
- What seems more dangerous these days? Pessimism or optimism?
- In what way do you wish your generation was more courageous?

# Your Question

*Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every one. Instead, make time to meditate on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"? And what is that question trying to get you to notice or acknowledge?*

*Often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with!*

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. Has bravely not running away ever produced surprising results?
4. Are you being called to bravely not run away today?
5. What do you know now about courage that you didn't know when you were younger?
6. What seems more dangerous these days? Pessimism or optimism?
7. Is life calling you to make a "leap of faith"?
8. How would your life be enriched by bravely forgiving someone? Maybe even yourself?
9. What if [Adrienne Maree Brown](#) is right that joy and self-love are among today's most courageous acts of resistance?
10. In resistance to white supremacy culture, what are you courageous enough to stop normalizing? ([sonyareneetaylor](#))
11. Is it time to tell someone how scared you really are?
12. Is safely tiptoeing around "it" making you ill?
13. Where are you saying "yes" when you need to courageously say "no"?
14. What if fear is an indicator of what you deep down long for and want to do?
15. Has comfort led you to forgetting what courage feels like?
16. Instead of standing up and speaking out, is courage now asking you to sit down and listen?
17. **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. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of imagining the path of courage.*

### Word Roots & Definitions

Courage is a heart word. The root of the word courage is cor - the Latin word for heart. In one of its earliest forms, the word courage meant "To speak one's mind by telling all one's heart." Over time, this definition has changed, and today, we typically associate courage with heroic and brave deeds. But in my opinion, this definition fails to recognize the inner strength and level of commitment required for us to actually speak honestly and openly about who we are and about our experiences -- good and bad.

*Brené Brown*

### Wise Words

Come to the edge.  
We might fall.  
Come to the edge.  
It's too high!  
COME TO THE EDGE!  
And they came  
And he pushed  
And they flew.

[Christopher Logue](#)

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

*Frederick Buechner*

All around you, people will be tiptoeing through life, just to arrive at death safely. But dear children, do not tiptoe. Run, hop, skip, or dance!

*Shane Claiborne*

Don't just resist cynicism — fight it actively, in yourself and in those you love and in the communication with which you shape culture. Cynicism, like all destruction, is easy, it's lazy. There is nothing more difficult yet more gratifying in our society than living with sincere, active, constructive hope for the human spirit. This is the most potent antidote to cynicism, and it is an act of courage and resistance today.

[Maria Popova](#)

We need the courage to question the powers that be, the courage to be impatient with evil and patient with people.... In many instances we will be stepping out on nothing, and just hoping to land on something. But that's the struggle. To live is to wrestle with despair, yet never allow despair to have the last word.

*Cornel West*

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

*Ambrose Redmoon*

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*

Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, 'I will try again tomorrow.'

*Mary Anne Radmacher*

Anger can give us the mettle to speak with courage and conviction, but also the venom that blinds us to the views of others.

[James Hoggan](#)

We don't have to be pollyannish, or fatalistic. We can just be human. We can be messy, imperfect, contradictory, broken. We can recognize the difference between hopelessness and helplessness. Because what if we've been doing the equation backward? What if hope isn't what leads to action? What if courage is what leads to action and hope is what comes next?

[Mary Annaïse Heglar](#)

Next time, ask: What's the worst that will happen? Then push yourself a little further than you dare. Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt you, put you down and suggest it's personal. And the world won't end. And the speaking will get easier and easier. And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized you had. And you will lose some friends and lovers and realize you don't miss them. And new ones will find you and cherish you... And at last you'll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking it.

*Audre Lorde*

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

*Brené Brown*

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, even as we come to slowly learn that safety dependent on violence is not safe at all.

[Tema Okun](#)

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*

I will not die an unlived 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...

*Dawna Markova, from [I Will Not Die an Unlived Life](#)*

It's a shallow life that doesn't give a person a few scars.

*Garrison Keillor*

Anyone can slay a dragon but try waking up every morning and loving the world all over again. That's what takes a real hero.

*Brian Andreas*

I believe that courage follows love... When I love something, I can be very strong in defense of it, or very brave in pursuit of it. And I think my own courage has come from being loved well enough so that I could love myself and others.

*A Soul Matters Member*

## **Music**

Two different playlists for each of our monthly themes: one in Spotify and another in YouTube. I organized them as a journey of sorts, so consider listening from beginning to end and using the playlists as musical meditations.

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

Click [here](#) for all [Spotify playlists](#).

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

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).



## Videos & Podcasts

What dangers do you need to courageously bring into view?

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vT\\_PNKg3v7s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vT_PNKg3v7s)

**Courage is Born from Struggle - Interview with Brené Brown**

<https://onbeing.org/programs/1-courage-born-struggle-brene-brown/>

“We buy into the mythology about vulnerability being weakness and being gullibility and being frailty because it gives us permission not to do it...”

**Courage To Live Undivided, Parker Palmer**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5ZLt4yyYrw>

**TED Talk - What I learned from 100 days of rejection | Jia Jiang (*must watch!*)**

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

**Fearless - Invisibilia Podcast**

<http://www.npr.org/programs/invisibilia/377515477/fearless?showDate=2015-01-16>

**TED Talk - We're all hiding something. Let's find the courage to open up**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/ash\\_beacham\\_we\\_re\\_all\\_hiding\\_something\\_let\\_s\\_find\\_the\\_courage\\_to\\_open\\_up](https://www.ted.com/talks/ash_beacham_we_re_all_hiding_something_let_s_find_the_courage_to_open_up)

## Articles

**The Courage to Not Know**

*Brené Brown*

<https://brenebrown.com/articles/2020/02/13/the-courage-to-not-know/>

**11 Ways White America Avoids Taking Responsibility for its Racism**

*Dr. Robin Diangelo*

The pernicious impact of "white fragility" and the revolutionary courage to accept feedback.

[https://www.salon.com/2015/06/16/11\\_ways\\_white\\_america\\_avoids\\_taking\\_responsibility\\_for\\_its\\_racism\\_partner/](https://www.salon.com/2015/06/16/11_ways_white_america_avoids_taking_responsibility_for_its_racism_partner/)

Related:

<https://notesfromanaspiringhumanitarian.com/white-people-increase-your-racial-stamina-take-the-pledge/>

## Books

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

*Brené Brown*

**All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis**

*Edited by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine K. Wilkinson*

Reviews [here](#) and [here](#)

**Things Fall Apart**

*Chinua Achebe*

## Movies

[tick, tick...Boom!](#)

[Coda](#)

[Nope](#)

[Shut Up and Sing](#)

[Away From Her](#)

[Chasing Coral](#)

[The Call to Courage](#)

## More Monthly Inspiration from Soul Matters!

### Our Facebook Inspiration Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

### Our Instagram Page:

Find us as "soul\_matters\_circle"

### Music Playlists:

Click [here](#) for links to the [Spotify playlists](#) for each month.

Click [here](#) to check out the [YouTube playlists](#).



© 2022-23 Soul Matters ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

***Packets are for use only by member congregations of the Soul Matters Sharing Circle.***

*Learn how to join at*

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com>