



# TOUCHSTONES

**Courage**

**May 2022**

Like many of you, I've been reading some Brené Brown over the years. She researches and writes about shame and vulnerability. She's identified the way that shame keeps people from living the lives they wish and how it is vulnerability that constitutes real courage. If you want to love, lead, heal, grow, or achieve, you must have the courage to be vulnerable. To let your heart show, to potentially fail, to be hurt.

This idea shows up over and over again in different fields, from business success to marriage. Real courage is putting yourself out there. It might look like speaking up in a meeting with a new idea. It might mean telling someone that you have an emotional need. And this is where growth, creativity, and possibility come – when we dare to be imperfect. (Actually, we are imperfect. It is when we dare to show it).

This can be hard for some folks, especially if you are coded/raised white, middle-class, and/or midwestern. We say, "I got it" instead of "I could use some help." We say "it's fine" when it is not fine. Social media doesn't help – we compare other people's outsides to our insides, and those just aren't the same thing. It takes real courage, to be honest, vulnerable, and real.

What can help us develop this kind of courage?

- Other people who love us. Whether that's a spouse or partner, a small group at church, a circle of friends, or others, knowing that we are loved as we really are gives us courage to be more real and true.
- Stillness and centering. A prayer life, a journaling habit, meditation, singing, knitting – something that takes us away from the hustle can help us be real with ourselves.
- Practice. The more we do it, the easier it gets! When we are vulnerable, we often unlock the vulnerability of others, and this makes us all feel less alone. We learn it is less scary.

Courage is our theme for May. What does courage look like for you? What are you ready to dare to do? I encourage you to plan and take concrete steps to be more real, more vulnerable, or more honest with someone this month. Open up about your heart. Lay down your armor of intellect, passion, or clarity.

One more thought about courage. Aristotle identified courage as one of the four central virtues. Like all virtues, Aristotle said it was the mean between two extremes. So one extreme is cowardice – always being afraid, unwilling to do things or try things. Unwilling to be vulnerable or take risks. But the other extreme is "foolishness" or "rashness." When we take risks we should not, when we are reckless with ourselves or others. Aristotle doesn't say this, but I think recklessness is another way of denying our heart. When we are reckless, we are pretending we have no fear at all, that we have nothing to be vulnerable about.

Courage is between these. It is noticing where our heart fears, and then moving with love in that direction, so we can grow and truly live.

May you have courage, friends, to be true to yourself.

In faith,  
Matthew

## Readings from the Common Bowl

**Day 1:** "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear."  
Ambrose Redmoon



**Day 2:** "People are made of flesh and blood and a miracle fiber called courage."  
Mignon McLaughlin

**Day 3:** "Courage is as often the outcome of despair as of hope; in the one case we have nothing to lose, in the other everything to gain."  
Diane de Poitiers

**Day 4:** "When we are afraid, we ought not to occupy ourselves with endeavoring to prove that there is no danger, but in strengthening ourselves to go on in spite of the danger."  
Mark Rutherford

**Day 5:** "Courage is a gift. Those having it never know for sure if they have it till the test comes. And those having it in one test never know for sure if they will have it when the next test comes."  
Carl Sandburg

**Day 6:** "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear."  
Mark Twain

**Day 7:** "To live with fear and not be afraid is the final test of maturity."  
Edward Weeks

**Day 8:** "Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point."  
C.S. Lewis

**Day 9:** "Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."  
Winston Churchill

**Day 10:** "One person with courage makes a majority."  
Andrew Jackson

**Day 11:** "The important thing is this: To be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we could become."  
Charles Dubois

**Day 12:** "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

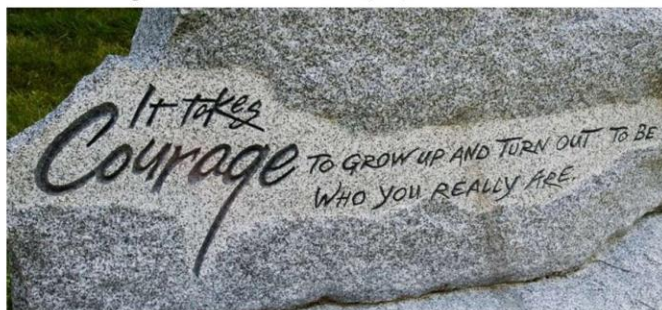
kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest."  
Maya Angelou

**Day 13:** "The secret of happiness is freedom; the secret of freedom is courage."  
Carrie Jones

**Day 14:** "You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do."  
Eleanor Roosevelt

**Day 15:** "Courage can't see around corners, but goes around them anyway."  
Mignon McLaughlin

**Day 16:** "Courage is grace under pressure."  
Ernest Hemingway



**Day 17:** "Something happens to me when I witness someone's courage. They may not know I'm watching and I might not let them know. But something happens to me that will last me for a lifetime. To fill me when I'm empty, and rock me when I'm low."  
Holly Near

**Day 18:** "But a man or woman becomes fully human only by his or her choices and his or her commitment to them. People attain worth and dignity by the multitude of decisions they make from day by day. These decisions require courage."  
Rollo May

**Day 19:** "It takes courage to push yourself to places that you have never been before... to test your limits... to break through barriers. And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight inside the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."  
Anaïs Nin

**Day 20:** "The highest courage is to dare to be yourself in the face of adversity. Choosing right over wrong, ethics over convenience, and truth over popularity... these are the choices that measure your

life. Travel the path of integrity without looking back, for there is never a wrong time to do the right thing."  
Source Unknown

**Day 21:** "Go to the edge of the cliff and jump off. Build your wings on the way down."  
Ray Bradbury

**Day 22:** "...part of us dies when we know that something is wrong, yet do nothing. We could call this radical dignity. We don't have to tackle every issue, but if we remain silent in the face of cruelty, injustice, and oppression, we sacrifice part of our soul."  
Paul Rogat Loeb

**Day 23:** "Love makes us human; courage makes us extraordinary."  
Faryal K. Kharal

**Day 24:** "Courage doesn't happen when you have all the answers. It happens when you are ready to face the questions you have been avoiding your whole life."  
Shannon L. Alder

**Day 25:** "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."  
Reinhold Niebuhr

**Day 26:** "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Day 27:** "There are all kinds of courage. It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends."  
J. K. Rowling

**Day 28:** "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

**Day 29:** "I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what."  
Harper Lee

**Day 30:** "Courage is not the towering oak that sees storms come and go; it is the fragile blossom that opens in the snow."  
Alice M. Swaim

**Day 31:** "Sometimes even to live is an act of courage."  
Seneca



## Family Matters

### Building Courage in Kids

Karen Young

Karen Young writes of ways to build courage in children. "Courage isn't about something magical that happens inside us to make us 'not scared'. It's about something magical that happens inside us to make us push through fear, self-doubt, anxiety, and do the things that feel hard or risky or frightening. Sometimes, courage only has to happen for seconds at a time—just long enough to be brave enough."

She offers a number of things that can be done to cultivate courage. These include:

**Speak of their brave as though they're already there:** Let them know that courage is coming alive inside them.

**Give permission for imperfection:** Often failure involves the courage of trying something difficult.

**You won't always feel ready. That's why it's called courage:** Courage can emerge when least expected, an outcome of fanning the spark of courage within.

**Try something new:** Moving outside their comfort zone can nurture a brave heart.

**Be the example:** Talk with your children about learning to be courageous, including addressing fear and doubt and other things that can challenge courage.

**Give them space for courage of thought:** This allows them to resist peer pressure, to question things, and to find their own way.

**Give space for their intuition to flourish—and teach them how to use it:** Gut feelings and heart whispers can often lead to doing what is right, not what is easy, and that often takes courage.

**And then there's self-talk. Sneaky, sidelining self-talk:** "The 'can'ts,' 'should,' 'shouldn'ts,' and 'what-ifs' nurture fear rather than courage." Courage can overcome fear and self-doubt.

**It's never too late to change ... anything:** You can start with courage, and still change your mind, you can make a different decision.

**The outcome doesn't matter as much as the process:** Playing it safe is a focus on the ending. Focus on the process so

courage is advanced by each small step.

**Encourage their sense of adventure:** Adventure has a way of nurturing courage.

**Celebrate their courage regularly:** Each good decision, small victory, or risk can involve courage. Create a weekly family ritual where everyone shares their "brave."

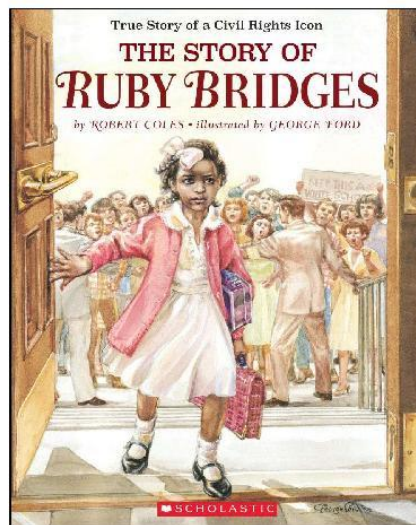
**Courage is about doing what's right for them:** Sometimes saying no requires considerable courage, and sometimes it is saying yes.

Young concludes, "The truth is, our children are slaying their own dragons, every day. ... The key is helping them realize it so they can use it to push through their edges when they feel small, scared, confused, or unseen."

Source: <https://www.heysigmund.com/building-courage-in-kids/>

### Family Activity: Ruby Bridges

Read *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles, author and George Ford, illustrator (1995) or watch the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRfy2xs8Xpg> (8:35) Discuss the story with your children. The following questions may get you started. What made Ruby so different from everyone else? What challenges did Ruby face going to an all-white school? How would you feel if you were Ruby? What would you do if you were Ruby in that situation? In what ways was Ruby brave?



## The Hardest Battle

### The Courage to Be Yourself

ee cummings

This comes from cummings' "A Poet's Advice to Students." Written in 1953, it includes his quote, "To be nobody but yourself..." Cummings, a Unitarian, fought that battle in 1950 when he was awarded the prestigious Academy of American Poets annual fellowship. He was harshly criticized by traditionalists who hated him for his bravery of breaking with tradition and being nobody-but-himself in his poetry.

A poet is somebody who feels, and who expresses his feelings through words. This may sound easy. It isn't.

A lot of people think or believe or know they feel—but that's thinking or believing or knowing; not feeling. And poetry is feeling—not knowing or believing or thinking.

Almost anybody can learn to think or believe or know, but not a single human being can be taught to feel. Why? Because whenever you think or you believe or you know, you're a lot of other people: but the moment you feel, you're nobody-but-yourself.

To be nobody-but-yourself—in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.

As for expressing nobody-but-yourself in words, that means working just a little harder than anybody who isn't a poet can possibly imagine. Why? Because nothing is quite as easy as using words like somebody else. We all of us do exactly this nearly all of the time—and whenever we do it, we're not poets.

If, at the end of your first ten or fifteen years of fighting and working and feeling, you find you've written one line of one poem, you'll be very lucky indeed.

And so my advice to all young people who wish to become poets is: do something easy, like learning how to blow up the world—unless you're not only willing, but glad, to feel and work and fight till you die. Does that sound dismal? It isn't. It's the most wonderful life on earth. Or so I feel. Source: <https://www.themarginalian.org/2017/09/25/e-e-cummings-advice/>



The Unitarian Universalist Church  
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- Members and friends of the church who live at Wesley Willows are invited to join others and Rev. Matthew on the 4th Tuesday of most months at 9am. We will meet in the Reflection Room Town Center.

Want to have a group – a book group, a parent group, a “circle supper”, or whatever you like?  
– just email Autumn at [office@uurockford.org](mailto:office@uurockford.org) and she can give you the Zoom login and password

### ***Courage & Repairing the World***

In 1931, Winston Churchill wrote, “Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities, because ...it is the quality which guarantees all others.” Repairing the world has never been easy work, and that is even truer in these times because of competing understandings of what, in fact, needs to be repaired. The repair needed because of climate change is instructive. While many accept the challenge of climate change, powerful interests dismiss it. It is not simply about working to make the systemic changes to slow and eventually stop climate change. It is also overcoming the considerable obstruction by those in opposition. This effort requires courage, components of which are bravery, persistence, and integrity.