



# INSTRUCTIONS FOR

## Instructions for Life – Courage Sermon Series Study Guide

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There are few qualities that more frequently inspire action and instill resolve than courage. Courage is the stuff of epic tales and legends. The presence of courage necessitates, by its definition, that there be some daunting task, seemingly insurmountable foe, or tragic injustice that screams to be put right. Adversaries and opposition are part of the territory. After all, without adverse conditions and forces that leverage their weight against that which is right, why would one need courage in the first place? It is such an admirable character trait that its demonstration has become largely romanticized in movies and media over the course of the last 75 years. Think about it. If you go to an action/adventure film, regardless of the quality of the movie, you have a strong sense of the plotline already. You know that you will, at the beginning of the film, be introduced in a seemingly unsuspecting way to the protagonist – the hero. You'll learn things about his/her life that build empathy and favor. Then some egregious wrong occurs that riles within the heart of the viewer a sense of justice. Surely, someone is going to correct this injustice whatever it is – they have to. Then ever so slowly, the hero is transformed from a person that the viewer empathizes with and relates to into the person the viewer longs to become. The hero becomes the hero, demonstrating a resolve and determination toward virtue and justice that exceeds the mounting threat from the source of injustice. And in the rare cases that a story is wonderfully told, our eyes well up with tears, our hearts pound with pride, and we resound the praises of those who overcome because of the courage that has been demonstrated. Think about your favorite action/adventure movie, and it will fall loosely into that form. We long to be courageous and to have the strength to do so.

Such factors were certainly in place for the future of Solomon's kingship as his father, David, encouraged him in 1 Chronicles 28:10, as we learned this morning. There is an overwhelming weight of the task that lays before Solomon as he prepares to build a house for God. The size of the work accompanied by the obligation to be God's man on the throne of His people is going to require tremendous courage in the face of political pressure, both domestic and international, temptation with the way he handles his influence as king, and the difficult waters of becoming king in the midst of a dysfunctional family rift that led to multiple descendants of David challenging Solomon for the right of the throne. All of these challenges are in addition to the adversarial forces that will face Solomon as he tries to be faithful as God's man in a world that seeks to undo the things of God.

In a very relatable way, we can understand that. Sure, we do not understand it in the same vein that Solomon understood it. We do not have the riches, prominence, power, fame, or resources that Solomon had to manage. However, if we are believers, we know full well the difficulty in striving for faithfulness to our call to be witnesses for Christ in a world that seeks, with everything in it, to discredit, silence, and undo us along with the other workings of God in the world. That is a story that never changes. It was true for Abraham and Moses. It was true for David and Solomon. And, as we will see in our passage this week in John 16, focusing on verse 33, it was most certainly true for Jesus and His disciples.

### LEARN

Our passage this week occurs in the middle of Jesus' Farewell Discourse with His disciples, which takes place following the institution of the Lord's Supper (John 13) as Jesus makes His way to the Mount of Olives, where He will be betrayed by Judas Iscariot. This discourse, which takes place through John 14 – 17, is the last conversation Jesus will have with His disciples before His crucifixion. He is preparing them for the change in their lives that is coming in the immediate

future; a change that is imperceptible and inconceivable to the disciples at this point. In chapter 15, Jesus explains the absolute necessity of the disciples abiding in their relationship with Him; the way the disciples are to love one another as a result of their relationship with Christ; and finally, the extreme animosity of the world toward them because they are no longer of the world, but are now of Christ.

Chapter 16, then, begins by warning the disciples of their becoming outcasts in the world because the world does not understand them. Knowing that these dire circumstances will force the disciples into seasons of despair and initial confusion, Jesus reveals how the Holy Spirit will indwell them and provide them with growing understanding of who Jesus is and a realization of the power and peace that He gives. Jesus continues by foretelling His death and resurrection, all the while assuring the disciples of their importance to God and their continued fellowship with God, even though Jesus will no longer physically be with them. In short, Jesus is preparing the disciples for the greatest crisis of faith and theological shift of their lives.

Right before moving into His glorious High Priestly Prayer in chapter 17, though, Jesus summarizes His conversation and teaching with the disciples over the last three chapters in one short, powerful verse in John 16:33.

“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

Within this single verse, we see three critical acknowledgements by Jesus regarding the need for His followers to have courage in the world. First of all, Jesus speaks to the disciples so that they may have peace. In acknowledging that the disciples are “in Me”, Jesus is most likely referring back to the dynamic of abiding in chapter 15. This sets up the distinction between life in Christ and life in the world. For Christians, they exist in both realms simultaneously. We are in Christ and in the World. But the results are polar opposites. In Christ there is peace – peace that refuses comprehension, as Paul explains in Philippians 4:7. That peace is sustaining and supernatural. It is also critically needed because of our next point.

Second, in this world for believers there will be tribulation. The NIV interprets this word as “trouble.” In the New Testament this word can refer to eschatological woes, persecution, or both. Here, the meaning is both. Jesus explained in chapter 15 that the difficulty and strife that believers experience in the world is largely because of their being identified with Christ. Furthermore, believers suffer tribulation because Jesus suffered it first. The world does not understand Christ or His followers. Because of that Jesus says that the world will hate those that follow Him (John 15:18). In short, there is no way around the believer having trouble in this world because of their faith because the ruler of this world, Satan, is anti-God. This is the second sphere believers live in. If there is peace in Christ, in the world there is tribulation.

Now, arriving at the final point the reader comes to a mental push. So if there is peace in Christ and tribulation in the world and the believer lives in both spheres simultaneously, doesn't that mean that the believer will be constantly oscillating between peace and trouble? That very question is precisely why the third acknowledgement is so pivotal. Third, the believer is to “take courage” in the fact that Christ has overcome the world.

Let's go back to the discussion about courage from the introduction for a moment. When we think of all the instances and examples of courage, whether real or fictional, the common denominator is that the ability to be courageous comes from a deep confidence in the ability to triumph over opposition. Sometimes, we are courageous in difficult situations because we have had the appropriate training to prevail. Sometimes courage is grounded in the knowledge that experiences have given special insight into how to solve a problem. Sometimes courage lies in raw, physical strength. In the case of the believer though, particularly in this verse, the ability to take courage is founded upon the assurance that Christ has overcome the world. The two spheres are not equal. It is not a chess game between peace and trouble. Rather, the thought flow is thus:

In Jesus, there is unsurpassable peace

In the world, in which we also live, there will be trouble for believers because they are in Christ.

The guarantor of peace has overcome, with all finality and completeness, the assurer of trouble.

So, courage is to be had by the believers because they are grounded in the One who is eternally and limitlessly victorious.

Jesus' victory is shared by all believers because that is precisely who Jesus gave His life for. The ultimate victory is won and secured, so what attacks of the world remain are pointless in comparison. The believer has peace in Christ.

## **LIVE**

When we seek to live for Christ in a faithful, being the salt and light in the world that He has called us to be, trouble will come. There is a need for courage, so we may as well acknowledge it. However, there is also a great source of courage for us as believers to withstand the pressures of the world. The pressures of the world come in myriad forms, which are a little bit different for all of us. For some, the pressure to not live as Christ leads may take the form of financial pressure. There are certain expectations our culture has for success and the trappings that go along with it that are awfully difficult to say no to. The newest, brightest, shiniest thing screams significance in the economy of the world. Sometimes, the allure of such significance bends us into the mold of the world.

For others, the pressures of the world take the form social connection. Who we know, where we go, and where we go with who we know become avenues of identity and definition for us. When that happens, our ability to refuse the subtle pressure to conform to the world's expectation for us becomes insidiously oppressive. For still others, the pressure to have the perfect family, date the right person, or be involved in the right causes all fight to remove pursuit of God from the top priority in our lives.

In the most blatant of instances, our freedom to speak of Christ and His redemptive work in our life is absolutely forbade. Ostracism and termination become all too real possibilities. We are squeezed into silence by the interest in self-preservation. So what do we do?

When courage is needed and peace seems scarce, remember the qualifier that Jesus Himself placed on that clause: "In Me". When courage is needed, we lean into our relationship with Christ all the more. We seek to know Him through meditating upon His word, fasting, prayer, and other disciplines. There is absolutely no substitute for the presence of God in our lives if we desire to be strong and courageous. Similarly, there is absolutely no substitute for time spent with Him when we desire a heightened sense of His presence in our lives. Being in the world is easy. It's tangible, visible, sensual, and all around us in what we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. We are extremely aware of how much in the world we are. The problem is that the lesser sphere of being in the world is allowed to crowd out our presence in Christ when we do not pursue Him and are, frankly, just plain lazy with regard to our relationship with Christ.

## **LEAD**

Leading others and ourselves toward lives filled with courage for God, resisting the pressures of the world, is no small matter. It requires frank and honest conversations, some intentional planning, and an ever-growing understanding of both who God is and who we are in light of who God is. Below are some questions to consider to help you process what that might look like for your life:

1. In which facet of your life is it the most difficult for you to resist the pressure of the world?
2. Where are you currently finding the greatest amount of success in your spiritual growth? How do you know?
3. In what area of your life is conversation about Christ the least welcomed? How would you describe the pressure?
4. How do you seek to grow intimately with Christ? How do you keep those practices from becoming just check boxes on a page?
5. Displaying courage is always a tremendous faith step. Which of your has had the greatest impact on your life? Spiritually? Emotionally? Financially?
6. When we consider our Outlive Your Life commitments, what required the most courage for you in making your commitment?
7. When do you feel the boldest for the things of God? What relationships contribute to that? What relationships detract from that?
8. Describe a time when you experienced peace in the midst of a difficult situation. How did you realize that peace as being connected with your relationship with Christ?