

Be Courageous

ACTS 6:8–7:2, 51–60

5



GOAL

Youth explore showing love and standing up for what is right even when it is scary to do so.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- AT Abstract Thinking
- C Conversation
- CT Concrete Thinking
- D Drama
- G Game
- M Music
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Powerful God, touch each of the youth in my care. Allow me to teach your children's hearts with holy boldness. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Showing love and standing up for justice may sound good in the abstract. But how far are we willing to go to spread godly love? While it might be easy to think of love in warm and fuzzy terms, sometimes love is not pretty. This is especially true when love must confront the ugliness of injustice.

Following Jesus, and loving as he tells us to love, can lead to trouble. The world we live in so often values priorities like power and money over loving God, neighbor, and enemy. When loving others jeopardizes the stability of power structures, the voices and violence of those in power whose privilege is threatened tend to rise in opposition. We see this dynamic played out in biblical narratives, as well as in historical and current stories.

This fifth aspect of loving God, neighbor, and enemy is slightly different than the others in that it is not specifically an action. However, it almost always results in action. Courage is the strength to act on one's beliefs. We need to develop our courage muscles to overcome our natural fear of harm or criticism when it comes to actively loving our neighbors.

THE BIBLE STORY

Acts 6–7 tell about Stephen, a deacon in the early church. There was concern that the needs of non-Jews and widows were not being met. Church leaders appointed Stephen and six other Greek Christ-followers to ensure that people were equitably represented, served, and fed. Stephen became a powerful minister who performed many signs and wonders. This made some temple leaders angry, and they conspired to destroy him. However, Stephen did not back down. As he faced being put to death for false allegations against him, Stephen courageously spoke truth to power.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Youth have begun to develop concrete understanding of right and wrong. Yet they may feel limited in their ability to do something about the wrongs in the world. This session provides examples of courageous love, demonstrating that even youth are empowered to show God's love by courageously opposing injustice.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Heavy Lifting” (p. 40): Ensure that you have access to a table or bookshelf that is difficult for the youth to lift.
- Depending on the options you choose:
- “Standing Up and Being Heard” (p. 42): Obtain parental consent before posting pictures of any youth online.

GETTING STARTED

- ☐ Small paperback book
- ☐ Large hardcover book
- ☐ Bookshelf or table



Please monitor the young people closely as they attempt to move a heavy bookshelf or table so they do not hurt themselves.

HEAVY LIFTING

AM

As youth enter, direct them to books on the bookshelf or table. Invite them to first pick up the paperback book, then to pick up the hardcover book. Finally, have them *carefully* try to move the bookshelf or table. Encourage their discussion about the ease or challenge of lifting these objects.

Explain that, in this session, they will explore courage. Sometimes being courageous can be challenging, like lifting something heavy. Although it is difficult to lift heavy objects, we can exercise and build our muscles to get stronger. Similarly, if we exercise faith and love, we can build the courage to act for justice.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

OPENING LITANY

QC

Welcome the youth with your usual opening activities. Explain that the theme of this session is “Be Courageous.” After you read a line of the litany, have youth repeat in unison “when we are courageous.” Their closing line is “may we be courageous.”

We love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind
when we are courageous.

We love our neighbor as ourself
when we are courageous.

We love our enemies
when we are courageous.

Lord, in your mercy,
may we be courageous.

- ☐ Paper and pens

INNOCENT BYSTANDER

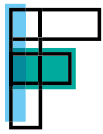
CT

Distribute paper and pens. Invite the youth to think about a time they were a bystander to something bad and did not react. Perhaps they saw someone being bullied and did not do anything to help. Or maybe someone made an ugly comment about a group of people and the young person did not respond.

Have them write about their experience. What happened? Why did they choose not to help? What were they feeling? Was fear part of the reason they did not react? Have the youth hold onto their written responses for later in the session.

SHOWING COURAGE

Encourage youth to spend a brief time in silence thinking about an example of when they showed courage in the face of danger. Invite a few volunteers to share their examples of courage. As a group, discuss ways youth can help one another develop courage muscles. Over time, with support from one another, it becomes a little easier to be courageous.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

EARLY CHRISTIAN COURAGE

C

☐ Bibles

Refer to “The Bible Story” on page 39 to set the context for the story of Stephen’s courage.

Have youth take turns reading aloud Acts 6:8–7:2 line-by-line. Use these questions to reflect on the passage:

- ➡ What are your initial impressions of Stephen?
- ➡ Why did members of the synagogue oppose Stephen? Why did they rally people to speak against him?
- ➡ What do you think Stephen will say to the high priest?

Continue reading Acts 7:51–60 in the same manner.

- ➡ What do you think of Stephen’s reply to the high priest?
- ➡ Do you feel that stoning was an appropriate response to Stephen’s actions? Why or why not?
- ➡ Would you have the courage to speak the truth like Stephen did?

Explain that Stephen is considered by many to be one of the first Christian martyrs, that is, someone who was killed for their religious convictions.

EXAMPLES OF COURAGE

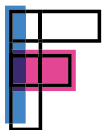
D

☐ Bibles

Form three groups and give each group a Bible. Assign each group one of the following Bible stories:

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in a furnace (Daniel 3)
- Daniel in the pit of lions (Daniel 6)
- Esther, a woman who courageously saves her people (Esther 4; 7)

Each group reads their assigned story and develops a short skit to share with the larger group. After the skits are presented, invite youth to identify the trouble the characters encountered, the courage displayed by the characters, and the source of their courage. Discuss how reading about these courageous characters helps you develop courage muscles.



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

GOOD TROUBLE

C

☐ Internet-connected device

Introduce the late civil rights activist and congressman Rep. John Lewis as a man known for encouraging “good trouble.” Lewis organized and protested and supported laws in Congress to ensure all Americans are able to exercise their right to vote. Show the YouTube video “Honor John Lewis, Get in Good Trouble—RepresentUs” (bit.ly/FMGoodTrouble, 3:04). Follow up with discussion:

- ➔ What kind of courage did it take to face the beatings, threats, and arrests that Lewis and others faced?
- ➔ What did Rep. Lewis mean when he said to get in “good trouble”? How could his commitment grow out of the trouble he and others lived through?
- ➔ Think about the practice of *Love God, Neighbor, Enemy*. How does Lewis demonstrate the kind of love God wants us to show?
- ➔ What does the video teach us about standing up for what is right?

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- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 1
 - ☐ Pens
 - ☐ Internet-connected devices or smartphones

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- ☐ Internet-connected devices

WORD SEARCH

CT

Distribute pens and copies of the word search on Resource Page 1. The page lists religious groups that historically have been persecuted for their beliefs. As youth find the words in the puzzle, encourage them to look up religious groups that they may not be familiar with. Invite them to share what they have learned with the group.

ACTIVE BYSTANDERS

C

Remind youth that having the courage to stand up for what is right is not easy. Organizations such as Training Active Bystanders strive to help people build the courage to act when they see injustice.

Form groups of two or three youth. Each group will need an internet-connected device like a cell phone. Have them find bit.ly/FMByStandCases and assign one of the cases to each group. Have groups read their case study, identify the bystander action, describe the effect of the action, and tell thoughts they have about the case. Gather the whole group and have the small groups talk about their case study and the bystander action. Discuss as a group:

- ➔ How did the bystanders show courage?
- ➔ What were the consequences of their actions?
- ➔ What encouragement would you need to be an active bystander?
- ➔ What precautions, safety, or courage are necessary for effective bystanders?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

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- ☐ Poster board
 - ☐ Markers
 - ☐ Camera



Be sure to obtain parental consent before posting images of any of the youth online.

STANDING UP AND BEING HEARD

A S

As a group, discuss social issues, challenges, or policies that young people believe are unjust. In the discussion, try to narrow the group's focus for this session to one issue or policy. Identify ways that the youth can stand up and speak out about the injustice. Could they make signs, raise awareness, join in a protest or march, initiate a protest, or join with another group to combine energy and voice? What message do they want to communicate?

Provide poster board and art supplies and invite the youth to create posters or protest signs that could be used to stand up and speak out.

After making posters, have the group stand together and display the signs for a photo. Consider having your church or organization post the photo on its website or social media. You may also wish to work with parents or caregivers and church leaders to organize a public demonstration raising awareness or speaking the injustice. The youth can bring their protest signs.

REWRITING HISTORY



☐ Paper and pens

If you chose the “Innocent Bystander” activity on page 40, have youth refer to their writings and rewrite their history in a reflection based on what they’ve learned in today’s session.

If you did not engage the “Innocent Bystander” activity, invite young people to think about a time they were a bystander to something bad and did not react. Perhaps they saw someone being bullied and did not do anything to help. Or maybe someone made an ugly comment about a group of people, and the young person did not respond.

Encourage them to respond to a bystander situation in a different way than before. What do they wish they would have done differently? How might their reactions to similar occurrences change in the future?

Give youth time to write their responses. Encourage them as they identify and strengthen their courage muscles.

CREATE GOOD TROUBLE

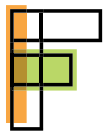


☐ Copies of Resource Page 2
☐ Art supplies

Explain that, in 2021, the National Endowment for the Arts turned to a cadre of artists, asking them how they might use artistic expression to stir up “good trouble.”¹ This was in response to Rep. John Lewis’s familiar approach to Civil Rights work. Artists responded to these two questions:

- ➡ At this time in American culture, how do you think about “good trouble” when it comes to your art practice?
- ➡ What kind of “good trouble” would you like to see happen in the arts?¹

Invite youth to discuss their responses to these questions. Then distribute copies of Resource Page 2 and make available art supplies for youth to draw, illustrate, or create “good trouble” through art.



FOLLOWING JESUS

CLOSING PRAYER



Have young people gather in a circle. Invite each youth to name one thing they want God to give them courage to do. Lead the group in the following prayer or one of your own:

Omnipotent God, we thank you for what you teach us and show us.
Thank you for standing up for us. Give us the courage to speak out against injustice and strength to act for others who are mistreated.
Amen.

1. Paulette Beete, “Artists Reflect on What It Means to Make Good Trouble,” *National Endowment for the Arts* (blog), February 24, 2021, www.arts.gov/stories/blog/2021/artists-reflect-what-it-means-make-good-trouble.

Word Search

Throughout history, people have been mistreated because of who they are, where they are from, how they look, or who they love. This mistreatment can range from negative comments to being denied services to being beaten or killed. While human rights activists have made significant gains in promoting equity for all people, some groups still face persecution.

The list below includes religious groups that have historically been persecuted for their beliefs. As you find the words in the puzzle, use a device or smartphone to look up religious groups that you may not be familiar with. Share with the group what you discover.

L A T T E R D A Y S A I N T S J Z
E W G N K L M Q C X I S Z P R E O
C H R I S T I A N J G K T S M W R
B P E G U H M T H M E L H X U I O
U X A P K N C H I N D U S A S S A
D A P G F M X E B L H F D K L H S
D Y E B A H A I Q U O C O B I Z T
H B K N T N X S D B M F G P M X R
I Z R I C O P T I C E A O E L D I
S J E H O V A H S W I T N E S S A
T A X W E S D F T H U K O M C V N
X W R O M A N C A T H O L I C R A

word bank

Jewish
Hindu
Muslim
Christian
Buddhist

Roman Catholic
Atheist
Bahai
Coptic
Jehovah's Witness

Dogon
Pagan
Sikh
Zoroastrian
Latter Day Saints

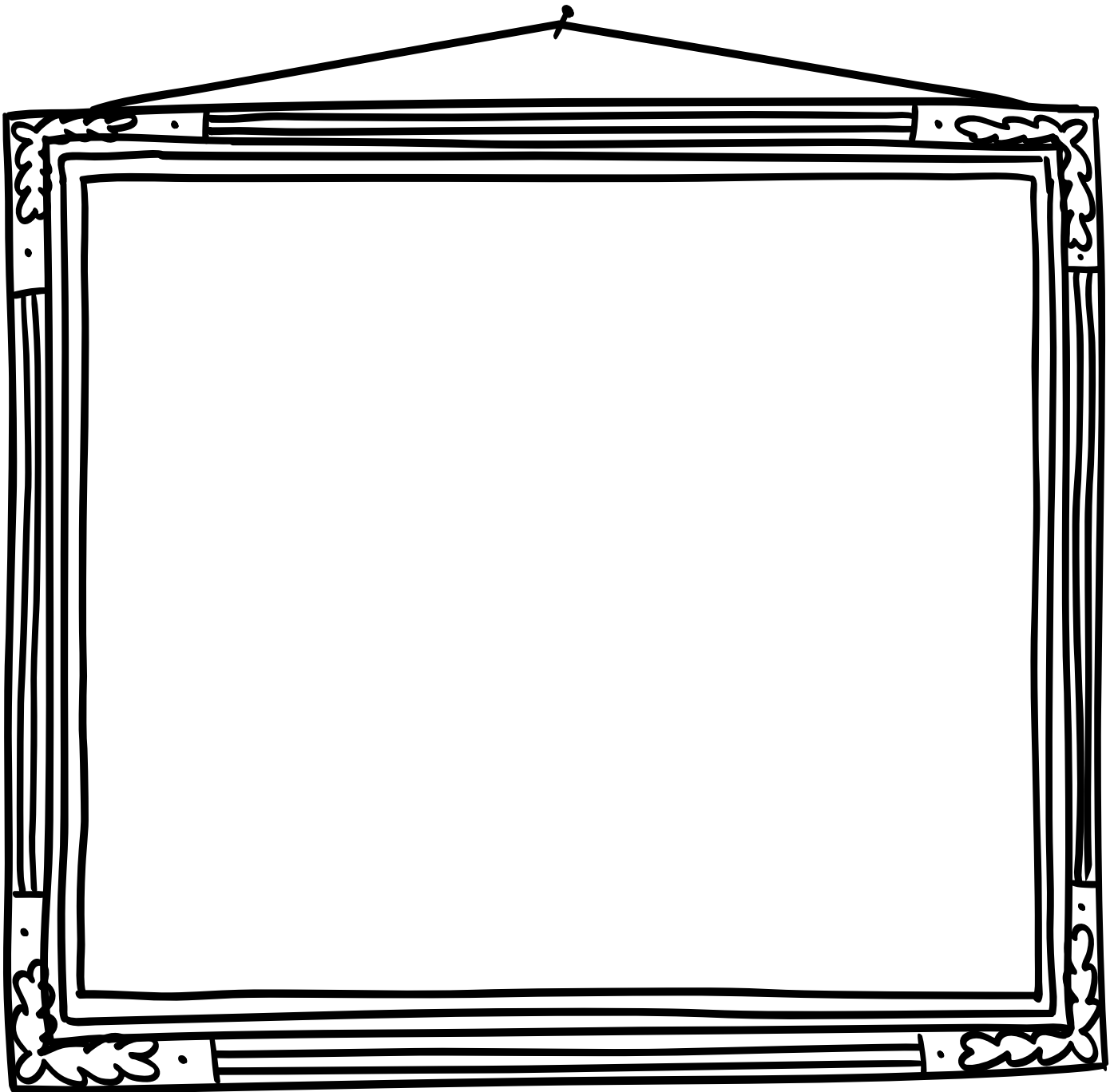
Create Good Trouble

In 2021, the National Endowment for the Arts turned to a cadre of artists, asking them how they might use artistic expression to stir up “good trouble.” This was in response to Rep. John Lewis’s familiar approach to Civil Rights work.

Artists responded to these two questions:

- ➔ At this time in American culture, how do you think about “good trouble” when it comes to your art practice?
- ➔ What kind of “good trouble” would you like to see happen in the arts?²

Use the space below to draw, illustrate, or create your own “good trouble.”



2. Paulette Beete, “Artists Reflect on What It Means to Make Good Trouble,” *National Endowment for the Arts* (blog), February 24, 2021, www.arts.gov/stories/blog/2021/artists-reflect-what-it-means-make-good-trouble.