

# ***Courageous Churches***

## **Leaders Guide**



**13 online adult Sunday school lessons  
designed for churches willing to risk  
on behalf of the gospel**

Produced in partnership with the Baptist General Association of  
Virginia  
and Trinity Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas

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### **About Acacia Resources**

The biblical witness singles out acacia wood for its uniqueness. The only wood mentioned in the building of the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle and the altar is acacia. Acacia wood is listed with other precious objects—gold, silver, fragrant incense, onyx stones—given to honor God.

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Some 1,200 species of acacia trees and shrubs exist throughout much of the world, including Africa, Australia and North America. The acacia species is tough enough to survive the semiarid regions of Africa where its roots sink deep to capture the rare water which runs quickly into the soil.

The name *acacia* symbolically ties BCE's publishing initiative to our biblical heritage. The acacia tree represents the wise value attached to educational resources, the diversity of needs within churches and the durability demanded for growing healthy Christians, whether they are singles, couples with children or senior adults.

Acacia Resources will guide Christians and draw them godward, as the ark of acacia wood guided the people of Israel in their journey and represented the presence of God in their midst.

For more information about Acacia Resources, call 615-383-3192 or visit our Web site at [www.acaciaresources.com](http://www.acaciaresources.com).

For a complete list of resources referenced in the *Courageous Churches Leaders Guide* and *Student Guide*, go to [www.acaciaresources.com](http://www.acaciaresources.com).

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A *Courageous Churches* Student Guide is also available from Acacia Resources ([www.acaciaresources.com](http://www.acaciaresources.com)).

## Abram: The Courage to Follow a New Vision

### Genesis 12:1-9

<sup>1</sup>Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." <sup>4</sup>So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup>And Abram took Sar'ai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions which they had gotten in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, <sup>6</sup>Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup>Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup>Thence he removed to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. <sup>9</sup>And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

**Theme: Courage is the fuel that helps us follow fresh visions for new destinations.**

### Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.
- Go to [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=979](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=979) and read the column "Marie Peterson: Testing Courage and

Commitment” by Dwight Moody. Summarize Marie’s story for your class.

- Also visit [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=789](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=789) and read the column “Dramatic Changes Can Transform Congregations” by Jeff Woods. Use these ideas to help formulate closing comments and challenges for your class.

## As You Teach

### Introduce the Lesson

- Summarize the story of Marie Peterson from the column by Dwight Moody. Point out that, in spite of Marie’s eye condition that profoundly restricts her physical ability to see clearly, she seems to possess a greater vision that enables her to see not the obstacles that surround her but the person she can through faith become. Tie Marie’s ability to see and pursue new opportunities in her life to her courage and lack of trepidation, even in the face of uncertainty, danger and difficulties.
- Ask class members to recall details from the story of the Lost Boys of Sudan. Note that their fearful situations called out from them bravery rooted in their remarkable faith that led them to pursue a new vision and a new life based not on what they could see or even imagine but on their belief that God was with them.
- Lead class members to identify other examples of courage and vision, both historical and contemporary. Include the examples of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr. and St. John’s Baptist Church. Point out that courage can have physical, moral and/or spiritual components. Identify Abram as an early biblical example of courage and vision, and note that the courage Abram showed embodied all these dimensions.

### Explore the Bible

- Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 12:1-9. Challenge class members to see who can summarize in the fewest

words the essence of this passage. Offer this suggestion: *God said go. Abram went.*

- Relate the following conversation:

“Why did he do it?” asked Bruce Feiler, author of *Walking the Bible*, about Abram’s leaving his home in Harran.

“The Bible doesn’t say,” answered Avner Goren, Feiler’s guide, as they sat with open Bibles atop the ruin at modern-day Harran. “As far as the text is concerned God says to do it, so Abraham goes. That’s it. But Jewish tradition says that Abraham was the first person to recognize that this was the *one* God.”

“But he had never heard God before,” Feiler said. “He didn’t know who or what God was. He didn’t *see* God. And suddenly, this voice says, ‘Go,’ and he goes.”

Goren replied, “The concept in the Bible is that the voice was such a powerful thing that Abraham had no doubts. He had faith” (Feiler 2002).

- Ask:

*~From the many choices we have that affect our values, beliefs, behaviors and pursuits, how can we, like Abram, discern God’s vision for ourselves and for our church?  
~How do we know the voice we hear telling us to do something new is really the voice of God? And where do we get the courage we need to follow God’s voice and vision?*

- Point out that Abram’s example provides us with a model for courage to follow a new vision. Beginning with Abram and continuing throughout Scripture, courage is a recurring biblical theme. Abram not only recognized the new voice he heard as being God’s, he also willingly left his home and followed that voice as it led him to a new but unknown future. His determined courage to follow a new vision affected not only his life and his future but the lives of Sarai, Lot and many others who traveled obediently with them. His obedience to God’s voice resulted in the formation of a people through whom God would work to change the course of history, ultimately changing us.

## Apply Biblical Truth

- Note that just as our world needs courageous individuals who act with faith to pursue a godly vision, it also needs courageous churches unafraid to take risks, do church in new ways and pursue godly vision corporately.
- Using the column “Dramatic Changes Can Transform Congregations” by Jeff Woods as background for your thoughts, challenge your class to identify areas of potential change in themselves and in your church by asking such questions as:

*~Do you think most churches today are effective in their witness, ministry and outreach? Why or why not?  
~If not, what about the way we do church must change in order for our effectiveness to increase?  
~Should the church change who we are, what we do or both?*

- Next, get more personal and practical by applying these questions to your church. Read aloud these statements from the Preface to this series of lessons: “Between the courageous churches and the cowardly ones reside the indifferent churches—churches that do little harm and show little faith. These are the churches that feel comfortable, care too little, ask almost nothing of their members, run few risks, turn a blind-eye to the world’s suffering and a deaf ear to the call of God.” Ask:

*~What about our church? Are we courageous, cowardly or somewhere in between?  
~Are we effective?  
~Should we change our identity?  
~Should we begin to do different things or do the same things in different ways?  
~If you believe our church needs to change in order to become more effective in God’s kingdom, where should those changes begin and how?*

- Ask class members whether they agree or disagree with these statements by Jeff Woods: “In order for a faithful congregation to alter its vision, it must also make changes

in its objectives, programs and events. . . . A new vision will obviously require new objectives in order to achieve that vision. New objectives will require a new set of programs. Finally, no new program can be launched without also creating or altering certain events in the life of the congregation.”

- Then ask:

*~To what degree do you believe our church is receptive to the kind of change outlined by Jeff Woods?  
~What events and programs are we willing to give up or change in order to achieve a new vision?  
~How tied is our church to its traditions and old ways of doing things?  
~What new initiatives and risks are we willing to take for the cause of Christ and his kingdom?  
~Do you believe God has a new vision for our church? If so, what is it?  
~What is your part in helping our church realize its vision?  
~What will happen to our church if we fail to discover and pursue the vision God has for us?*

- Close with prayer, asking God to enable you to recognize God’s voice and pursue the vision God has for you as individuals and as members of your church.

# Biblical Examples of Courage

## Jesus: The Courage of Connection and Clarity

### Matthew 21:23-27

<sup>23</sup>And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" <sup>24</sup>Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you a question; and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>25</sup>The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or from men?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' <sup>26</sup>But if we say, 'From men,' we are afraid of the multitude; for all hold that John was a prophet." <sup>27</sup>So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

**Theme: Courageous agents of change stay connected and speak with clarity in the midst of contentious change.**

### Before You Teach

- Read Matthew 21 and note the sequence of events in Jesus' life it describes.
- Read the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

- Relate the following illustration:

A few years ago, Alcatel Americas, a communications network company, paid the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change an undisclosed sum of money for the rights to use King's "I Have a Dream" speech in their TV and print advertising campaign (see "King: Commercializing or Communicating?" at [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1089](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1089) ).

The TV ad showed King standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial delivering his famous speech. But instead of standing before a crowd, he stood alone. A voiceover announced, "Before you can inspire, before you can touch, you must first connect."

The ad campaign generated a storm of controversy. Some thought it exploited King and commercialized his message. Others thought it was a powerful ad and paid tribute to King.

Whether you agree with the use of the King speech for commercial purposes or not, the ad makes a powerful point: "Before you can inspire, before you can touch, you must first connect."

No one understood this truth more than Jesus. He was able to speak with clarity and inaugurate revolutionary change because he always connected with people, even when it was difficult, uncomfortable or contentious.

- Remind class members of how Jesus' agenda regularly clashed with that of the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees. They were most concerned with preserving their traditions, keeping the law and pointing out others who were not as successful in doing so. Jesus threatened their status quo. It is not a surprise that here, as in other places in the Christian Scriptures, Matthew recorded an encounter between Jesus and some of these religious leaders. True to his nature, Jesus spoke clearly about who he was and why he had come.

#### Explore the Bible

- Summarize for your class the series of events in Matthew 21:1-17. Point out how the stormy scene in the temple was

followed by a touching encounter between Jesus and the blind, the lame and children. Ask:

*~Why do you think Matthew was so careful to include this encounter?*

*~What does it tell you about Jesus and his purpose?*

- Read aloud Matthew 21:23-27. Then ask: *Why do you think Jesus chose to return to the temple after the conflict of the previous day?*

Point out the contrast between what Jesus did in the temple the day before and what he said in the temple the next day. Jesus did what he had to do the first day. He got everyone's attention and pointed out a serious problem. He made clear his authority and his purpose. He *did* more than he *said*. The second day, he *said* more than he *did*. And he listened as much as he said. He allowed questions and encouraged discussion by asking questions of his own. He told stories to help everyone understand. He worked to establish a relationship with people with whom he disagreed.

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

- Suggest that the church today—the Christian church universal and your church in particular—often finds itself at odds with the prevailing culture, much as Jesus did when he challenged the traditional thinking of the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees. Many churches react defensively to a culture they believe belittles them and their values. Instead of engaging those with whom they disagree in meaningful dialogue, they instead disconnect from anyone and anything they perceive as threats.
- Remind class members of the model of Christ: connection with others and clarity of message and purpose. Lead them to discuss ways your church can remain connected to those for whom Christ died by asking such questions as:  
*~What are some areas of our society or culture that create discomfort and conflict for you and cause you to want to withdraw?*  
*~What will it cost us, individually and as a church, to stay connected and speak with clarity in an attempt to evoke positive change?*

*~What will it cost us and our church if we fail to stay connected and articulate our values and vision?*

- Pray that you will stay connected to God, each other and the world and that you will speak in clear and positive ways the message of Christ.

# Biblical Examples of Courage

## First-Century Women: The Courage of Witness

### Luke 24:1-12

<sup>1</sup>But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; <sup>5</sup>and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" <sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise." <sup>8</sup>And they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup>and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles; <sup>11</sup>but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

**Theme: Witnessing takes courage in a disbelieving, dangerous world.**

### Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.
- Go to [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1279](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1279) and read the movie review of "Signs." Also go to [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1532](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1532) and read the column "Signs' Theology Is Absurd, Immoral." If time permits, watch the video or DVD of the movie and formulate your own conclusions and applications of this movie to the different

ways people interpret and respond to the unbelievable or incredible.

- Also go to [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=2007](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2007) and read the column "The Age of Martyrs Is Far From Over." Use examples from this column as you prepare comments and closing challenges for your class.

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

- Ask class members who have seen the 2002 movie "Signs" to summarize its plot.

Focus on the crisis of faith of the main character, Graham, played by Mel Gibson. According to Graham, people are one of two types: those who see only luck or coincidence, or those who see signs and miracles. Graham declares he is the former.

After his wife's tragic death in a car accident, Graham gives up his ministerial calling and turns to farming. Soon he discovers mysterious crop circles in his cornfield. TV reports follow showing more crop circles in other places like India and England. Thousands of people begin flocking to churches, synagogues and mosques in search of reassurance and answers.

When Graham's children try to make sense of the phenomenon, his son Morgan declares, "I think God did it." But Graham doesn't want to hear any "God-talk."

"Signs" progresses with science-fiction thrills and spills but also raises spiritual questions and quandaries. The movie, says reviewer Cliff Vaughn, "merely drops a cast of a few in a foggy field of faith. It's scary. It's funny. It's probably not what folks were expecting. Then again, neither is life, and that's the point. So when the unexpected happens, which type of person are you?"

- Point out that, while the character Graham resolves his inner conflicts with quite questionable theology, the movie does raise important questions for us: *When the unexpected happens, which type of person are you? As a person of faith, what is your response in the face of others' disbelief?*

### Explore the Bible

- Explain that, though Jesus had tried repeatedly to prepare his followers for what would happen to him, they reacted to his crucifixion with shock and disbelief. And rather than expect him to overcome death as he had promised, they reacted to the first news of this with that same spirit of disbelief.
- Ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 24:1-12. Lead your class to discuss the series of events by asking such questions as:

*~What did those who went to the tomb expect to find? What did they find instead?*

*~Why do you think Luke waited until the end of this account to identify those who first went to the tomb?*

*~Do you think the women anticipated the response of the others to their news?*

*~What risks did these women take? In what ways did they display courage?*

*~What were the results of their courageous witness?*

*~What do you think it did for the faith of these women when their witness was first questioned and then verified? Do you think their witness would have been any less zealous had their story not been substantiated by Peter?*

### Apply Biblical Truth

- Display the words *witness* and *martyr*. Then ask: *Which word is more comfortable for you?*

Suggest that while many people back away from the idea of giving a personal witness to their Christian faith, most will admit that it is something Christians should do. Most people rarely think of becoming a martyr, although witness and martyr originate from the same word, and Christians today

around the world are killed for their faith just as they were centuries ago. While few of us will be called upon to become martyrs, we are all called to bear witness to the faith we profess.

Affirm the courage it takes to witness to our faith in the face of danger. Remind the class that bearing witness also takes courage in the face of the skeptical, disbelieving nature of many people in our world. Remind them that we bear a witness to our faith in a number of ways, including how we speak about our faith to those within and outside the faith community. But we also witness to our faith by how we respond, react and interact. We give witness to our real commitments through the ways we behave at home, on the job and in the world. Then ask:

*~When have you encountered skepticism or disbelief as you have spoken about or lived out your faith?*

*~What about Christ or the Christian faith do most people who are not Christians express skepticism or disbelief?*

*~How do you respond when someone dismisses or minimizes your faith or responds to you with hostility?*

*~How do you balance the need to respect others' opinions and beliefs with the responsibility you feel to witness about your faith in Christ?*

*~Whom do you consider courageous witnesses today?*

Point out the examples of courageous witnesses at the conclusion of the lesson in the *Student Guide*.

- Relate the following illustration:

Harriet Tubman, a former slave from the Eastern Shore of Maryland, returned to the South on April 20, 1853, to free other slaves. She believed she was following the voice of God. "I always tole God," she said, "I'm gwince [going] to hole stiddy on you, an' you've got to see me through" ("Black Moses," Christian History, [www.christianitytoday.com/ch/62h/62h024.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/62h/62h024.html)).

Given the nickname Moses, Tubman gave witness to her faith in God through 19 trips into slave-country to free some 300 slaves.

- Ask:

*~Which requires more courage of you—speaking about your personal faith in Christ or trying to interact with and respond to others as Christ did?*

*~How would your life be different if you spoke more boldly about your faith and took more risks because of your faith?*

*~How would our church be different if we all began to speak and act as though our faith matters all the time—in politics, education, business, sports, family, neighborhood?*

- Pray, asking God to give you courage to speak convincingly and act boldly as a result of the faith you embrace.

## Biblical Examples of Courage

### Miriam: The Courage to Speak to Power

#### Exodus 2:1-10

<sup>1</sup>Now a man from the house of Levi went and took to wife a daughter of Levi. <sup>2</sup>The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. <sup>3</sup>And when she could hide him no longer she took for him a basket made of bulrushes, and daubed it with bitumen and pitch; and she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds at the river's brink. <sup>4</sup>And his sister stood at a distance, to know what would be done to him. <sup>5</sup>Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, and her maidens walked beside the river; she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to fetch it. <sup>6</sup>When she opened it she saw the child; and lo, the babe was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." <sup>7</sup>Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" <sup>8</sup>And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. <sup>9</sup>And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away, and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. <sup>10</sup>And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son; and she named him Moses, for she said, "Because I drew him out of the water."

**Theme: Speaking to power takes courage.**

#### Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.

- Go to [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=776](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=776) and read the column “Facing the Power People with Courage, Skill and Prayer” by Eddie Hammett. Summarize Hammett’s suggestions for your class.
- Before class begins, copy onto the chalkboard the statement of Martin Luther King Jr. from the *Student Guide: Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.*

## As You Teach

### Introduce the Lesson

- Read aloud the statement by Martin Luther King Jr. and ask class members to explain whether they agree or disagree and why. Ask:

*~Is this always true? Are there times when we are justified in remaining silent even when our speaking out would make a difference?*

*~If it is true that our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter, what could possibly be more important?*

- Recall briefly for the class the stories of the three women *TIME* magazine named as its 2002 Persons of the Year. Ask the class to offer additional insights based on news reports and interviews they saw and read following the incidents involving each of the women. Note Cynthia Cooper’s assertion: “In the end, it is what life finds in us that makes us different.”

Suggest that we become the change agents Christ intends for us to be when we find within us the courage to speak to power. Acknowledge that speaking to power often comes at a high price, and it certainly brands us as different. Ask the class to list some power people or sources we often shrink from addressing (political, media, denominational, corporate, religious, etc.). Then ask:

*~What excuses do we give for not speaking to those in positions of power? Are our excuses justified? Why or why not?*

*~What happens when people of faith repeatedly back away from speaking to power?*

*~What happens when they do speak to power?*

*~What does the refusal to speak to power say about our faith?*

## Explore the Bible

- Ask someone to read aloud Exodus 2:1-10.
- Note that the biblical witness often offers only modest glimpses into intriguing characters. Like archeological fragments, we have bits and pieces to the story about Miriam, and these are scattered through the Bible. Make these observations:

We do know that Miriam’s mother was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, who was born in Egypt (Num 26:59). Her father was Amram, who traced his family tree to Levi, one of the sons of Jacob who had settled years earlier in Egypt (Ex 1:1).

We also know that Jochebed and Amram had an odd relationship, at least from our perspective. Jochebed was both wife and aunt of her husband, Amram. “Amram took to wife Jochebed his father’s sister” (Ex 6:20).

Amram and Jochebed had three children. The eldest child was Miriam. Her brothers were Aaron and Moses (Ex 15:20, 2:4).

Outside the biblical witness are other fragments about Miriam. The rabbinical literature notes that the name Miriam can mean “bitter,” a reference to the harshness of life under Egyptian rule, not to her core personality. As a child and before the birth of Moses, “she predicted to her father that a son would be born to him who would liberate Israel from the Egyptian yoke,” according to [www.jewishencyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com). After Moses was born and placed among the reeds, her parents pressed her for what would become of her

prophecy. She, then, went to the river to see “how her prophecy would be fulfilled.”

- Point out the relative obscurity into which Miriam was born and her complete powerlessness as a female and a Hebrew slave. Also note the swift narrative in this passage that describes in 10 verses what likely took place over a couple of years.
- Guide the class to review the Scripture and discuss the remarkable courage Miriam displayed by asking such questions as:

*~Why was what Miriam and Jochebed did so dangerous?  
~What motivated Miriam’s actions?  
~What was so unusual about the actions and reactions of Pharaoh’s daughter?  
~In what ways did Pharaoh’s daughter display courage?  
How do you think she explained the presence of a young Hebrew child in her father’s palace?  
~What ironies do you find in this series of events?  
~How has your perception of Miriam changed as a result of seeing her as a young woman with the courage to speak to power?*

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

- Suggest some things that speaking to power is *not*: spreading rumors, gossiping, lying, using profanity, trash-talking, using hate speech and misdirected “God-talk.” Contrast these with some things that speaking to power includes: talking straight, speaking with conviction but also with civility and respect, suggesting proper courses of action when pointing out errant ones. Ask class members to suggest some other things that characterize one who courageously speaks to power. Supplement the discussion with suggestions from the article “Facing the ‘Power People’ with Courage, Skill and Prayer.”
- Recall for the class the example of Martin Niemoller from the *Student Guide*. Connect the example of Niemoller to the three previously obscure women who spoke to corporate power and the three obscure women mentioned

in Exodus 2. Ask the class to suggest qualities common to these individuals.

Then lead your class to examine their personal willingness to speak to power, and that of your church, by asking such questions as:

*~When have you felt the urge to speak to people in power but failed to do so? What stopped you?*

*~When have you spoken to power? What were the risks? What were the results?*

*~What happens to individuals, churches and societies when people lack the courage to speak to those in authority?*

*~What are some situations in our community needing attention that our church could address by speaking to someone in power?*

- Close with prayer, asking God to empower individuals in your church with the courage to speak up and speak out about things that matter. Pray that God and others will find within the people of your church something that is different, courageous and bold.

# Biblical Examples of Courage

## Asa: The Courage to Change Culture

### 2 Chronicles 15:1-19

<sup>1</sup>The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded, <sup>2</sup>and he went out to meet Asa, and said to him, “. . . The Lord is with you, while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. <sup>3</sup>For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law; <sup>4</sup>but when in their distress they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them. <sup>5</sup>In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in for great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. <sup>6</sup>They were broken in pieces, nation against nation and city against city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress. <sup>7</sup>But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.” <sup>8</sup>When Asa heard these words, . . . he took courage, and put away the abominable idols . . . and he repaired the altar of the Lord . . . <sup>9</sup>And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were sojourning with them . . . <sup>11</sup>They sacrificed to the Lord on that day, . . . <sup>12</sup>And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, . . . <sup>14</sup>They took oath to the Lord . . . <sup>15</sup>And all Judah rejoiced over the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and had sought him with their whole desire, and he was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest round about. <sup>16</sup>Even Maacah, his mother, King Asa removed from being queen mother because she had made an abominable image for Asherah. Asa cut down her image, crushed it, and burned it at the brook Kidron. . . . the heart of Asa was blameless all his days. . . . <sup>19</sup>And there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa.

**Theme: Changing culture requires a gritty, long-term view.**

### Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.
- Go to [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1935](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1935) and read the article “Center for a New American Dream.” Click on the article’s link to the center’s Web site ([www.newdream.org](http://www.newdream.org)) and take the “consumption quiz” as a tool for engaging your class in a discussion about ways they can work to change culture. If you prefer, print out the quiz and plan to use some of its questions as you introduce this lesson.
- Go to [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=256](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=256) and read the column “Where Is Amos When We Need Him?” by Dwight Moody. Use these ideas to help formulate closing comments and challenges for your class.

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

- Begin by asking: *How do you define or describe “the American dream”?*

Refer your class to the Web site of the Center for a New American Dream and explain that the center’s purpose is to change the definition of the American dream by helping Americans “consume responsibly to protect the environment, enhance quality of life and promote social justice.”

According to this Web site, “the traditional American Dream once focused on greater security, opportunity and happiness. Increasingly, that dream has been supplanted by an extraordinary emphasis on acquisition. The recent commercial definition of the American Dream has hidden costs for the environment, our quality of life, and our efforts to create a just and equitable society.”

- Challenge your class by asking them to respond to some of the multiple-choice questions from the consumption quiz on the Web site. Or, point out some interesting facts and conclusions the quiz reveals, such as:

~In the last 50 years, Americans have consumed the amount of natural resources equivalent to the amount consumed by every human who lived before the last 50 years.

~Though the adjusted per capita income more than doubled between 1957 and 1994, there was no significant difference in the number of Americans in 1994 reporting they were “very happy” compared to those in 1957 reporting they were “very happy”.

~Each hour per week in front of the television corresponds with an average consumption increase of \$208 per year.

~The average American consumes as much energy as three Japanese.

~More than 50 percent of Americans surveyed said they would be willing to reduce material possessions and earnings by “some” or “a lot” in order to gain time with family and reduce stress.

## Explore the Bible

- Recall for your class this old denominational mission statement: *Helping changed people change the world*. Ask volunteers to suggest what it conveys.

Like yeast slowly transforms the nature of dough, we can change our culture by positive, proactive efforts. Observe that at no time has our culture more needed such change. Entrenched corruption, decades-old prejudice, misplaced fears and false values dominate our cultural landscape. Though we may never see the results, our efforts at political, social, economic and other reforms can affect ours and future generations. The biblical example of King Asa offers us a model and inspiration for instigating cultural change.

- Suggest that in a way, David and Asa represent generational bookends. Between their kingships, three other family members ruled in a fashion which can only be

characterized as moral failure. They did “what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

Solomon, who followed his father, David, as king, was known as a leader of wisdom. Yet Solomon “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done” (1 Kings 11:6). Under Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, the nation of Judah “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” The people “provoked him [the Lord] to jealousy with their sins which they committed, more than all their fathers had done” (1 Kings 11:22). Rehoboam’s son, Abijah, “walked in all the sins which his father did before him; and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father” (1 Kings 15:3).

Abijah’s son, Asa, broke the pattern of three generations. Asa “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as David his father had done” (1 Kings 15:11). Asa’s heart “was wholly true to the Lord all his days” (v. 14).

- Provide a framework for the environment in which God’s prophet Azariah spoke to King Asa (see 2 Chron 12-14, 15:3-6). Then ask someone to read aloud selected verses from 2 Chronicles 15, such as verses 2, 7-8 and 12.

Lead your class to review the Scripture and King Asa’s efforts at cultural reforms by asking them such questions as:

~*What was necessary for Asa to change the culture of God’s people?*  
~*What were the conditions of God’s presence with Asa?*  
~*What was Azariah’s warning to Asa, and why was it necessary?*  
~*What were the results of the reforms Asa initiated?*  
~*What conflict did Asa face as he worked to change the predominant culture?*

## Apply Biblical Truth

- Note for your class the cultural similarities in which King Asa and the prophet Amos lived. Read aloud the following

from Dwight Moody's article, "Where Is Amos When We Need Him?": "The Book of Amos is minor in the same way that the Gettysburg Address is minor; both are relatively short. Both are major in the same sort of way, however; they present a transforming and compelling vision of human society where peace and prosperity are rooted in ethics and equality. 'Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream,' Amos said. We need a man like Amos, a straight-talking, truth-telling, no-holds-barred man like Amos, who understands right from wrong and is not afraid to say so."

- Ask the class to suggest areas within our culture that need to be challenged by people like Azariah, Asa and Amos who understand right from wrong and are not afraid to say so. Lead them to evaluate how our culture has affected us, our faith practices and our willingness to work for cultural change by asking such questions as:

*~How much does culture affect our worship? the time that we worship? what we find acceptable as music or elements for worship? the portrayal of God in our worship? the way we design and adorn our sanctuaries of worship?*  
*~What differences might someone observe between a member of our congregation and a non-church member who lives in the same neighborhood and has the same educational/economic background?*  
*~What differences do you see in the way our culture and our Lord treat women? the poor? material wealth? the issue of security? the needs of people in other countries? the environment?*  
*~Should we as the church work to change culture, or should we seek to create our own culture apart from a culture with which we do not agree?*

- Pray that God will use your church as a cultural change agent and give you the courage to work diligently and patiently toward positive and long-term reforms.

# Biblical Marks of the Church

## Church as Royal Priesthood

### 1 Peter 2:9-10

<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.  
<sup>10</sup>Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

**Theme: The church is a gathering of baptized believers, living as a moral community of nonconformity in the world.**

### Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.
- Determine which of the quotations suggested below you will use as discussion-starters, and how. You may choose to copy them and distribute them individually among class members, display them collectively in your classroom or simply read them aloud.

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

- Distribute or display some or all of the following quotations and ask volunteers to read them aloud. After each quotation, ask class members to respond to the statements and express whether they agree or disagree with them and why. Frequently interject questions such as: *Is this always true? How is this true for Christians?*

*~Never be afraid to stand with the minority when the minority is right, for the minority which is right will one day be the majority.* William Jennings Bryan

*~I am personally convinced that one person can be a change catalyst, a 'transformer' in any situation, any organization. Such an individual is yeast that can leaven an entire loaf. It requires vision, initiative, patience, respect, persistence, courage, and faith to be a transforming leader.* Stephen R. Covey

*~Whatever you do, you need courage. Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising which tempt you to believe that your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to the end, requires some of the same courage which a soldier needs.* Ralph Waldo Emerson

*~Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are stiffened.* Billy Graham

*~One man with courage makes a majority.* Andrew Jackson

*~Read, every day, something no one else is reading. Think, every day, something no one else is thinking. Do, every day, something no one else would be silly enough to do. It is bad for the mind to continually be part of unanimity.* Christopher Morley

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

*~Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect.* Mark Twain

*~To know what you prefer instead of humbly saying Amen to what the world tells you you ought to prefer, is to have kept your soul alive.* Robert Louis Stevenson

*~The only man I know who behaves sensibly is my tailor; he takes my measurements anew each time he sees me. The rest go on with their old measurements and expect me to fit them.* George Bernard Shaw

*~The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently.* Friedrich Nietzsche

*~Don't think you're on the right road just because it's a well-beaten path.* Unknown

- After you have read and discussed the quotations, ask someone to suggest their two most prominent themes (courage and nonconformity). Call attention to the theme of this lesson: *The courageous church is a gathering of baptized believers, living as a moral community of nonconformity in the world.*

### Explore the Bible

- Explain that today's text deals head-on with what it means for Christians to live lives of nonconformity. Ask someone to read aloud 1 Peter 2:9-10. Suggest that the class look back at the preceding verses and notice how verse 9 contrasts believers with unbelievers described in verse 8.
- Note that this passage looks at the status of God's people from two distinct vantage points: through the eyes of faith and through the eyes of unbelief. The Christians to whom Peter wrote were struggling with their status. The unbelieving world around them told them they were despised exiles, and in fact, that is how unbelievers saw them. Because these new Christians had begun to change their priorities and live differently, they became suspect to others in their community. They thought differently; they spoke differently; they behaved differently; they viewed themselves and others differently. Though they had taken great steps to show that they were different people, the pressure for them to conform to the ways most citizens were still living was enormous. When they refused to conform they experienced discrimination and hostility. Peter wrote, among other things, to convince them of their true identity. And that identity sprang not from how unbelievers around them perceived them but instead from how God perceived them.

The difference between Christians and non-Christians, according to *The New Interpreter's Bible* commentary, "is not that we see different things but that we see the same things differently. Those who believe and those who do not believe both see Jesus Christ, the rock. For believers, that rock is the cornerstone or the capstone of their lives as individuals and in community. For unbelievers, that rock is simply to be rejected. What makes the difference between the two ways of seeing is faith" (Vol. XII, p. 268).

Peter's use of the rejected stone theme in verses 4-8 connected Hebrew scripture and the past with Christ and his followers. Jesus had even used the image to refer to himself, telling temple leaders that they had rejected him because he did not fit in with their plans.

Point out that though these early Christians felt as though they didn't "fit," like aliens and exiles, Peter reminded them that as children of God they were important in God's plan and were like living stones in building the new temple in which God wanted to dwell. The very fact that they did *not* fit in or conform to the standards around them made them useful in God's building plan.

- Stress the often lonely and difficult nature of nonconformity. Lead your class to discuss the impact of Peter's words for the first-century Christians, those "aliens and exiles," and for Christians today by asking such questions as:

*~How do you think the early church interpreted Peter's assertion that they were "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people"? What significance did each of those phrases have for them?*

*~What special significance do you find in the phrase royal priesthood?*

*~If we are now priests, what is our function?*

- Call attention to verses 11-17 and note the ways Peter outlined for God's people to live.

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

- Ask someone to read aloud from the *Student Guide*, one line at a time, Aristides' description of Christians. After each

line, ask the class to suggest a specific 21st-century example of that quality. Suggest that they draw from their own experiences and apply these principles to situations they have recently encountered.

- Note the timeless nature of both Peter's list in verses 11-17 and that of Aristides. Ask:

*~Do you think the call for us to conform to our culture is greater than that the first-century Christians faced?*

*~What does a life of nonconformity look like on the job? At the supermarket? On the sports field? In the neighborhood? On vacation? In the checkbook?*

*~How does the church, the community of faith, encourage and enable you to live a life of moral nonconformity? How could it help even more?*

- Close with prayer, asking God to help your church become a community that equips Christians to live lives of faithful conformity to the standards of Christ.

# Biblical Marks of the Church

## Church as Body of Christ

### Ephesians 4:1-6

<sup>1</sup>I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, <sup>3</sup>eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

**Theme: Symbolically, the church is the body of Christ.**

### Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.
- If time permits and you have not seen it, rent the video or DVD and watch the movie “My Big Fat Greek Wedding.” Read the review at [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1494](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1494).
- Visit [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1231](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1231) and read the article “The Cyber-body of Christ.” Use information from this article to help introduce this lesson.
- You might also find the column “Sitting Down to Eat with Jesus” by Dwight Moody at [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1738](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1738) helpful in formulating closing challenges for your class, as it deals with things churches sometimes do to exclude, rather than include, others.

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

- Recall for the class the surprise box-office hit of 2002, “My Big Fat Greek Wedding”. The primary source of both its drama and its comedy is the reaction of an extended Greek family when one of its members, Toula, announces she is marrying a non-Greek, a stereotypical WASP named Ian. The entire family, particularly Toula’s father, is completely stunned when she breaks with their tradition of marrying only other Greeks and brings an “outsider” into the family.

The movie deals humorously but honestly with family, heritage, culture, gender, generation gaps and other issues that can either cement or fragment relationships—not unlike the church. In the end, Toula and Ian establish a loving, nurturing and culturally diverse environment for their daughter—not unlike what Christ envisioned for the church. Rather than allowing their differences to divide them, the characters in the movie chose to embrace and celebrate their differences and blend them to form a new family.

- Ask the class to list some metaphors Christian scripture uses for the church. Remind them that one of the most common is family. Note the sense of connectivity and dependence this image conveys, and suggest that it is just such community that many people seek, although some choose to do so from a distance. As evidence, point out the proliferation of Christian Web sites on the Internet offering everything from live Sunday-morning worship service broadcasts to support groups, chat rooms, counseling, teaching, seminars, devotionals, fitness and nutrition tips, church leadership helps, youth studies and more.

Challenge the class to think about what it says about the body of Christ when some people seem to feel more comfortable “experiencing” it via the Internet rather than in person. Suggest that most churches’ tendencies to attract people just like their existing members and to be one of the most segregated institutions in America prevent many from finding their place within it, and also prevent the church from becoming all that God intends for it to be.

## Explore the Bible

- Remind the class that another common metaphor for the Christian community is body (see Rom 12, 1 Cor 12, Col 3 and Eph 4). It, too, evokes feelings of unity, cooperation and dependence.
- Point out that even before Jesus instituted the church and blessed its diversity, he created a diverse community of disciples (Mt 10:1-4). From tax collector Matthew, who collaborated with the Romans, to Simon the Zealot, who fought against the Romans, the earliest followers of Christ represented a variety of ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, lifestyles and occupations.

The fact that the church is a gathering of those who are baptized into Christ (Rom 6:3-4) does not mean that diversity vanishes. While Christians share common values of meekness, patience, love and desire for unity (Eph 2:2-3) and a common life in Christ, the body metaphor described in scripture also acknowledges diversity: “For as in one body we have many members and all the members do not have the same function” (Rom 12:4). Gifts differ, Scripture affirms (Rom. 12:6-8), for the sake of equipping other believers and building up the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-16).

- Ask a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 4:1-6. Then ask:  
*~What should characterize those within the body of Christ?*  
*~What in your experience most often characterizes those within the church?*

Point out the word *lowliness* (*humility* in some translations) and remind the class that it was a trait despised in the Greek world, something attributed only to slaves. Yet in Christian scripture, servanthood and humility are virtuous qualities exemplified first by Jesus and then by his followers.

Note also the phrase *forbearing one another in love* and ask: *What is our natural tendency when someone disagrees with us?* Suggest that instead of striking back

and further antagonizing those who disagree with us, the love we have because of Christ in us enables us not only to hold back but also to maintain the unity and peace Christ’s Spirit establishes.

Finally, note the seven unities named in this text—one body, one Spirit, one hope; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all—and remind the class that in Scripture, the number seven denotes wholeness and completeness.

## Apply Biblical Truth

- Lead the class to identify things throughout history and today that have divided the church. Suggest issues such as the Bible, the Sabbath, church polity, doctrine, slavery, church ordinances, music, worship style and the role of women. Then point out the list of suggestions from the *Student Guide* about how we can better relate to each other within the body of Christ. Ask someone to read aloud the list from the *Student Guide*; then ask the class to suggest others.
- Close with prayer, that your church will become a body that maintains unity, welcomes diversity, practices patience and demonstrates love.

# Biblical Marks of the Church

## Church as Way of Life

### Acts 2:41-47

<sup>41</sup>So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup>And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup>And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup>And all who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup>And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

**Theme: The church is a way of life, not an escape from the world.**

### Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.
- Go to [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=706](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=706) and read the column "On Being the Salt of the Earth" by James Evans. Summarize the story of Buster and plan to use it to introduce the lesson.

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

- Tell the story of Buster, the "perennial do-gooder" who was "salt of the earth." Compare Buster's willingness to love

society's thrown-away people with that of Mother Teresa as described in the *Student Guide*.

- Point out how for both Buster and Mother Teresa, "church" happened not inside a building but outside on a front porch, in the produce section of the grocery store, at the nursing home, in the rubble of an earthquake, on the streets of Calcutta. They understood that rather than an escape from the world, the church as Christ intended it is a way of life that involves its members elbow-to-elbow with the world's deepest needs and worst hurts. The biblical model of the courageous church is one of relationship.

### Explore the Bible

- Ask class members to recall their earliest memories of church. Encourage honest discussion by asking such questions as:
  - ~What do you remember most about church if you began attending as a child?
  - ~What seemed to be important to the adults around you in church?
  - ~What was most important to you?
  - ~What impressions of church did you carry with you into adulthood?
  - ~What ideas about church did you acquire at home? How did these ideas affect your understanding of what church is really all about?
  - ~If you began attending church later in life, what attracted you? What did you perceive church to be all about?
  - ~What attracted you to this particular church? Why were these things important to you?
- Remind the class that the Christian church has had centuries to develop its identity and purpose. Though at times various branches have lost focus or gotten off course, the church of Jesus Christ has endured because it is unlike any other organization or institution. In fact, it is neither. It is a living organism with Christ at its head. Its identity and purpose come from Christ himself. Its underlying quality is love.

- Point out that the first-century church had no model to follow. They only knew what bound them together: love for and devotion to Christ. The book of Acts chronicles the beginnings of the Christian church and allows us to see both their triumphs and their struggles as they determined just what it meant to be church in their world.
- Ask someone to read aloud Acts 2:41-47 while other class members listen for the primary things to which the church devoted itself (learning/study, prayer, worship, fellowship, sharing, service). Point out their willingness to sell what they owned, share everything they had and give to those who had need. In this way, they built a community that loved and worshiped God, served God and others and invited those once outside the faith to embrace it completely.

### Apply Biblical Truth

- Remark that while few of us know anyone like Mother Teresa, we probably all know about someone like Buster who lives out his or her faith on the world's dirtiest of streets and among its most unlovely and unlovable people. These people are the church. They do what they do because in the faces of the world's thrown-away people, they see the face of Jesus.
- Close by challenging your class with these words from the *Student Guide*: "What if when I looked into the faces of my children, I saw Jesus? What if when I looked into the faces of my fellow church members, I saw Jesus? What if when I looked into the face of the store clerk, I saw Jesus? What would my life be like if I lived out those simple words? What would life be like if you lived out those simple words? What would the world be like if all of us who are followers of Jesus lived out those simple words?"
- Pray together that your church will become an authentic, caring community that offers hope and healing to people and treats them as if "they are Jesus to me."

# Biblical Marks of the Church

## Church as Discipleship-Making

### Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

**Theme: The church goes into the world to make disciples.**

### Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.
- Read the story of Charlie Bris-Bois as told by Eddie Hammett in the article "Lessons Learned from a Transformed Deacon" (see [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=464](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=464)). Prepare a summary of Charlie's story and his suggestions for Christian discipleship for your class.
- As additional resources for teaching this lesson, read the column "Becoming a Lifelong Student" by Barry Howard at [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1125](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1125) and Gary Furr's book review of *Mentoring: The Ministry of Spiritual Kinship* at [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1798](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1798).
- Prior to your class time, print on a chalkboard or other writing surface the quotes from Charlie Bris-Bois in "Lessons from Charlie's Journey."

## As You Teach

### Introduce the Lesson

- Summarize for your class the story of Charlie Bris-Bois and conclude the story by relating some of the lessons Charlie learned. Stress that Charlie's life is an example of what happens when a church takes seriously its call to discipleship-making. Read aloud the last paragraph in the article "Lessons Learned from a Transformed Deacon."

### Explore the Bible

- Point out that Charlie Bris-Bois' church not only became serious about discipleship-making, individual members like Charlie in turn became disciple-makers. They learned to live out Jesus' brief but powerful instructions found in Matthew 28:18-20.
- Ask volunteers to quote from memory or read aloud from various translations Matthew 28:18-20. Say that, while this is perhaps one of Jesus' most familiar statements, it may also be one of his least understood. Then ask:

*~Why do individual Christians and churches have such a difficult time determining how to fulfill this basic command from Jesus?*

*~What do you think "disciple-making" has traditionally looked like?*

*~What do you think Jesus meant when he told his followers to make disciples?*

- Remind class members of the time and place Jesus spoke these words—they followed his crucifixion and resurrection—and their significance—they included a more far-reaching and inclusive commission than he had ever given before. Encourage class members to view Jesus' instructions to his disciples as a mission that we too share. Ask:

*~Where have we traditionally placed emphasis: on the going, the teaching or the baptizing?*

Explain that Jesus' primary command to his earliest disciples and to us involves teaching others to obey everything Jesus taught. Jesus' intent was that we teach obedience ahead of doctrine.

- Point out the printed quotations from Charlie Bris-Bois and ask class members to evaluate them, one by one, in light of Jesus' instructions in Matthew 28:18-20. Ask:

*~How accurately do you think Charlie's practical suggestions reflect the nature and intent of Jesus' instructions?*

Encourage class members to find a phrase from verses 18-20 to support each of Charlie's suggestions. For example, Charlie says, "Stop worshiping traditions and begin to worship Jesus." Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

### Apply Biblical Truth

- Read aloud the following statement from "Becoming a Lifelong Student" by Barry Howard: "Education and discipleship are ongoing tasks in life. Perhaps true education is not the pursuit of a degree but the development of a lifelong discipline and disposition that promotes learning. Then, discipleship becomes a lifelong commitment to pursuing, processing and proclaiming truth and wisdom within a context of faith."
- Challenge class members to evaluate their personal commitment to discipleship by reviewing the suggestions of author Bill Mowry in Howard's article. Then lead them to evaluate your church's effectiveness in discipleship-making by asking them to respond to questions such as:

*~Does our church create and provide an environment which encourages personal change, wisdom and application?*

*~Does our church allow and encourage people to ask difficult questions and seek answers to those questions?*

*~Does it equip people to think for themselves?*

~How effective are the classes, small groups and other opportunities our church provides in encouraging collaborative learning?  
 ~Does our church offer an environment in which people feel comfortable expressing and examining opposing views?  
 ~Does our church encourage self-study through a variety of opportunities?  
 ~How effective is our church in creating opportunities for intergenerational learning and exchange of ideas?  
 ~How effective is our church in equipping people to apply what they have learned?

- Review briefly the two mission models explained in Models for Discipleship-Making in the *Student Guide* and ask volunteers to compare and contrast these two models. Then call attention to the evaluation tools in the *Student Guide* and lead your class to evaluate itself and then your church in the areas suggested.
- Close with prayer, asking God to give your church the courage it needs to move into new territories and make disciples.

# Signs of the Courageous Church

## A Trusting Church

### Acts 4:32-37

<sup>32</sup>Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. <sup>33</sup>And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup>and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. <sup>36</sup>Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, <sup>37</sup>sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

**Theme: A courageous church is a trusting church.**

### Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.
- Read the review of the movie "The Emperor's Club" at [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1846](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1846).
- Read the columns "The Road Back to Integrity Must Begin in Our Churches" at [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1392](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1392) and "Guard the Gate of Your Character with Integrity" at [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1454](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1454). Use examples from these columns as you talk with your class about integrity and trust.

## As You Teach

### Introduce the Lesson

- Ask class members who have seen the 2002 movie “The Emperor’s Club” to summarize it briefly and explain its underlying theme.

The movie, based on a short story by Ethan Canin, tells the story of a classics teacher, Mr. Hundert, and his students at the St. Benedicts School for Boys. Hundert, played by Kevin Kline, instructs his students as carefully in moral character as he does in ancient languages.

He tells them one day, “It is not living that is important, but living rightly.” He follows this the next day by saying, “A man’s character is his fate.”

The movie deals directly with personal ethics, with choices and their consequences. “All of us, at some point,” Hundert says, “are forced to look at ourselves in the mirror and see who we really are.”

- Explain that this concept applies not only to individuals but also to churches. A church that wants to live courageously and minister with integrity must see itself clearly and honestly. Its members must trust each other explicitly. Even when decisions are difficult, ministry is risky and giving is costly, churches cemented by trust can act decisively and courageously.
- Ask class members to cite recent examples from headlines that point to America’s “crisis of trust.” Supplement their suggestions as necessary with examples from “The Road Back to Integrity Must Begin in Our Churches.”

Read aloud this quote from columnist Marv Knox: “Integrity is the vessel that carries trust, the most essential ingredient in human relationships. Once integrity is cracked or broken, trust spills out across the table of human life and drips down onto the floor of eternity—lost, dissipated, wasted.”

## Explore the Bible

- Remind the class that many first-century Christians paid a very high price for their devotion to Christ. Their businesses suffered; they lost their livelihoods and faced great financial need. Though resources such as money and food were sparse for many people in the Jerusalem church, trust was not. It was, in fact, this high level of trust among early Christians that added strength to their witness and resulted in tremendous growth.
- Ask someone to read aloud Acts 4:32-37. Then lead your class to discuss the Jerusalem church’s model of trust by asking such questions as:

*~What was the church’s attitude toward ownership of property?*

*~According to verse 33, what was one result of the church’s spirit of giving and sharing?*

*~How was this spirit of giving and sharing evidenced in individual lives?*

- Reinforce the results the Jerusalem church experienced as a result of their willingness to be of “one heart and soul.” Ask class members to formulate a spiritual principle from the example of this church. Remind them that the early church understood that their witness about the love of God would be undermined if they failed to show love to each other.
- Contrast the example of Barnabas in Acts 4:36-37 with that of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11.

## Apply Biblical Truth

- Ask class members to recall or read aloud the five concluding principles related to trust outlined in the *Student Guide*.
- Close with prayer, asking God to enable you to see yourselves as you really are and to see your church as it really is. Pray that God will cultivate trust among your church members resulting in courage to act decisively, minister boldly and give sacrificially.

# Signs of the Courageous Church

## A Self-Defining Church

### Acts 6:1-7

<sup>1</sup>Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. <sup>2</sup>And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. <sup>3</sup>Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. <sup>4</sup>But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." <sup>5</sup>And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup>These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them. <sup>7</sup>And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

**Theme: A courageous church is a self-defined church.**

### Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.
- Go to [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1472](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1472) and read "Deacons: Clarifying What Really Matters Now." Note especially the series of six questions in the middle of the article. Plan to use these questions to introduce this lesson.

- Go to [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1588](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1588) and read the article "The Role of Second Baptist Church in the Little Rock Central High School Crisis" as additional background in helping your class apply the truths of this lesson.
- The following articles might also be helpful as you prepare to teach and lead your class in discussions about a self-defining church: "Why Conflict Occurs in Congregations," ([http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1719](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1719)) and "Moving Through an Identity Crisis" ([http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1844](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1844)).

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

- Ask your class to suggest some ways they perceive the Christian church has changed since the events of September 11, 2001. Point out how many people both within and outside the church have since that day engaged in at least some degree of self-evaluation and have tried to determine what really matters, especially now. Ask class members to volunteer some of their thoughts and opinions. Then ask:

*~What about our church? Are we more in tune with what really matters?*

*~Are we more aware of the world, its people and their conditions?*

*~Have we changed what we do in response to the world's needs?*

*~Have we clearly defined and perhaps re-defined ourselves as a church in light of our changing world?*

- Read aloud the following statements and ask class members to tell if they agree or disagree with them, and why: "While God is certainly real and clearly moving in many churches and parts of the world, it is equally true that God doesn't seem to be very active or evident at all in many churches and in many lives. Many people are comfortable in 'their churches' while the world around them deteriorates and yearns for God. To many church leaders

and members, being comfortable with the way they do church is more important than risking discomfort and unfamiliarity in order to reach the world with the Good News” (Hammett 2002).

- Then ask: *What really matters now?*, followed by the series of six questions in the article “Deacons: Clarifying What Really Matters Now.” Encourage your class members to respond to each of the questions and express their opinions honestly.

Next, ask them to describe what it means for a church to be self-defining. Then offer these Insights: Peter L. Steinke, in a book titled *How Your Church Family Works* (1993, The Alban Institute), refers to the term *self-differentiation*, introduced by the late Dr. Murray Bowen. The concepts behind this term also relate to self-definition and include things like “. . . staying in touch with others . . . being responsible for yourself and responsive to others . . . maintaining your integrity and well-being without intruding on that of others . . . allowing the enhancement of the other’s integrity and well-being without feeling abandoned, inferior, or less of a self” (Steinke, p. 11). Self-differentiation or self-definition also includes the ability to be oneself and enter into a relationship with another without losing sense of self or diminishing that of the other.

Just as for a person, self-definition for a church is a life-long process, and events and circumstances constantly test and reshape that identity. The first-century Christian church faced many such incidents, including the one recorded in Acts 6.

### Explore the Bible

- Suggest that the first-century church was clearly in tune with their world’s physical, spiritual and relational conditions. While the church grew at a tremendous rate and was characterized by a spirit of unity and love, it was not without its problems. Its rapid growth and subsequent change, in fact, led to some of its earliest conflicts. One of these was a dispute between two different ethnic groups in the church.

- Read aloud Acts 6:1-6 and ask someone to summarize the problem and how the church chose to solve it.
- Call attention to the word *murmured* in verse 1 and explain that Christian scripture includes this word several times. One of the meanings of the word in the original Greek is *to speak secretly or in a whisper*. Steinke notes that “We find it happening in the church family when people talk about, not to others. Secrecy is an inevitable part of anxious blaming” (Steinke, p. 89). Secrecy, he goes on to say, is “anxious reactivity” and serves only to produce additional anxiety. “It is the secrecy itself,” he asserts, “not the content of the secrets, that is harmful.” Carefully and wisely, this church uncovered these secret murmurings and dealt with them honestly and fairly.
- Point out this irony: Since its beginning, the Christian church has promoted positive change in individuals and in society. Change often results in conflict. Individuals and churches unwilling to change, in effect, choose not to be a part of God’s plan. If individuals and churches are true to the mission of Christ, they will experience change, and in the process, conflict. Lead your class to discuss this by asking such questions as:

*~What is it that people really resist in the process of change?*

*~What do people most fear as they undergo change?*

- Call attention again to the example of the first-century church. Point out the willingness of church leaders to listen to the problem and take decisive, positive action. Suggest that the way they chose to resolve the conflict was not without risks: the Jewish Christians may have feared that their widows would be slighted if the Hellenists’ widows began receiving more. Yet the disciples wisely chose to involve those who raised the problem in helping to solve it.
- Ask someone to read aloud Acts 6:7. Point out the tremendous growth the church experienced after they resolved their internal conflict and dealt positively with change.

## Apply Biblical Truth

- Call attention to the advice for leaders facing change found in the *Student Guide*. Ask volunteers to read aloud the statements and encourage class members to agree, disagree and provide additional comments and insights.
- Close by offering the following example of a courageous church that chose to define itself decisively during a turbulent time of conflict and change. As a result, it continues to be known in its community for its positive stand on “people relations.”

In September 1957, President Eisenhower sent the U.S. Army to Little Rock, Arkansas, to escort and protect the nine African-American students who entered Central High School. When the governor of Arkansas closed the city’s high schools for school year 1958-59, Second Baptist Church, Little Rock, opened Baptist High in the church, in contrast to the school opened for segregationists.

The church’s pastor preached about God-given dignity of all people and worked for integration. A church layman served as vice-president and president of the PTA during those years. Brooks Hayes, another church member and U.S. Congressman, worked the halls of government for integration.

The church lost members and Hayes lost his seat to a segregationist because they were clearly self-defined. People knew where they stood and refused to do the thing we now know was the right thing to do.

- Close with prayer, asking God to help your church clearly define its purpose and mission, deal positively with conflict and change and attract those outside the church by its spirit of unity and love.

# Signs of the Courageous Church

## A Giving Church

### Acts 11:27-30

<sup>27</sup>Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup>And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world; and this took place in the days of Claudius. <sup>29</sup>And the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea; <sup>30</sup>and they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

**Theme: A courageous church is a generous and giving church.**

### Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.
- Go to [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1159](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1159) and read the column “A Bible, a Guitar and a Two-pound Coffee Can” by Dwight Moody. Also visit [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1612](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1612) and read the column “Greed Results in Idolatry” by James Evans. Use illustrations and ideas from these columns as you guide discussion about generous giving in a culture dominated by greed.

### As You Teach

### Introduce the Lesson

- Summarize the story from Dwight Moody’s childhood as told in “A Bible, a Guitar and a Two-pound Coffee Can.” Lead

your class to recall occasions in their lives when they have been suddenly prompted to give selflessly and generously. Guide them to discuss their views on generosity and charitable giving by asking such questions as:

*~What prompts or motivates generosity?*

*~How often do you spontaneously give in response to a charity, cause or need?*

*~How do/did you teach your children to be unselfish, generous and giving?*

*~How unselfish and self-sacrificing do you think Americans in general are?*

*~What about the average church member? What seem to be church members' priorities when it comes to financial giving?*

- Contrast Moody's spontaneous, unselfish act of giving with the popular wisdom of today that says, "Greed is good" (see "Greed Results in Idolatry"). Ask your class to evaluate the role of money in our culture by posing some of the questions in Evans' article:  
*~Do we need money to establish a viable identity?*  
*~Does it take money to validate our existence?*  
*~We need money to make a living, but does money alone make a life?*
- Summarize for your class some of Evans' conclusions about greed and the ways it makes us less human. Read aloud the last three paragraphs of Evans' column. Point out that often in both Christian scripture and contemporary culture, those who have the least materially—the poor and children—serve as models of generosity and sacrificial giving. From the widow who gave everything she had as an offering to God (Mk 12:42), to the little boy who offered his meager lunch to Jesus' disciples to help feed a massive crowd (Jn 6:1-13), to a sixth-grader who gave the earnings from his newspaper route to an itinerant preacher, those most grateful for the love of God in their lives generously return that love to others through giving all that they are and have. And selfless, generous individuals encourage this same spirit of courageous giving in their churches.

## Explore the Bible

- Briefly describe the beginnings of the church at Antioch, noting especially their origins in persecution. Read aloud Acts 11:27-30 and note the church's complete trust of Agabus as a messenger representing a need and of Barnabas and Saul as the delivery system for their contribution. Explain that while the Jews considered prophecy no longer to be a valid ministry and believed rabbis to be the successors of prophets and the spokesmen for God, Christians continued to believe in the validity of the prophetic function in the church (see also Acts 13:1; 15:32; 21:10; 1 Cor 12:28-29; 14:29, 32, 37; Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11).
- Lead your class to discuss answers to the following questions:  
*~What do you think prompted the Antioch church's immediate response to the need Agabus described?*  
*~In what ways did their response to the Jerusalem church's needs require courage of them?*  
*~What do you think our church's response would be if someone made such a plea to us?*  
*~What is our normal reaction to requests or solicitations for donations to charitable causes?*  
*~How do you determine personally which worthy causes to support financially?*  
*~What criteria did the church at Antioch use in determining whether to lend financial support to the church in Jerusalem?*  
*~What criteria should our church use in determining which needs, missions and ministry causes to support?*

## Apply Biblical Truth

- Remind the class that the Antioch church was still learning what it meant to be church. Yet in their formative years, giving and helping others was as important to them as anything else. While giving and serving have always characterized the Christian church, benevolence giving by American Christians has steadily declined for decades. Point out the giving trends mentioned in the *Student Guide* and note that beginning in the 1960s, Americans in general

moved from an ethic of obligation to others toward a culture of obligation to self. Suggest that a byproduct and long-term consequence of this trend are several generations of middle-aged and younger church members who lack a strong and sacrificial giving pattern.

- Note also that many churches have a habit of recognizing and celebrating only the largest of gifts. Religious organizations, too, often list or spotlight only those churches that give the largest monetary gifts, emphasizing monetary level rather than courage and sacrifice level.
- Remind the class of the model of the Antioch church: “the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief” (v. 29). Suggest that no one individual’s gift was likely very large. But together, the Antioch church combined their offerings and by entrusting them to Paul and Barnabas and then to the elders in the Jerusalem church, made a significant difference in the lives of people who needed their help.
- Close by relating this story:

As a small child, Hattie May Wiatt loved attending Sunday school at the Grace Baptist Church near her home in Philadelphia. Many times, however, the classroom was so crowded that she and other children had difficulty getting inside. One Sunday as she was trying to determine whether she could go inside, she met the pastor, Russell H. Conwell, outside the church gate. He promised her that one day they would have a larger Sunday school room, one that would accommodate all the children who wanted to come. He assured her that they would begin raising money for the new building very soon.

Shortly after that brief encounter, Hattie became very ill and died. At the little girl’s funeral, her mother told Rev. Conwell that Hattie had been saving money to help pay for a larger Sunday school building. She then gave him Hattie’s little purse, which contained 57 cents.

Rev. Conwell converted all of Hattie’s change into pennies and told his congregation her story. He then offered the

pennies for sale and received about \$250 in return. With that money, the Wiatt Mite Society, dedicated to growing the little girl’s initial offering as much as possible, was able to purchase a house and property near the church for a Sunday school building. The first classes of Temple College (later University) were held in that house.

Hattie May Wiatt’s generosity inspired thousands of others in fundraising efforts that resulted in the building of Temple University and Good Samaritan Hospital, now the Temple University Hospital (see [www.truthorfiction.com/rumors/hattiemaywiatt.htm](http://www.truthorfiction.com/rumors/hattiemaywiatt.htm)).

- Pray together that your church will instill a spirit of generosity in its members and that you will respond by giving courageously and sacrificially to the needs God shows you.

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and “Do Over” at [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=122](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=122).

## As You Teach

### Introduce the Lesson

- Begin with the following illustration:

Darrell Green spent his entire 20-year career in the NFL playing for the Washington Redskins. In his last professional game, the almost-43-year-old took the ball on a punt-return reverse, jumped over a defending Dallas Cowboys player and bolted 35 yards down the field. He was surprised he didn't go all the way into the end zone to score.

Green ended his career with the class and grace he displayed throughout it. The last three years he played for the Redskins, team officials acquired three different new players and put them ahead of him at cornerback. Instead of sulking and complaining, Green amazed his teammates by not only welcoming them but also teaching them the finer points of the position.

His career spanned 313 games and included seven Pro Bowl appearances and two Super Bowl championships. During that time, he played for five different head coaches and three different owners in two different stadiums. Whatever the circumstances, however challenging and difficult, Green always bounced back.

In his farewell speech to fans before his last game, he said, “My goal is not only to end a career but to be launched into a future that produces a light and carries out the purpose of God. With all this great joy, something in my heart has always said, ‘Is that it?’ You have given me a great platform and a great community to do what I believe . . . to change the world for all that is good, right and Godly.”

While he was committed to professional football, he was not totally defined by it, nor did he let its hard knocks keep him down. His life has a larger purpose, and he has

## A Resilient Church

### Acts 15:1-35

<sup>1</sup>But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” <sup>2</sup>And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. . . . <sup>4</sup>When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. <sup>5</sup>But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses.” <sup>6</sup>The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. . . . <sup>12</sup>And all the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. <sup>13</sup>After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brethren, listen to me. . . . <sup>19</sup>Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, <sup>20</sup>but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood. . . .”

**Theme: A courageous church is a resilient church.**

### Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the *Student Guide* and the following teaching suggestions.
- For additional insights and illustrations to use as you teach, read the articles “Using Adversity as a Catapult to Success” at [http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1670](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1670)

another passion: the Darrell Green Youth Life Foundation, designed to nurture, educate and help children. He seems determined that the time he spends with kids—his own and other people’s—will be even more rewarding than his football career. In 20 years, he says, he’d like for people to hear his name and say, “Oh, by the way, he used to play football, too.”

Darrell Green exemplifies the quality of resiliency, one of the marks of true courage.

- Engage your class in dialogue about resiliency by asking them to offer definitions or synonyms for the quality. Supplement their ideas with terms such as *flexibility*, *buoyancy*, *irrepressibility*, *liveliness*, *good spirit*, *pliancy*. Also offer this definition: *the ability to return to original shape or position after deformation*.
- Affirm the quality of resiliency in people as well as in churches. Ask class members to cite examples of people who have displayed resiliency during difficult times. Then ask:

*~Have you ever been a part of a church that experienced dissension and/or difficulty? How did the church respond? What signs of resiliency did you observe?*

*~What prevents many churches from being able to compromise or bend during challenging circumstances in order to move toward a greater goal?*

*~How do churches develop resiliency?*

### Explore the Bible

- Remind the class that the early church enjoyed remarkable growth, but that growth at times resulted in dissension. It began when the gospel spread beyond the Jews to Gentiles. Jewish Christians complained because the Gentiles were uncircumcised. They couldn’t understand how they could become Christians without first becoming Jews. The gospel then spread to Gentiles in places beyond Jerusalem: Antioch, Cyprus and Galatia. And Jewish Christians (called Judaizers) continued to insist that these Gentiles must first experience circumcision and become

Jews before they could become Christians. When the situation reached a crisis point in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas agreed to take the matter to the mother church in Jerusalem to seek resolution.

Emphasize the seriousness and importance of the situation described in Acts 15. This marked a turning point in the church’s history. The future of Christianity was at stake.

- Ask someone to read aloud key verses from chapter 15, particularly the speeches of Peter in verses 7-11 and James in verses 13-21.
- Summarize the early church’s pattern for problem-solving by utilizing the five bulleted points in the *Student Guide*.

Emphasize that because the early church determined that the gospel is indeed good news for all people, Christianity continued to spread throughout the world, and the church throughout history received a model for dealing with conflict and displaying resiliency.

- Note the results of the early church’s approach: the people were happy and rejoiced (v. 31) and the church expanded to include new believers (v. 35).

### Apply Biblical Truth

- Ask the class to name some issues or situations that can create conflict within churches today. In each case, ask them to suggest how a church can deal positively and constructively with the situation, achieve compromise and display resiliency.
- Suggest that wise and courageous churches bend but do not break during difficult times because they are prepared for them. They determine to deal with conflict, challenge and change by drawing strength from the essentials of their faith and agreeing to compromise on matters of interpretation or preference.
- Summarize the following conclusions from the *Student Guide*:

~Without flexibility inspired by vision and creativity, churches can calcify and become immobilized by fear of challenge and change. Then they fracture and splinter when their fears materialize.

~Displaying resilience requires courage. Sometimes displays of resilience result in criticism from other Christians.

~Sometimes resilience means seeking the best for the whole church while discovering other ways to nurture individual needs.

~Sometimes resilience means accepting pain and disappointment but looking ahead to new possibilities.

~Sometimes resilience means staring down a challenge, trusting God and depending on the Holy Spirit for divine creativity.

~Resilience employs the principles of listening patiently, considering everyone's needs and seeking God's plan.

~Resilience enables churches to overcome obstacles that would fracture rigid congregations.

~Resilience shows strength and flexibility. Neither of these is sufficient alone, but God blesses their synergy with courage that produces hope.

- Relate the following example:

In an inspirational column about preparing for his first 10K run, Larry D. Wright recalled that he was in good physical condition but had a lot to learn otherwise. To better prepare, he asked advice from a veteran runner who was familiar with the course for the race. The first part of the course is flat, she told him, so you will be tempted to start out fast. But between the third and fifth miles are rolling hills, so you need to prepare yourself for those hills.

He found her advice to be absolutely true. The temptation was there to keep up with and even overtake faster runners at first, but he kept a steady pace. The first three miles were easy. Then he approached the hills. They were even worse than his friend had described. But because he was prepared for them, he did not have to slow his pace much at all. He was thankful, he said, that someone had warned him to "prepare for the hills."

Wright observed that most Christians approach life as though it were an easy sprint. When times are difficult, they fall by the wayside. Life is really more like a distance run with lots of hills, he wrote. The wise Christian prepares for the challenging times by nurturing a vital relationship with Christ.

- Pray for your church, that you will develop spiritually so that you will be "prepared for the hills" and deal constructively with challenges the future will inevitably bring. Ask God to give your church the courage to apply the principles of resilience to difficult situations you face.