

# **FEARLESS THE COURAGE TO QUESTION**

**SUPPLEMENT FOR YOUTH  
AND YOUNG ADULTS**

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**RETHINKCHURCH®**

# WELCOME

Welcome to the youth and young adult companion to *Fearless: The Courage to Question*. Each week contains several sections designed for a variety of settings. They include the following.

**Focus:** Provides overall direction for each week, with additional insight into the chosen Scripture.

**Active Element:** Provides experiential component to help students discover through action.

**Discussion Questions:** Facilitates discussion on the week's topic. For some great tips on leading youth discussion, go to <http://tinyurl.com/youthdiscussion>.

**The Week Ahead:** Helps continue the study into the week ahead with a task, idea or social media message that can be done while not together.

The multimedia bundle is a necessary component for certain uses of this curriculum. Each week concludes with options for utilizing social media both before and after group meetings to reinforce and promote *Fearless*. If you have questions or ideas,

Please feel free to contact me via e-mail at [cumcyouthpastor@gmail.com](mailto:cumcyouthpastor@gmail.com)

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RETHINK

# Ash Wednesday

**SCRIPTURAL FOCUS:** *Read Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21.*

**Focus:** This passage is interesting for those open to questions. What Jesus is talking about—giving alms, praying, and fasting—are all good things. We encourage these spiritual practices. But sometimes even they can feel empty.

Spirituality can become hollow when focus is unclear. When it moves away from being God-centered and becomes self-centered, it loses its meaning. Unfortunately, we live in a time when the church has created religious consumers whose primary focus is on filling their personal spiritual wants and whims. The problem is not that people are having needs met, but that they are headed down the road of self rather than down the road of communion with God and community. This gets worse when we are focused not only on meeting our desires but also on receiving praise for superior spiritual lives.

This happens over and over again in the lives of youth and college students who go to incredible retreats or conferences, then make that turn toward self once they come home. Sometimes they find themselves dreading the hollow practices they used to love. Stunned by the emptiness of what were once fulfilling practices, they begin to question the validity and authenticity of those practices. *“Why are they boring?” “Why can I not hear God speak like I did at camp?” “Why do I not feel fulfilled anymore?”*

What is even more damaging is when people ignore the hollowness and pretend it does not exist or try to manufacture some sense of authentic emotion. People who continue to pretend so that others will not think poorly of them are in the greatest danger, as they are ignoring the emptiness so that they can continue to receive the praise they so dearly love. They need to stop, take stock of their lives, and refocus on the author and perfecter of all spiritual practices.

One of the most widely adopted spiritual practices is the *Lenten fast*. It may be time for some of the people to fast from accolades; maybe they need to take up the spiritual practice of secrecy and hide out with God for a while.

## **The Takeaway:**

God cares more about being in real conversation with you than how you appear to others.

## **The Challenge:**

Let the mystery of God unfold through spiritual practices. Take up one new practice during this season.

## Active Element

Talk about hollowness. The people who were waving palm branches and laying them at Jesus' feet were standing by as Jesus was convicted and crucified only days later on Good Friday. We generally burn the palm branches used in the previous year's Palm Sunday service to be used as the ashes of the next year's Ash Wednesday service. Try this to help bring that practice to life.

1. Give each student a piece of paper and ask them to write the lyrics of their favorite worship song on it. If they can't remember all the lyrics, they can write what they remember.
2. Have students fold the papers up and say a prayer of repentance for when they have made worship a hollow practice.
3. Have students light the papers and drop them into a bowl, dish, or jar.
4. Remind students that as a community, we must help one another when we are questioning, when we are feeling the hollowness of faith, and when we need the sign of Jonah.
5. Find some way for each student to take home a bit of the ashes in a ziplock bag or jar to remind them that this season is one of repentance and mourning. It is time to ask questions and wait to hear the voice of God. It is time to listen expectantly

## Discussion Questions

1. What are some of your favorite ways (spiritual practices) to connect with God?
2. What is a practice that you have heard of or seen but never tried? Why not?
3. Read Jonah 3 and Luke 11:29 and this background: The practice of using ashes as a sign of repentance and/or mourning stretched back millennia. Tamar tore her robes and put ashes on her head after she was raped by her half-brother, Job sits in ashes as his life goes to ruin, and so on. What is interesting is the way that the ashes connect mourning and repentance. This connection allows us to see clearly one interesting aspect of repentance. True repentance has at its root a mourning over the profound disconnection created by sin, and when worn on the forehead as a sign of repentance, as we do on Ash Wednesday, the ash is a sign to others around us that we are taking time to mourn the loss created by sin and reconnect with God. In Jonah, we see a man coming with no name or reputation and delivering a simple message of the judgment of God. This is what many believe Jesus meant when he spoke of the "sign of Jonah." Jesus was talking about those times when we hear the voice of God through a stranger; when someone we know little or nothing about speaks words that resonate in our soul as if God himself were speaking.
4. Tell a story of a time when you saw or heard a "sign of Jonah."
5. Tell the story of a time you mourned the passing of a friend or family member.
6. Why do you think each person mourns or repents differently?
7. If the point of repentance is turning and walking in the opposite direction from sin, how does mourning help us do that?
8. We do not have to repent for asking questions. In fact, questioning is often what leads us to hear from God through others. How can we use questions to help us repent?



## Active Element

Some of those who had waved palm branches and laid them at Jesus' feet during the triumphant entry to Jerusalem were the same ones standing by as Jesus was convicted and crucified only days later. The ashes used in Ash Wednesday services are traditionally made of the palm branches used in the previous year's Palm Sunday service. Try these ideas to help bring new understanding to that practice.

- Give each student a piece of paper and ask them to write the lyrics of their favorite worship song on it. If they can't remember them all, encourage them to write what they remember.
- Next, have students fold the papers and say a prayer of repentance for when they have made worship a hollow practice.
- Have students light the paper and drop it into a bowl, dish, or jar.
- Remind students that as a community, we must help each other when we are questioning, when we are feeling the hollowness of faith, and when we need the sign of Jonah.
- Find some way for each student to take home a bit of the ashes in a Ziploc or jar to remind them that this season is one of repentance/mourning. It is time to ask questions and wait to hear the voice of God. It is time to listen expectantly.

## The Week Ahead

God is wooing us toward **Easter** when we can throw off the sackcloth of repentance and announce "*Christ is Risen!*" He does this through spiritual practices. Consider putting up some newsprint outside the worship area. Invite students to write their questions on it. Take the questions and turn the newsprint into a piece of art for **Easter**. Maybe shape it into the words "*He is Risen*" or an empty tomb.

**Rethinkchurch.org** will present **FaithLink** online Bible study for seekers and those wanting to engage relevant issue through the eyes of faith beginning the first week of Lent.

## SOCIAL MEDIA:

Pre-message: *"If you could ask God one question, what would it be?"*

Post-message: *"Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves."*

-Rainer Maria Rilke

Use these videos in your Facebook posts this week:

*"For Those Who Wait"* by Fireflight: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcRMNiZtj5s>

*"Shine"* by David Crowder Band: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGZkrn\\_vaqU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGZkrn_vaqU)

# First Sunday in Lent

**SCRIPTURAL FOCUS:** *Read Matthew 4:1-11.*

**Focus:** Jesus was fully human and divine, a mystery that is difficult to take in. In this passage, we see a human experience, one that everyone can identify with: temptation. What an amazing thing to be able to say that God has felt the undercurrent that is temptation, the pain of a hungry belly, and the pull of ego. Yet he did not give in. When faced with grandeur and power no one has experienced, he stood his ground. In fact, he did more than stand his ground.

What Jesus does in his responses to each temptation is expose the way in which each temptation is not a mere giving into the desires of the flesh for pleasure, recognition, or power, but a choice of mortal over immortal and human over divine. Yes, the food would corrupt his fast, the over-the-top unveiling of his divinity would make him look like another self-righteous pastor, and the betrayal of his faith would cause his followers to be disenchanted. All of these things would be bad, but the true damage of giving into temptation is not physical or temporal. The true damage is a result of turning away from God to self.

What is even more amazing about what Jesus does here is that he does not reject these offers because he knows he will be avenged soon. Rather, he rejects this so that in a couple of years he can be physically humiliated, die, and, through that act of profound selflessness, provide salvation.

This is the life to which we are called: the life of the selfless servant. We are asked to give up power, recognition, and physical comfort so that others might know God and that his kingdom might come.

## **The Takeaway:**

Jesus' humanity allows him to identify with us and us to identify with him. His divinity allows him to free us from the bondage into which we sell ourselves by giving into temptation.

## **The Challenge:**

The challenge this week is to do what it takes to stop giving into temptation. The best way to start is to confess to someone who will help you identify first steps and hold you accountable. Do not be afraid! Remember, 1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. The person who is afraid has not been made perfect in love" (CEB).

## Active Element

As an act of repentance, fast from the things that provide easy access to your temptation.

Consider these things:

- Stay away from the computer for all nonschool or work-related tasks.
- Don't hang out with the people in your life whose presence and influence causes temptation.
- Don't go to the places that bring up seductive memories of giving in to temptation.
- If you are dealing with addiction, now is the time to tell a pastor or counselor and get the help you need to win the battle with addiction.

Fasting is not just about stopping, but starting. It opens up space for God. Use that space to do things that honor him and draw your soul into the deep waters of faith.

## Discussion Questions

1. Jesus was able to identify the way in which these physical temptations were also spiritual temptations. Take a moment to list some normal temptations and try to identify the spiritual component. Then share notes as a group.
2. Before Jesus was tempted, he had completed a forty-day fast. His fasting obviously didn't remove temptation. What do you think it may have accomplished?
3. Jesus quotes Scripture in each response to a temptation. What Scriptures help you put out the fires of temptation?
4. Why would a loving God allow temptation?

## The Week Ahead

One of the biggest temptations faced by teens and young adults is pornography. Encourage students to check out [XXXChurch.com](http://XXXChurch.com) and consider signing up your church to be part of next year's porn Sunday.

## SOCIAL MEDIA:

Pre-message: *"What are the greatest temptations of your generation?"*

Post-message: *"Decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage...to say 'no'...The way to do that is by having a bigger 'yes' burning inside." -Stephen Covey*



# Second Sunday in Lent

**SCRIPTURAL FOCUS:** *Read John 3:1-17.*

**Focus:** At the moment of creation God did something unique with mankind: he imbued it with his image. We all have some sort of God DNA inside that grows and develops after a second birth. Jesus talks about this same idea in Luke 17:20-21 when he says that the kingdom of God is within us. It is that kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, that we need to have come.

God has placed some part of who he is within us. Just like DNA is the essence of who we are physically, this bit of the image of God is who we are spiritually. In other words, who we are supposed to be has its source in who God is. That has radical implications for how we live our lives of faith. If it is true, a whole lot of what we need to be doing is allowing that seed of the image of God to grow within us, transforming us into a beautiful expression of the kingdom. It means that faith is not just about keeping some set of rules, but about nourishing the presence of God in our lives and becoming more like Jesus.

Unfortunately, many get the process backward and focus their faith on everything that is displayed on the outside and try to live by someone's list of dos and don'ts. They end up like the Pharisees depicted in this story. Jesus called them "whitewashed tombs" (Matt. 23:27) because they looked good but did not have the life of the kingdom inside. We must recover the image of God in our lives. It may have been covered over with many layers of hurt and neglect, but it is there. Uncovering that priceless treasure can be the start of something beautiful and new.

## **The Takeaway:**

The way of Jesus is not following a to-do list, but a process of discovery and growth. It is much more like the birth and rearing of a child.

## **The Challenge:**

Live into the image of God within you. What do you have at your core that is just, hopeful, loving, truthful, or merciful? Live as if that were your DNA. Be that person.



## Active Element

Have students take seeds and plant them, water them, and care for the resulting plants. As they plant the seeds ask students to pray that God will help them nurture the image of God within them. Tell them the reason behind caring for these plants: to remind them that they need to care for their souls in order for the seeds of the kingdom within them to grow.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Jesus was so hard on the people like the Pharisees in this Scripture who were concerned with doing all the right things?
2. If God's kingdom is within you, how do you know the difference between his kingdom and all the rest of what is inside your heart?
3. Have you ever had to answer what it means to be born again (or a similar question)? How did you, or would you, respond?
4. This passage begins with Jesus pointing out the real reason why Nicodemus was coming, a reason Nicodemus may not have known himself. Tell the story of a time this happened to you with a friend or family member or with God.

## The Week Ahead

New birth is something to be celebrated. Consider having your students host a baby shower for mothers in your community who need support. Work with local agencies to understand what the greatest needs are. Collaborate with adoption agencies and those that support single moms. Invite those outside of your congregation to participate, or host it at the agency with whom you are partnering.

## SOCIAL MEDIA:

Pre-Message: *"What is at the core of the human race?"*

Post-Message: *"Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending."*

-Maria Robinson

## Use these videos in your Facebook posts this week:

*"This Is Home"* by Switchfoot: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0ykm1v9xbU>

# Third Sunday in Lent

## **SCRIPTURAL FOCUS:** *Read John 4:5-42*

**Focus:** Jesus is going to the well at the time of day when no one was expected to be there—no one, that is, but the outcasts. The woman arrives and is standing next to the messiah. Though the discrepancy in social status is great, Jesus does not talk down to her; he does not treat her as less. Jesus speaks to her with dignity and respect.

Showing her dignity and respect does not mean that he allows her to stay where she is. With what I imagine is a soft, hushed tone respectful of the sensitivity of his words, he engages her in a revealing and redeeming conversation. He speaks honestly and transforms this outcast sinner into a brilliant evangelist.

The Bible is not just true because it happened, but because it happens. There are places in our world that are empty except for the sinners and the outcasts. There are places where a respected religious leader should not go lest she or he be thought of as less than holy. Yet those places are full of people who need someone to be the presence of Jesus.

When we are able to get past our image issues and risk our reputation to go to the well in the middle of the day, we cannot go as one descending from on high. We cannot be the unapproachable holy man. We must follow the savior's lead and be the mysterious, redeeming presence of change and renewal in the lives of the people we meet at the well.

### **The Takeaway:**

Let go of the stereotypes of *"those people"* in your mind and allow God to open up conversations.

### **The Challenge:**

For so long we have gotten it wrong. We have been focused on getting people to church when the church needs to go to them. This week, go. Go to new places, talk to new people, cross the invisible borders in your school or workplace that separate you from those who need Jesus.

### **Active Element**

Have each student make a list of the people on the other side of the invisible barriers in their lives—people who, for one reason or another, are considered off-limits. Students probably don't know these people's names, so lists will read something like *"the kid at the bus stop," "guy wearing flannel who waits at the door,"* and so forth. Then ask students to pair up and brainstorm ways to get to know those people. What are the first steps they could take? Ask them to role-play and see how their approaches may feel and where the conversation might go. Then get back together and share as a group.

## Discussion Questions

1. How does the conversation begin between Jesus and the woman?
2. How does Jesus keep the conversation on a spiritual topic?
3. Jesus was alone with this woman. How might he have changed his statements if she was with friends?
4. Knowing that we are not the messiah, consider how Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman can be a model for our own spiritual conversations.

## The Week Ahead

Think about how important water is, and how difficult it is for people to find good, clean water. Go to [www.water.cc](http://www.water.cc) and get a better idea of the problem and how you can do something about it. This kind of information can strike up interesting conversations. Try to use this info to get into conversations with a “woman at the well” in your life.

## SOCIAL MEDIA:

Pre-Message: *“What is at the core of the human race?”*

Post-Message: *“Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.”*  
-Maria Robinson

Use these videos in your Facebook posts this week:

*“This Is Home”* by Switchfoot: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0ykm1v9xbU>



# Fourth Sunday in Lent

## **SCRIPTURAL FOCUS:** *Read John 9:1-41*

**Focus:** *What is a miracle? How do you classify it?* Often when people say miracle, they mean that the normal, natural way things would have gone were “trumped” by God and something better has happened instead. That is good, but the more we discover how the world and our bodies work, the more we put in the “*natural way*” column and the less we can attribute to God. If you think about it, before we understood how bacteria and viruses act, everyone counted on prayers and some basic home remedies to counter illness. That meant that whenever the immune system was successful, it was a miracle. We are far from that now.

Is it possible that as we understand how the immune system works, and we create helpful drugs, that we are not revealing this knowledge as a non-miracle? Rather, are we getting to see the hand of God working?

What if a miracle is not God trumping the natural order of things, but moving through a surge of biochemicals to heal and restore? What if we could celebrate the miracle of antibodies? What if we could celebrate the fact that we can take a couple of pills and rid ourselves of thousands of diseases and infections? If we open our eyes, we can see miracles everywhere. We would see the power and presence of God in penicillin and *Adderall*, in the *Z-Pak* and *Claritin*. How much would our praise be multiplied?

But the reality is we don't see it. We have given God a set of rules to define when we will give him the credit for a healing or restoration. We become like the Pharisees in this passage, deciding whether or not this blind man's sight came from God or the optical laser. The sad thing is, we are the ones who miss out. We miss out on a life of thankfulness and wonder at the myriad of ways that God works in the world.

### **The Takeaway:**

God is at work in the world today making miracles all the time. Can we see it, or are we blind to God's work?

### **The Challenge:**

Try to notice at least one miracle a day this week.

### **Active Element**

Consider this sending forth option. Prepare some mud ahead of time and close by rubbing some mud on the eyelids of the students and then saying a prayer asking God to open their eyes to see his miraculous work all around them.

## Discussion Questions

1. What do you think made the Pharisees miss the fact that not only was Jesus the messiah but also that what he had done was a miracle?
2. What are some things that would have been considered miracles before that are not considered so anymore?
3. Why do you think some people are healed, while others continue to suffer?
4. Jesus could have done his healing more publicly, or in front of the Pharisees. What do you think could have been his reason for doing so privately?

## The Week Ahead

This week consider all the ways that God is working in the world. Consider the possibility that science is not opposed to religion, but revealing streams and methods designed and used by God himself. Maybe listen to a science podcast and learn a bit about scientific study yourself. If you are looking for a good podcast source, try: <http://twit.tv/kiki>.

## SOCIAL MEDIA:

Pre-Message: *Are there such things as miracles in the world today?*

Post-Message: *"You can become blind by seeing each day as a similar one....Each day brings a miracle of its own.*

*It's just a matter of paying attention."* —Paulo Coelho

Use these videos in your Facebook posts this week:

*"Fully Alive"* by Flyleaf: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-d3RYW0YoEk>

*"Smell the Color 9"* by Chris Rice: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lp2WgqBHYqM>



# Fifth Sunday in Lent

## **SCRIPTURAL FOCUS:** *Read John 11:1-45*

**Focus:** What a beautiful and layered passage of Scripture. We find Jesus—*the savior of the world*—waiting as his close friend is sick, and then grieving the loss of that friend. And let's not forget Jesus' bringing a dead person back to life!

Let us consider the interaction between Jesus and the sisters. As soon as Jesus gets into town, Martha meets him with what appears to be anger at the fact that he did not come in time to save Lazarus. She vents, and he lets her. Then Mary comes with the mourners and Jesus, in the shortest verse in the Bible, weeps with them. Finally, Jesus is moved to action.

Many of us can empathize with those who are suffering, and some of us can even allow people to vent without getting upset, but it is the final piece—action—that we omit. Many times we are moved emotionally, but do not translate this into action. We hear statistics about the 2 million children in the sex trafficking industry or the 30,000 children who die every day because they do not have enough food to eat and we feel bad, but it just doesn't lead to action.

If we are to receive and try to live out the instruction in these verses, we must do something. Let us not be a people of emotion without action.

### **The Takeaway:**

Throughout his ministry, Jesus shows that action must be part of faith. Let us follow that example.

### **The Challenge:**

Talk with God about things that are not right in the world and how much of it you may be able to improve.

### **Active Element**

Brainstorm as a group. *What are some big problems in the world that everyone has heard of?* Next, divide the group into smaller groups and do some research about what the real problem is and how group members can have an impact on that problem. Come back and share the info with the group. Plan on doing something small as a group in the near future.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why would Jesus weep?
2. Why do you think that Martha missed what Jesus was trying to do when he asked that the stone be rolled away?
3. How can grieving with people be helpful?
4. It seems kind of mean for Jesus to put these sisters through their grieving if he was already going to bring Lazarus back to life. What greater purpose made this action worth it?

## The Week Ahead

How can your youth group or college ministry be a place of healing for your community and world? There are problems all around and a limited amount of resources. What could you do or change so that you could make a difference both locally and globally?

## SOCIAL MEDIA:

Pre-Message: *If you could change something in the world, what would it be?*

Post-Message: *“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.”* —Helen Keller

Use these videos in your Facebook posts this week:

“*The Sound*” by Switchfoot: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNQgABsUfK8>



# *Sixth Sunday in Lent*

*Perseverance*

*( Jesus before Pilate )*

**SCRIPTURAL FOCUS:** *Read Matthew 27:11-54*

**Focus:** What a curious story! God descends from heaven and is physically born of a woman. After a life full of wisdom and peace, the God who has the power to raise the dead and create the sun with a word allows himself to suffer the most excruciating, horrific death imaginable by those he has come to love and save. It is a moment of total exposure for humanity. There is never such a clear moment of depravity than when we crucify our Savior.

It simultaneously reveals the perfection of love that is Jesus Christ. No matter how you look at this, Jesus is a wise man of peace who displays his love in the most dramatic, extravagant way possible.

We share in the blame. Though we did not live in first-century Palestine, we have done the same. The Communion service says it best:

*“We have not done your will,*

*We have broken your law,*

*We have rebelled against your love,*

*We have not loved our neighbors,*

*And we have not heard the cry of the needy.”*

There is time for celebration, but also time to grieve and repent. That is the call of the Crucifixion. The hope and joy of Easter is coming, but we must mourn the tragedy and shame of the cross: shame to Jesus, but even more a shame to us as a people. This is the defining moment in this great and curious epic God is telling. A hard light shines on the flaws of humanity, revealing to the world the darkness and brokenness. That is why we grieve; that is why we repent.

## **The Takeaway:**

God's love is more powerful and pervasive than our sin.

## **The Challenge:**

Take time to grieve the Crucifixion and repent of your sins.



## Active Element

One great way to experience a sense of redemption is to use the power of film. Check out [www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com) to find a movie on redemption suitable for your audience. “Simon Birch” is one to consider, as it deals with questions about life’s meaning, and redemptive death. Be sure to allow time to discuss the spiritual aspects of the film.

## Holy Questioning

1. Jesus did not ascribe to any particular political or ideological party, which meant he angered them all. Imagine if he came today and did the same thing. Imagine if he angered the liberal and conservative talking heads as well as many influential religious leaders. Would we do better in seeing him for who he is?
2. Why did Jesus have to die?
3. Would it have been as important if he had not come back to life? Why?
4. If you were to identify with one person in the Crucifixion story, who would it be?

## The Week Ahead

One of the most ancient practices is a prayer vigil on *Maundy Thursday*. As an act of repentance, you stay up with a group of people praying through the night with Jesus, much as the disciples did not. This is an ideal time to focus on repentance and the far-reaching effects of our actions. Consider offering a room in your church for this purpose. If all night is too much for some, consider signing up for specific hours through the night when people would come to the church for an hour to pray.

## SOCIAL MEDIA:

Pre-Message: “*How is love essential to human life?*”

Post-Message: “*Take away love and our earth is a tomb.*” -Maria Robinson

**Use these videos in your Facebook posts this week:**

*Vertigo* by U2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98W9QuMq-2k>

*Fatal Wound* by Switchfoot: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q490jdYdFic>