

Cunning, Compassion, and Courage



Exodus 1:8 — 2:10 places the story of Moses' birth within the context of women who appear to be without power and voice, but whose cunning, compassion, and courage lay the foundation for Moses and the liberation of God's people. This week's texts remind us of our vital role in the unfolding promise of God.

Focus scripture: Exodus 1:8—2:10

The prejudice Joseph experienced from Egyptians who refused to share a meal with an Israelite (Genesis 43:32) has come to a full head with the open and oppressive exploitation of the Israelite people. Thanks to historical amnesia, the Egyptians no longer remember that it was Joseph who kept their empire intact with his insightful dreams and his skill at working within an imperial system. Recognizing that discrimination ultimately feeds alienation, the Egyptian rulers double down on their oppression by making the Israelites live "bitter with hard service... ruthless in all the tasks they imposed" and ultimately genocidal by seeking to kill all the newborn males.

The story is an introduction to Moses and the role he will eventually play in the liberating work of God. But the formative lessons for Moses and the seeds that ultimately undermine an imperial and patriarchal system are rooted in the cunning, compassion, and courage of the women who refuse submission to injustice. Shiprah and Puah courageously take the lead among the midwives, rejecting the genocidal orders and then cunningly arguing that Israelite women are too vigorous in their labour. These midwives of justice are in turn cunningly and courageously followed by Moses' mother and sister who keep Moses hidden until such time as he can be strategically placed among reeds on the bank of the river. As the mother and daughter hope, their act of defiance is rewarded by the Egyptian princess who is brought into their conspiracy with her embrace and adoption of the child she names Moses.

It is possible the King's daughter knows nothing about Moses' mother and sister. But it is just as likely that this daughter of com-

passion knows full well what she is doing when she asks Moses' mother to nurse the child, paying her a salary to nurse her own son. The life of Moses is spared and nurtured by the cunning, compassion, and courage of all these women. They are virtues that Moses will absorb and call upon when his time to lead arrives. Nowhere is God mentioned in this story, but there is little doubt that each of these women plays a critical role in God's unfolding justice and liberation.

Psalm 124 makes explicit what is implicit in the story of the women who resist and undermine the imperial power of the Egyptian pharaoh, God is at work in bringing justice and liberation to the people.

Romans 12:1–8 offers a firm theological foundation for resisting all systems of domination by insisting we conform only to the One in whom our true unity exists, thereby discerning the will of God "what is good and acceptable and perfect."


Matthew 16:13–20 provides the reminder that like the women who play such a critical role in bringing freedom and justice to the Israelites, we each have a vital role in the realm of God coming into being.

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It would have been easy for the Israelite midwives to feel they were powerless in the face of injustice, for the mother and sister of Moses to accept his death as their only option, or the daughter of Pharaoh to capitulate to the discriminatory fears of her father. But each resisted conforming an unjust system, becoming, instead, cunning instruments of God's justice and compassion. What does it mean to be cunning in the service of God's justice and liberation?

Focus scripture
Exodus 1:8 — 2:10

Additional scriptures
Psalm 124
Romans 12:1–8
Matthew 16:13–20

 *Seasons of the Spirit* is based on semi-continuous readings of the Revised Common Lectionary.

God of liberation and freedom, we thank you for the people we have known whose courage reminds us that your compassion is present and at work in our world. Following their lead, may we resist systems and practices of domination, conforming only to the spirit of your justice. Amen.

Lection Connection
links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Most children see themselves as able to provide loving care for others. They will probably have had happy experiences showing love for a parent, affection for a friend, or nurture for a smaller child or pet. At the same time, younger children in this group have times when they also want someone to look after them.

Older children know how to work together to accomplish a task. They are often acutely attuned to unfairness toward any group and often protest unequal treatment. Children also know that one person's actions may affect many people. They are beginning

to exercise independence and want to make a difference in their own world.

This week's story has many layers to engage the children in the group. They will be interested in how people in this story work together to protect Moses, and that protection can come from unexpected sources – not supermen, but ordinary women who do extraordinary acts. Pray that each child will sense the power of God's love always with them, allowing them to tap into reserves of courage as they grow, and empowering them to make a difference in the world.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Exodus 1:8—2:10, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 91).
- ❑ Set worship space with green cloth; bring candle and Bible with bookmark placed in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 6), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 6), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring song "Behold, I Make All Things New" (p. 10 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #4 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).

Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[Courageous Women](#)."
- ❑ **Loving actions group:** no additional materials needed
- ❑ **Motives group:** copies of resource sheet "[Motives](#)"; follow instructions for preparing cards.

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Story zone:** brown construction paper, poster board, strips of paper, instructions from resource sheet "[Story Gallery Project-2](#)" (p. 111)
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** writing paper, envelopes, stamps
- ❑ **Cooperative zone:** small-gauge bendable wire, pliers, wire-cutters
- ❑ **Art zone:** white paper doilies, red card stock, wide ribbon, self-adhesive heart stickers, glitter; using the heart templates on resource sheet "[Heart Hanging](#)"; follow instructions for preparing the materials.
- ❑ **Craft zone:** large card stock heart shapes (use pattern on resource sheet "[Heart Hanging](#)"), circles of felt (slightly larger than heart shapes), safety pins

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "As We Go Now" (pp. 6–7 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #28 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).



Scripture

Exodus 1:8—2:10

Cunning, Compassion, and Courage

FOCUS To explore courage through the actions of the women in the story of Moses

Gather

Welcome the children and introduce any newcomers. Share stories and experiences from the past week.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space and invite a volunteer to light the candle as you say:

This candle reminds us
of God's presence with us.
In this space, we hear stories
about God and God's people.
(Place Bible beside candle.)
In this space, we know God's Spirit
is with us.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "Behold, I Make All Things New" (p. 10 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #4 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).

Pray (Invite children to repeat each line after you.)

Loving God,
thank you for this place
where we can learn and share.
May we be open to the work
of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Connecting with the focus

Invite children to talk about times when they were very young or times when they have been ill and needed someone to look after them.

- **What do people need to do to look after babies?**
- **What kinds of things might make someone who is ill feel cared for?**

Affirm their experiences and suggestions and explain that in this week's story some brave women care for a little baby who is in danger.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Exodus, the second book of the Bible with stories about our faith ancestors. Recall that in last week's story, at the end of the book of Genesis, Joseph brought his whole family to live in Egypt, where they would have enough food. This week's story takes place many generations later and Joseph's descendants have become slaves in Egypt.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Courageous Women](#)" based on Exodus 1:8—2:10 and the events that

led up to this time. Invite volunteers to read the parts, explaining that Shiphrah and Puah are midwives who help women have babies.

Wondering questions Make a list of the female characters (Moses' mother, Moses' sister, Miriam, the Midwives, and Pharaoh's daughter) on a sheet of newsprint. Invite children to consider each of these women as they discuss the following questions:

- **What courageous thing or things did she do?**
- **How did she make a difference?**
- **How much courage do you think she needed to do what she did?**

Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Loving actions group *(for younger children)* This group will have the opportunity to explore further the care offered by courageous people. Ask children to name all those who did something to love baby Moses.

■ What did each person do to help keep Moses safe?

Motives group *(for older children)* This group will have the opportunity to explore the motives of the characters in this week's story. Explain that a person's reason for doing something is called a motive. Give each child three cards from the resource sheet "Motives" and have them place

each of their cards beside a character (on the list created earlier) who they think might have had that particular motive for doing what she or he did. Review the choices together.

Reporting Invite the poster group to share their answers to the discussion question and invite the motives group to share some of their choices.

The Bible story and us

Miriam and the older women showed great courage in caring for Moses and saving his life.

■ What are some times when you have needed to act with courage?

Invite children to name some situations today in which bravely speaking out or acting in love can change things. (For example, speaking out against a bully or helping to protect an area of land.)

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- ❑ **Story zone: Story gallery** *(Option: ongoing project)*
Words of courage from the Bible or from caring friends can remind us that God's loving care is with us in difficult times. Follow the instructions for this week on the resource sheet "Story Gallery Project-2" (p. 111) for making the basket of "courage words."

- ❑ **Quiet zone: Letters to self** *(for older children)* We all need encouragement to remember to act on our decisions to make a difference. Invite children to write letters to themselves about a problem that they could do something about, as well as one thing that they commit to doing that could make a difference. Have them place these in envelopes, add addresses and stamps. Early in the week, mail the notes to the children, and follow up later.



- ❑ **Cooperative zone: Wire sculptures** Courageous women in this story made a difference, and we can make a difference today. As a group, discuss the kinds of symbols that could remind us

to have the courage to make a difference in the world (such as heart shape or open hand). Have the children work as a group to create a wire sculpture of symbols of courage, joining each shape to the other.

- ❑ **Art zone: Hangings** God's plan for Moses relied on the loving actions of brave people. Distribute heart shapes and help children follow the instructions on the resource page "Heart Hanging" to make hangings showing the chain of God's protective love down through the women to Moses.
- ❑ **Craft zone: Courage badges** *(for younger children)* God's plan includes ordinary people living courageously God's way of love. Give each child a heart shape cut from card stock. Help them print the phrase "I can be a brave helper" on their heart shapes and staple these to circles of felt. Attach safety pins to the backs of the badges and help children pin their badges on. Take turns naming brave things that they can do to share God's love.

Bless

Gather around the worship area and light the candle again.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song the song “As We Go Now” (pp. 6–7 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #28 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).

Pray Lead the children in the following prayer, inviting them to repeat each line after you:

God gives us courage
to stand up for love,
even when it is hard.
May God help us
to show brave love this week. Amen.

Blessing Offer the following blessing to each child: “(Name), may you feel God’s love and care for you this week.”

Reflect

In what ways are you modelling courageous love in your interactions with the group? In what ways can you continue to encourage the children to be brave in sharing God’s loving care?



Courageous Women

Based on Exodus 1:8—2:10

Narrator: When Egypt got a new king, he didn't know all that Joseph did for Egypt. So, he told his people...

King: There are too many Hebrews here. They're getting so powerful they might fight for our enemies if we ever go to war.

Narrator: The Egyptians turned the Hebrews into slaves and tried to wear them out. They made them build two cities, but the Hebrew families kept growing. Finally, the king called Shiphrah and Puah, two midwives who helped the Hebrew women give birth. He told the midwives...

King: If a Hebrew woman has a baby girl, the girl can live. But, if she has a baby boy, you must kill him.

Narrator: The midwives believed in God, so didn't kill the baby boys. The king called them again and said...

King: Why do you let the boys live?

Shiphrah: Hebrew women have their babies faster than Egyptian women.

Puah: So, by the time we get there, the babies are born!

Narrator: God blessed Shiphrah and Puah with their own babies. But the Hebrew families kept growing, so the king commanded everyone in Egypt...

King: When a Hebrew woman has a baby, the girls can live. But throw the boys in the Nile River!

Narrator: A man and woman from the Levi tribe married, and she had a baby boy. She hid him at home for three months, but when she couldn't hide him any longer, she put him in a waterproof basket and hid it in the grass by the Nile River. His older sister watched from a distance, then one of the king's daughters came to bathe and saw the basket. She sent a servant for it, and when the princess opened the basket, the baby's crying made her sad. She said...

Egyptian Princess: This must be a Hebrew baby.

Narrator: The baby's older sister approached her and asked...

Sister: Would you like a Hebrew woman to look after this baby for you?

Egyptian Princess: Oh, yes! Can you find one?

Narrator: So the girl brought the baby's mother and the princess said...

Egyptian Princess: I will pay you to take care of this child for me.

Narrator: The baby's mother took him home and cared for him. When he was old enough, she returned him to the princess, who adopted him and gave him the name Moses – which means "pulled out" – because she pulled him out of the water.



Motives

Make copies of this page and cut sections apart;
make sure that each child has at least three motive cards.

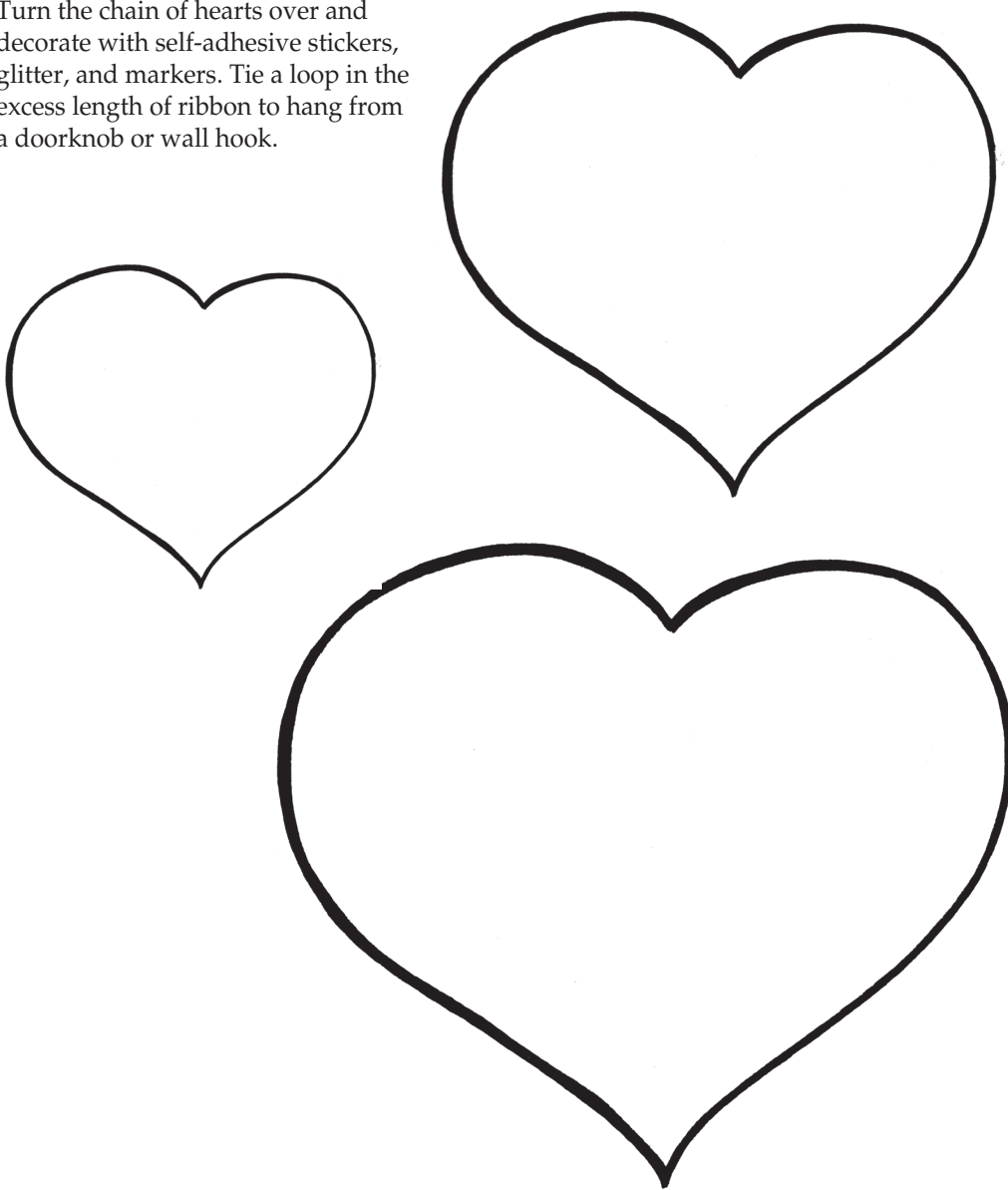
I was afraid of the Hebrews.	I thought that God would want the babies to live.	I knew that if I didn't do something, no one would.
I was afraid of the king.	I thought that lying to the king was better than hurting children.	My mother seemed upset.
I was afraid of people unlike me.	I loved my little brother.	I treated others how I would want to be treated.
I wanted to protect my child.	I thought that Hebrew boys were a bigger threat to the nation than girls.	I wanted to do what was right.
I wanted to help my people.	I was curious about the little boy in the basket.	I was worried about the large number of Hebrew people.
I wanted to help other people.	My job is to bring life into the world, not to destroy it.	I loved my family.
I thought the king's policies were unfair.	I felt brave that day.	I think it's important to stand up for others.
I thought the baby was beautiful.	It is my job to keep all the people under control.	I hoped my mother could keep her baby and no one would find out.
I was afraid to lose power.	I wanted to help my brother.	I could not imagine letting anyone hurt my baby.
I wanted to please God.	I thought I was doing the right thing.	I was afraid to leave my little brother alone in the river.



Heart Hanging

Instructions:

1. Use the templates below to trace and cut one large heart and five medium hearts from paper doilies.
2. Use the small heart template to trace and cut six hearts from red card stock.
3. Glue one red heart on each white heart.
4. On the large heart, write the name "God." On the medium hearts, write the names of Shiphrah, Moses' mother, Miriam, Pharoah's daughter, and Moses.
5. Lay the hearts face down in the above order in a vertical line with the large heart at the top. Put a dab of glue on the back of each heart. Lay a length of flat ribbon approximately 30 cm/12 in longer than the row of hearts along the glue dabs to join the hearts together, leaving the excess length at the top of the row.
6. Turn the chain of hearts over and decorate with self-adhesive stickers, glitter, and markers. Tie a loop in the excess length of ribbon to hang from a doorknob or wall hook.

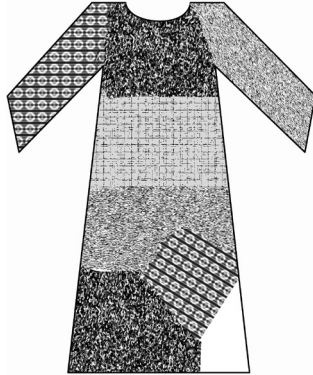


Story Gallery Project-2

The following projects can stand alone as an activity for that week, or the activities can be part of an ongoing project to create a “gallery” of images based on the stories from Genesis and Exodus. If you choose to do an ongoing project, mount each week’s art pieces as indicated and keep in the meeting room until August 31, when the group can host an “art gallery tour” for the rest of the congregation.

August 9: Fabric collage

Joseph’s special coat reminded him of the love of his father, Jacob (*Genesis* 37). Invite children to make fabric collages as reminders of this part of the story. Have them cut scraps from many different colours of fabric and collage these onto cardboard coat shapes by covering the cardboard with a layer of white glue and then pressing the fabric scraps onto the cardboard. Add glitter or star sequins if desired. Make an arrangement of the “coats” on a sheet of poster board, adding a title and scripture reference.

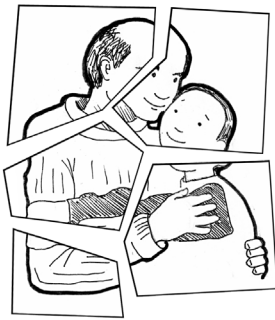


August 23: Courage words

Through the courage and love of women, Moses was kept safe (*Exodus* 1). Invite children to create “baskets of courage words” as reminders of God’s loving care. Draw a large basket shape on brown construction paper and have children work together to add lattice-work lines to make it resemble a woven basket. Cut this out and attach it to a sheet of poster board by taping around the bottom and sides, leaving the top open. Then help children to write inspiring words on strips of paper (such as “God’s love never fails” or “God is always with us” or “Friends are signs of God’s love”). Place these strips in the “basket” and add a title and scripture reference to the board.

August 16: Picture mosaic

Taking steps toward forgiveness brought the broken pieces of Joseph’s relationship with his brothers back together again (*Genesis* 45). Invite children to look through magazines and find pictures that represent for them the theme of forgiveness. Have them remove their pictures from the magazines and then cut into large pieces, like a jigsaw puzzle. Then have them glue the pieces onto a sheet of construction paper to re-form the picture, leaving small spaces between each piece. Make a display of the images, adding a title and scripture reference.



August 30: Flame names

Moses heard God’s voice call him by name, calling him to be part of God’s plan for the Hebrew people (*Exodus* 3). Talk together as a group about how God calls us all to be part of God’s way of love. Distribute orange, yellow, and red construction paper and help the children to cut these into flame shapes. Have them each write their name on one of the shapes. Then talk together about others who might also be called by God, such as family members, friends, people in church, helpers at school or in the community. Add these names to other flame shapes and then work together to glue the “flame names” onto a sheet of poster board to form the shape of a bush. Add a title and scripture reference.

