Profiles in Courage

INTRODUCTION: Read Proverbs 24:10-12. Discuss the following questions (possible responses are italicized and placed within parentheses):

1. **What situation does this passage describe?** (Days of adversity, distress, trouble, scarcity, injustice; people are being given death sentences even though they are innocent of any capital offense; others are “stumbling to slaughter,” perhaps by means of their own recklessness or because they are intent on killing innocent people.)

2. **What actions are required?** (Rescue or deliver those being taken to death; hold back, restrain, or prevent unjust deaths.)

3. **To whom is the command addressed?** (People who are not being led to death or staggering to slaughter but are by-standers or observers of the situation; people ignoring the situation who need to become involved; people who are hoping someone else will act.)

Proverbs 23:15, 19, 22, 26 and 24:13 lend context. This section of the book was for Solomon’s son, who would one day be king. It’s worthwhile to consider this command as we evaluate government leaders, but as we will see in our study, kings and princes are not the only ones who should rescue.

4. **What do we know about God from these verses?** (God knows what is going on in the world and the dangers we face. He knows how much we know. He is acting behind the scenes to keep our souls. He is also watching and considering how we respond to helpless people dangerous times. He weighs our hearts—our action or inaction—and renders His judgment accordingly. Future reward or loss of reward is based on our response to distress.)

5. **Key questions: What methods should we use to prevent unjust death? Should we place our bodies between victims and their killers? Should we employ violence?**

The text does not specify why people are going to their deaths or how they should be rescued, but we are told about unacceptable behavior. It is unacceptable for leaders (or faithful followers of God) to be weak or lazy, to do nothing, or fail to act (verse 10). We can't excuse ourselves because we feel incapable of action or ignorant of what’s going on. A lack of courage, compassion, or knowledge is inexcusable. Verse 12 says that God judges our action and inaction. He knows what we know and don’t know. He renders judgment accordingly.

Consider historical examples, such as people who rescued Jews from the holocaust, versus those
who cooperated with the Nazis for their own survival. What did people do in order to rescue Jews?

6. **According to verse 10, what does inaction reveal about a person?** *(It indicates we have small or limited strength, are fearful or lack of courage, are apathetic, or perhaps weary. It could reveal our faith is small, that we don’t really believe God is watching over us and keeping our souls, and that we’re overly fearful of what people can do to us. It may show that we think too much about current comfort than future reward, treasures on earth vs. treasures in heaven.)*

   Proverbs 21:2 says, “Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts.” We may be able to deceive ourselves, but God will make an accurate judgment.

**PROFILES IN COURAGE:** Even though Proverbs 24:10-12 does not tell us how to rescue or deliver people from death, the Bible does give us several examples. Look at the following passages to discover what people did to prevent the unjust deaths of brothers and neighbors:

| Genesis 37:12-27 | Exodus 1:15-21 | 1 Sam 19:1-7 and 20:1-42 |
| 1 Kings 18:3-4 | Esther 3:5-11, 4:1-17, 8:4-6 | Job 29:12-17 |

**Activity:** Read each passage, identify the main characters, and discuss a few questions:

- What obstacles or dangers did the hero/heroine face? Consider the interpersonal dynamics at play between the hero and villain: Who held power? Why might someone decline to help in that situation?
- How did the hero/heroine show courage and strength? What action did the he or she take?
- What motivated the hero/heroine to action? What did he or she know about God?

Use one **Profiles in Courage** worksheet to record your findings for each passage. The class could look at the first passage together and then break into smaller groups for the rest.

**Leader:** We’ve provided some key points from the Profiles in Courage passages at the end of this lesson.
## Profiles in Courage Worksheet: __________________ Passage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identify the main characters</th>
<th>Victim:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Villain:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hero/heroine:</td>
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Fill in one worksheet for each assigned passage and report your findings to the class.
SUMMARY: This overview of heroism in the Bible gives us a good idea of how we can “rescue” or “hold back” people from death, as commanded in Proverbs 24:10-12. In each case, a brave person intervened in a life-and-death situation.

- Some were leaders (princes, kings, queens, prominent citizens), but others were ordinary folk (siblings, midwives, servants, fellow travelers). None of us can say, “It’s not my job.”
- Some situations called for secrecy or stealth. Working quietly behind the scenes, some heroes helped without drawing attention to themselves, the victims, or what they were doing.
- Their efforts were largely successful, and they’ve become good examples for all believers.

What did you learn about the types of action that can be taken on behalf of another person? They fall into roughly two categories: speaking up and providing practical help. Which of our heroes spoke up? Which offered practical help? How many did both? Arrange your summary in a chart similar to the one below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEROES WHO SPOKE UP</th>
<th>HEROES WHO PROVIDED PRACTICAL HELP</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Made an effort to persuade: Argued on behalf of a brother (Reuben, Judah), friend (Jonathan), a people-group (Esther), a servant of God (Ahikam, Ebed-melech, Paul’s nephew)</td>
<td>Refused to participate in murder (midwives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warned a potential victim (Jonathan)</td>
<td>Enabled a victim’s escape (Jonathan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposed villains who oppress the poor, the dying, the disabled, etc. (Job)</td>
<td>Hid potential victims and cared for their physical needs (Obadiah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interceded before the king and God on behalf of himself and other victims (Daniel)</td>
<td>Helped victims according to their needs (Job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan both spoke up (to the king, and to David to warn him) AND acted to enable the victim’s escape.</td>
<td>Lifted a victim from misery and danger (Ebed-melech)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebed-melech spoke to the king AND physically lifted Jeremiah from the pit.</td>
<td>Tended to a victim’s physical needs (Good Samaritan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job both opposed the villains AND helped the victims with their needs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One more biblical example: Look at John 7:1, 14-20, 25, 30-32, 43-53 – Jewish leaders, who wanted to kill Jesus, had sent officers to the temple to arrest Him. After the officers returned without Jesus, Nicodemus reminded them that God’s law required proof before someone could be sentenced to death. It was a risky thing to do, but he feared God more. Jesus’ life was spared because a) the Jews had no answer, and b) it was not the right time for Jesus to die.

APPLICATION: In the distressing situation represented by abortion, thousands of unborn babies all around the world are being taken to their deaths each day.

1. **Think about their mothers: How are they like the people in Proverbs 24:11 who are staggering or stumbling to slaughter?** Some women are threatened with losing their home, job, or relationships if they continue the pregnancy. They are not the ones who will die, but they may have
made reckless choices, endangering their own life or the lives of others. If they abort, they suffer many losses: loss of their child, a hardening of conscience, broken fellowship with God, etc.)

2. **Describe the kinds of distress that leads pregnant women to have abortions.** *(Being abandoned or misled by the baby’s father, being a victim of sexual assault, lacking a husband or a home, lacking good parental guidance, repeated errors in judgment, etc.)* A note of caution: While it might be tempting to criticize the pregnant woman, finding fault does not help her or her child.

Looking at the demographics of abortion patients and their reasons for abortions, we find:

- Most abortion patients are unmarried and in their 20s or 30s
- 59% have had at least one previous birth
- The reasons for abortion include not being ready for a child, financial or relationship instability, not wanting people to know they’re pregnant or had sex, being coerced by a husband or partner

3. **How should we behave toward people who are caught up in the distress of abortion?** Make a list of practical things that God’s people can do to alleviate a woman’s distress:

   *Welcome unwed mothers and their children to church*  
   *Support the work of pregnancy care centers*  
   *Donate clothing and furnishings*  
   *Help with car and home repairs, job searches, etc.*

4. **How can we meet the challenge of abortion distress by speaking up?**

   We must speak to the woman: about the dangers of sexual sin and abortion, about alternatives to abortion, about forgiveness for sin (including the sin of abortion).

   We must also speak for the woman and her baby: to her parents and the baby’s father, to the government, to the community at large.

5. **Reflecting on the fight against abortion, how have people been weak and ineffective in response? How have they been strong and wise in their responses to abortion?**

6. **Reflecting on your own response to abortion, has it been weak or strong, wise or unwise? In what areas can you become stronger and wiser?**

   If we’re afraid to speak or act, we can draw on God’s promises for courage and wisdom:


**RELATED VIDEO:** *Profiles in Courage* is available for free download from Vimeo, at https://vimeo.com/372727327.
KEY POINTS IN THE PROFILES IN COURAGE PASSAGES:

**Genesis 37:12-27** – Joseph (victim) needed rescue from some of his brothers who wanted to kill him (villains). Reuben and Judah became his heroes, speaking up on his behalf to preserve his life, even if it meant selling him into slavery. The eight brothers who were clamoring for Joseph’s death could have turned against Reuben and Judah. It’s easy to get swept up in a mob and scary to think about opposing it. Reuben reminded them it would be wrong to shed innocent blood. Judah may have thought about Cain and Abel and known he would answer to God for his brother’s death (see Gen. 9:5-6). It does not seem they were motivated by love for Joseph but may have loved or at least honored their father. They used persuasion, not aggression.

**Exodus 1:15-21** – Baby boys (victims) needed rescue from Pharaoh (villain). The Hebrew midwives, who would have been the instrument of their deaths, instead became their heroines. They refused to obey Pharaoh’s edict and saved the baby boys’ lives. They risked making Pharaoh angry and losing their lives, or at least their livelihood. Even though they were under Pharaoh’s authority, their fear of God was greater. They may have known God planned to work through the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God commended and rewarded them for defending their countrymen.

**1 Samuel 19:1-7 and 20:1-42** – David (victim) needed rescue from King Saul (villain). Jonathan (hero) spoke to his father in favor of David and temporarily persuaded King Saul to not kill him. Later, Jonathan warned David about King Saul’s intent to kill him, which allowed David to escape. He set up a signal so that he would not be seen talking to David. Jonathan risked making his father angry and being killed himself. He was motivated to act by his love for David, and by the knowledge that God had chosen David to become king after Saul, not Jonathan. He also knew God’s laws concerning capital punishment, that David had done nothing deserving of the death penalty, and that he would have to answer to God if he did nothing (see Genesis 9:5-6).

**1 Kings 18:3-4** – Prophets of God (victims) were being massacred by Queen Jezebel (villain). Obadiah, a servant in King Ahab household, became a hero by protecting 100 of them. Obadiah risked losing his job and his life by hiding them in two caves and feeding them bread and water. He was motivated by fear of God, fearing God more than the king and queen. He knew God was his King and Judge.

**Esther 3:5-11, 4:1-17, 8:4-6** – Haman (villain), the 2nd most powerful man in Persia, succeeds in convincing King Ahasuerus that all Jews should be killed (victims). Mordecai (hero) convinced a reluctant Queen Esther to become a heroine, even though she feared being killed if the king didn’t extend his scepter to her. She was motivated by the knowledge that she would be killed with the rest of the Jews, and by the idea that God had made her queen for just this moment. Esther bravely and passionately spoke up for her people before the king, gradually winning the king over and letting Haman think he was being honored. She astutely persuaded the king to allow Jews to defend themselves.

**Job 29:12-17** – Villains were wicked people who preyed upon victims who are poor, orphans, the perishing, widows, the blind, lame, and needy. Job (hero) rescued people in various practical ways, making them joyful and earning their blessing. He not only prevented the killing of innocent people but rendered the wicked people toothless against future victims! He made his business to help people. Job investigated cases about which he knew little (or was willing to help people who were strangers). Knowing God is righteous and just, Job was motivated by his desire to be like God.

**Jeremiah 26:1-24** – Priests and false prophets (villains) were determined to kill Jeremiah (victim), even though Jeremiah had done nothing to deserve death. Ahikam is credited by name with saving Jeremiah, although princes/officials, elders, and the people were also heroes. They risked angering King Jehoiakim who had chased another prophet all the way to Egypt to have him killed. They feared God more. Even
though they were living in a time of God’s judgment, they knew His law well enough understand killing Jeremiah would be wrong.

**Jeremiah 38:1-13** – King Zedekiah allowed his princes/officials (villains) to throw Jeremiah (victim) into a muddy cistern, leaving him there to die. The king was weak and could not control them; he feared having anything to do with Jeremiah. Ebed-melech, Zedekiah’s Ethiopian servant (hero) risked his own life by persuading Zedekiah to let him rescue Jeremiah. Ebed-melech seemed to be motivated by compassion for Jeremiah and considered how to make his rescue more comfortable. We know little else about him, except that he was promised deliverance in the coming destruction (39:15-18). He knew right from wrong (Romans 2:14-16) and that God’s prophet would die without intervention.

**Daniel 2:12-19** – When King Nebuchadnezzar (villain) ordered all the wise men (victims) to be killed, Daniel (hero) spoke up on behalf of himself and others. He requested more time to seek wisdom from God that would eventually save all their lives. He was motivated by His faith in God. Daniel and his three friends were the only real wise men because they knew and trusted the true God, Sovereign Creator of all. The others were weak, fearful idolaters who had no resources for saving anyone.

**Luke 10:25-37** – Thieves (villains) were greedy for a traveler’s money. They beat the victim severely and left him to die by the side of the road. A Samaritan (hero) acted to see that the man survived. He spent his own time and money to help him and risked falling prey to the same robbers. He was motivated by compassion for a neighbor, even one he didn’t know. The Good Samaritan did not tell the victim to “be warmed and filled,” as James 2:15-16 warns against. He stood in contrast to religious leaders who failed to do anything.

**Acts 23:12-31** – Some Jews (villains) conspired to kill Paul (victim), but his nephew (hero) learned of the plot and spoke to the Roman commander on Paul’s behalf. He risked being found out by the conspirators. The commander (another hero) used stealth and military might to bring Paul to safety. Even though he was not a Christian, he knew right from wrong and that Paul had done nothing deserving of death. (Notice the contrast between the pagan commander and people of Jeremiah’s time who should have known it was wrong to take an innocent man’s life.)

**2 Timothy 4:9-18** – Paul (victim) was on trial in Rome because some Jews (villains) had accused him before Roman leaders. People had done him much harm, and others had failed to help. No one defended him and he felt alone. He needed friends, but ultimately had no hero but God Himself. During the trial, God strengthened him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and he was delivered from a death sentence. Even though Paul grew in his conviction that God is able to deliver and that he would be preserved until he was called home to heaven, he still sought human companionship.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**


