

Material for small groups: “Dare to live”

Dare to live

In the course of the coming days we will put this question: “How can we live (more) courageously?” In all areas of life, we need courage. Some (but not all, by a long way!) facets of this topic will be looked at in these pages. Our aim is to speak about them in the small groups and also in the TUNE IN events in the mornings. It is, so to speak, the general topic of the entire “Crescendo Summer Institute 2012”.

You can, of course, also take this material home with you and use it for local meetings. We would even suggest organising local meetings and groups. And we are very happy to accompany and support these local initiatives.

We hope that these thoughts will lead to lively exchanges in the groups and be a great encouragement for all!

Hearty greetings,

Your

Crescendo Team

Part I

What is courage?

A pupil had to write on the subject “courage” in a school final examination essay. He had four hours time for it. But after only a few minutes he handed the essay in. It was only one page! On it was written in large letters: “This is courage!”
So, what is courage, actually?

QUESTION:

What story or experience of your own occurs to you on the subject of courage? Share about where you personally had to be courageous or where the courage of others impressed you.



QUESTION:

*Let us go back to the story with the essay: where did the pupil get his courage from? What was he thinking about as he wrote this essay?
One could also ask: “What possible reservations did he not have—or did he brush them aside?”*

“What I am doing is good”

There is a “Courage Prize” in Switzerland for people who have shown courage in the last 12 months: one person had rescued someone from a burning car. A second had uncovered a scandal in his firm. A third had started an aid project in another country under dangerous circumstances. – They all believed that what they had done was “good”.
What is “good” or “bad” is the ethical question that hangs in the background. The “Courage Prize” is not given, for example, to terrorists, although they of course also act courageously because they believe they are doing something “good”.

Are you familiar with these thoughts (precisely as a musician/artist): “What I am doing is good!”, and do you gain courage from this? Do you need courage at all? If yes, where?

“What I do has an effect!”

Anyone rescuing a person from a burning car is hoping two things: “This person is still alive! I will not lose my life in this action!” (The second thought may even be absent if one risks one’s own life to rescue someone else).

Anyone uncovering a scandal has this hope: “This will lead to a change!”

Hope is also needed where something new, unusual, creative is to come into being. If we only want what is usual, conventional, guaranteed by popular opinion, we do not need courage.

Have we had similar experiences?

Are there areas in your life where you especially need “courage through hope”? Are there things for which you so far have no great hope of success or that others are on your side?

Is there something in the coming days for which you need particular courage?

Additional questions:

What are courage-killers?

Fear: “It is too risky. It might work, but the risk is too great.” (At the same time, fear is not always “bad”! If we had no fear, we would be all too over-confident, all too prepared to take risks.)

Defeatism: “It is all pointless!” – “What I do does not help/interest anyone.” – “Nothing can be changed anyway!” – “Other people / the circumstances / the world is simply too bad!”

Lack of resolution: “I do not know what is right in this situation. There are so many arguments for and against...”

With which “courage-killers” are you especially familiar? How do you deal with them?

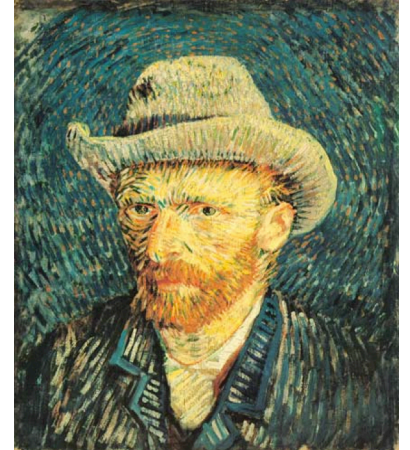
Part II

Courage to be “oneself”

Each person is unique in a wonderful way!

Artists in particular are always in some way “different” from others. And many people take note of their progress, even if they are not accepted. It takes courage to be “oneself”. A famous example is Vincent Van Gogh, who remained incomprehensible during his lifetime and yet continued courageously and without deviating on his artistic path. If he had constantly asked himself, “Do I affect anyone? Do I have success with others? Do they understand me? Do people respond positively to me?” he would have painted differently!

An experiment in which a large number of people had to write down their thoughts during a working day brought the following result: most thoughts went in the direction of “What do others think about me?” This cripples the courage to be oneself.



From what source do you draw the courage to be “yourself” (and to be “different”)? Were you sometimes dis-couraged to be “yourself”?

How, and by whom, were you en-couraged?

The courage to say “NO”

Being able to say NO is very important! Artists often need to show resistance. Artistic creativity has been required to defend itself against the status quo, the monotonous, or the well-adjusted, and has treasured the freedom to be different, whenever it existed.

Many works of art are a kind of protest against prevailing conditions. (According to a well-known saying, the revolution in Germany took place in the opera!)

Which artists who make a NO-statement in their art occur to us? To what would you like to say “NO” with your art and your behaviour as an artist?

You. Researcher in a laboratory. If they order you tomorrow to find a new means of death against the old life, there is only one answer::

Say NO!

You. Poet in your study. If they order you tomorrow to sing songs not of love but of hate, there is only one answer:

Say NO!

You. Doctor at the patient’s side. If they order you tomorrow to certify men fit for combat, there is only one answer:

Say NO!

You. Preacher in the pulpit. If they order you tomorrow to bless the war and declare it holy, there is only one answer:

Say NO!

From a text by the German author Wolfgang Borchert, who wrote against the war (1921-1947)

In personal life, too, it is important to be able to say “NO”.

Today’s educational theory is facing completely new challenges: parents can no longer control a child in the way they used to and forbid certain things, such as using the internet or regarding the temptation to take drugs. But they can (and must) teach the child to say “no” for himself. The goal, then, is strengthening the child’s will!

Do you find it easy or difficult to say “no”?

Where should you say “no” more often?

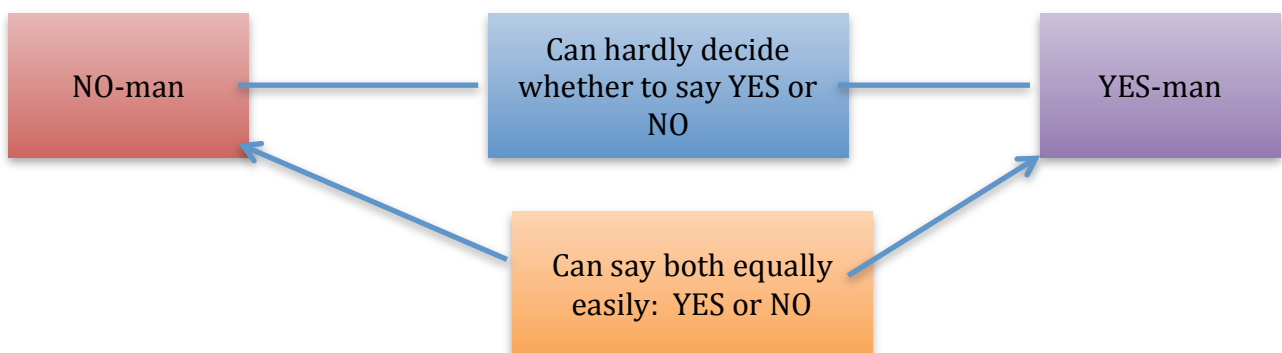
Fasting is an old religious exercise, practiced by Christians during Lent, for example. One who is fasting does without food or alcohol (or Facebook...) – and trains oneself in saying “no”. Thus one concentrates, for a certain time, on what one considers “more important” and dedicates oneself to prayer for this purpose.

Have you had any experience with this?

Additional question:

There are typical NO-men and typical YES-men. And also some who can comfortably say “no” and “yes” depending on the situation (see the scheme and text below).

To which do you tend?



There is the typical YES-man: He would like to please everyone if possible and fulfil everyone’s wishes. Perhaps he always had to be very well behaved during his childhood. He

loves harmony and can be a peace-maker. This is good if no lazy compromise results, leaving problems unsolved. Because he cannot say “no”, he often gets into big personal problems, because he does not want to disappoint anyone and because, in the process, he demands too much of his own energies. He needs an extra portion of courage in order to say “no”.

There is the typical NO-man: In his type, he is the “revolutionary”. He is in some way always in opposition. Behind this front, a sensitive (and often deeply hurt) person may be found. He has to overcome much in himself to work as part of a team. His criticism, however, often breaks up, in a good way, established structures and brings movement into situations. He needs courage to be able to say “yes”.

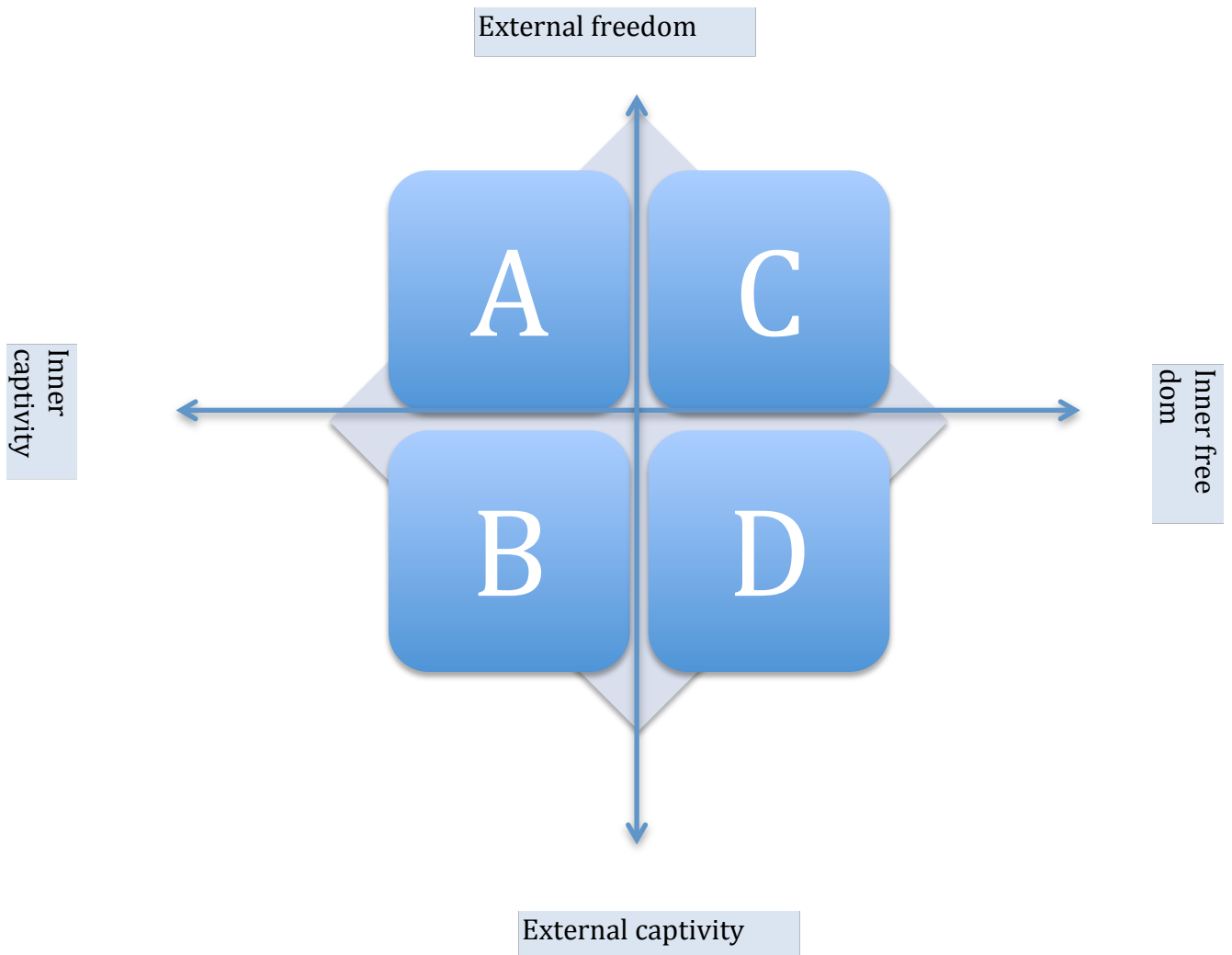
There is also the undecided: He wishes to get everything as “right” as possible. He has different or contrary ways of thinking and always also sees the negative side, the disadvantages and possible difficulties of any decision. He therefore prefers to do nothing and stay where he is. This also applies to career choices or to relationships. He does not like to be under obligation and wishes to remain free. But in precisely this regard he is not free. He needs courage to be able to make clear decisions.

The one who can say YES and NO: He can make many free decisions: decide personally for or against a cause and express his own opinion. He may also be very different in his thinking, being aware of the positive and negative sides of a decision. But he knows this: making no decision is also a decision, and often the poorer one.

Part III

Courage and Freedom

Courage is linked to freedom. Only a person who has inner freedom can also be courageous. There are different kinds of freedom: external and inner freedom.



Let us read the following descriptions of the individual areas and then share some thoughts about them.

On (A): externally free, in inner captivity:

People who are externally “free” (from political, economic or family constraints – or also from limitations due to illness) can nevertheless be profoundly “unfree”. Inner compulsions or unhealed psychological injuries and deep deficits prevent them from acting in freedom (and with courage!)

An example from the Bible: A rich young man seeks to talk with Jesus. He clearly lives a faultless life on the ethical level. But he seems to feel that something important is missing in his life. Jesus says: "If you want to be perfect, (in the Greek also "whole"), sell what you own and give it to the poor, then you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." The rich young man then goes away in sadness...

Jesus obviously sees what is missing in his life: inner freedom!

Your views on this:

For entirely personal reflection: Are you aware of inner compulsions, deficits or hurts which hold you captive?

On (B): external and inner captivity:

This is the case where people are overpowered by external circumstances – or even give up their freedom voluntarily, e.g. in cults or **running with the herd in dictatorships**. Their personal will is radically broken. In science fiction films, however, there are always courageous heroes who revolt against the imposed uniformity in a totalitarian system.

Your views on this:

On (C): external and inner freedom:

This would almost be Paradise! Advertising operates with these dream-like ideas that Paradise can already be enjoyed here on earth: one buys a particular car or books a dream holiday – and finds perfect freedom and happiness.

Or – one goes to a concert and finds this impression aroused: "The musicians who play Mozart so wonderfully are themselves free and happy! The orchestra is inwardly full of harmony!"

Your views on this:

On (D): external captivity, inner freedom: People who show inner freedom while in external captivity are courageous. It is possible to name numerous examples from past and present.

One example is in the martyrs, who in many cases were even killed for their faith.

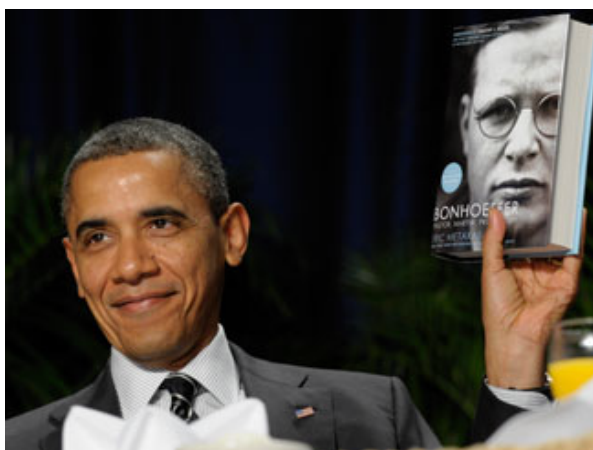
About the illustration: The fates of martyrs were often represented symbolically, as in this picture. What do we see? Two cages – in one a person is held captive. The door of the other is open, and through it a bird flies out into freedom – a symbol of the free soul.



The **apostle Paul** (a central figure in the New Testament of the Bible) was often imprisoned because he proclaimed the message of Jesus Christ. His experience was that in prison his internal freedom even increased, and that, as a result, the other Christians living in freedom were encouraged to tell others about their faith (Letter to the Philippians 1: 14). Paul also wrote this: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” (Letter to the Galatians 5: 1). With the “yoke” he does not mean external freedom, but internal captivity and religious compulsion.

The fates of many martyrs have made their way into literature and also into music, most importantly with Bach’s passions (for the story of **Jesus’** passion is a story of martyrdom). And then, for example, Handel’s “Theodora”.

The German theologian **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** showed courage at an early age when, on 1st February 1933, he gave a radio talk on “The term Führer [Leader]”. He said “Leader and office which make themselves idols mock God.” The transmission was broken off. Bonhoeffer became a pastor in London in 1933, but returned to Germany in 1935. He left the “external freedom” behind him and chose life under the dictatorship in order to strengthen the churches in his own country and continue resistance against the Third Reich. He did this in a variety of ways and was executed in 1945. His books (including “Gemeinsames Leben” [“Life Together”], “Nachfolge” [“The Cost of Discipleship”]) are very impressive. In prison in Berlin/Tegel he went on to write many texts. They show a man who is inwardly free while in external captivity – and who remains courageous. But he was also completely honest and spoke about his fears.



Barak Obama received the bestseller “Bonhoeffer” by Eric Metaxas

Your thoughts on this & sharing:

*What other examples do you know for “courage in internal freedom under external captivity”?
Have you had any similar experiences?*

How can “internal freedom”, and thus also courage, grow?

Part IV

The courage to show weakness

When we hear the word “courage”, we may perhaps think of heroes, adventurers, or strong personalities. But it does not take courage to show strength. We live in a world where everything that is strong and successful, rich and beautiful is prized anyway. Often, “being beautiful” is the standard applied. In art, including music, it can be the effect, combined with the attractive outfit on the CD cover. For this, a lot of self-confidence, a big ego, is needed. But this is not the same as courage. It requires a lot more courage not to swim with the sweeping current of the ego culture and instead to show weakness on occasions, to speak honestly about one’s difficulties or failures or to say to someone else, “I need your help”.

What experience do you have of this?

Have you discovered that it takes courage to show weakness?

Which of the following statements finds a particular echo in you? What comments would you like to make or what would you like to discuss further?

- A person who shows weakness also creates a place where others can speak about their difficulties and problems. This is liberating! Being able to show weakness has something to do with honesty and authenticity. Artistic work is a prime example of the need for honesty and for the courage to admit weakness. Otherwise there is danger of perfectionism or mere playing for effect.
 - The courage to admit weakness means the courage to ask others to help. This leads to a different kind of fellowship from that in which everyone demonstrates his own strength. The strong person makes the others weak, the weak person makes the others strong.
 - It is true for the culture world as well that the strong have contempt for the weak, as the successful have for the unsuccessful or the better for the less good. The atmosphere is determined by egoism, competition and fear. It takes courage to say “no” to a culture of this kind and to propagate other values.
 - Whoever shows weakness also helps the weaker.
 - “Let my grace be enough for you. For my strength is made perfect in weakness” (a word of Jesus taken from 2 Corinthians 12: 9). Where God’s grace is experienced, one becomes “strong”.
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The courage to make mistakes

In Finland there is, once a year, a “Day of the Failure” on which one can tell others openly about mistakes. A firm which relies on innovation has a cannon positioned in front of the building. Whenever a department risks something courageous and ends up suffering a failure, this is celebrated by firing the cannon and having a glass of champagne. They are, of course, not celebrating the failure, but the courage to risk mistakes and the learning process. Without the courage to make mistakes, the artistic creation process would also be inconceivable. Art is to only a small extent the result of an inspiration. It is predominantly the fruit of the “working-out phase”, to which constant re-working and correction belong.

Do you have the courage to make mistakes?

Tell us about where you have most learned from mistakes.

Dare to trust! (1)

The classical nightmare at a wedding is if the bride or bridegroom suddenly says “no” at the altar because his or her courage fails them. Only if one has trust can one take a courageous step. A child learns to swim because he trusts his father, who is stretching out his hand towards him and will not let him go under. Every healthy person has an intrinsic “primal trust” which says to him: “Life carries me!” – “I can master life!” – “I will make it!”

The question of whether or not one is familiar with this fundamental attitude has a shaping influence on one’s life, even in the details of concrete life situations...

*Are you familiar with this situation: You begin to practise (or to write a text, paint a picture, compose a piece...) and think, “I will make it! I can do this!” – or conversely: “I will not make it!”
Tell us about your experiences...*

There are people with a very strong primal trust and a positive attitude to life which carries them through even the worst experiences

But not everyone has such a fundamental trust and positive approach. In one CRESCENDO Magazine (No. 78/2008), we interviewed the Jewish pianist Alice Herz-Sommer, born in 1904 (!). Here is a short extract from it:

CRESCENDO: Your son’s words, likewise included in the book, are very moving. He writes that, even in the concentration camp, you managed to give him a happy childhood.



Alice Herz-Sommer: Part of that is due to my being an optimist. My twin sister was a terrible pessimist. We had the same parents, of course, and the same upbringing. But she virtually waited for the worst to happen and was always thinking, "This and that will happen!" That never comes into my head...

CRESCENDO: So you never suffered from stage-fright?

Alice Herz-Sommer: No, never! My son has never had it either. It was much more the case that I looked forward to playing every concert and showing people how wonderful the language of music is. I also like working. Some people are work-shy...

How does this look with you? Do you have a fundamental trust in "life"? Or is it rather missing? Do you perhaps discover in yourself similar tendencies to those in your immediate relatives (grandparents, parents, siblings)? Have you noticed that the factor "trust" supports your readiness to be courageous?

Part V

Dare to trust! (2)

En-couragements

An important factor in the development of a child is positive feedback from the parents. A golden rule states that one should praise a child (and this applies at later stages as well) seven times before voicing criticism. This strengthens self-confidence, the “trust in oneself”! It is correspondingly more difficult for a person who was praised never or seldom. It is not by chance that there is a close linguistic relationship between praise and encouragement. The important thing is this: genuine encouragement is honest and not unrealistic.

Where have you experienced en-couragement which has made a special impression on you? Or perhaps you received much discouragement, and this has left its mark? For example: What were your (music) teachers like?

Can you encourage others?

Trust can be learned

Even if one has received little encouragement, one does not have to end up a failure. André Agassi begins his autobiography with this sentence: “I hate tennis.” The reason: his father never really praised him but constantly criticised. **André Agassi** had to learn trust along another path.

Many people say that the greatest encouragement they have received is knowing and experiencing that they are loved by God

The most important message in the Bible tells us that God loves us, that he says “yes” to us. In Psalm 139: 14, King David prays: “I praise you because I am fearfully and **wonderfully made.**” Or, as is written in the 1st letter of John 4: 11: “Dear friends, since **God so loved us**, we also ought to love one another.” Or in John’s Gospel 3: 16 we read: “For **God so loved the world** that he gave his one and only, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life.”

Do you know people who experience this – or have you experienced this yourself?

How can one experience God's "yes"?

Paul writes, in the famous 8th chapter of his Letter to the Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? [v. 31:]... I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (v. 38)

This text makes three central statements:

1. Nothing can separate us from God's love
2. This love is made visible in God's sending his own son Jesus Christ to this world (Christmas), in his "not sparing him" (the Passion: Jesus dies on the cross for our sins) and in his giving us everything (forgiveness of sins and fellowship with God in this life and in eternity)
3. Paul calls Jesus Christ "our Lord". What he means is that we can only experience God's love if we also say "yes" to Jesus Christ and accept him as "Lord".

*With this, we have outlined the central statements of the message of the Bible as we also find them in the great works of church music. What questions do you have on this?
What did you experience going through this?*

Does faith give rise to courage?

Part VI

Defeating enemies courageously

We all have enemies. What would you say is your greatest enemy?

We are concerned here not with persons, but with circumstances, life situations, one's own attitudes, thought patterns, feelings etc.

Fear

One great enemy is called "fear". We know different fears: fear in examinations, stage fright, fear in facing decisions...

An exemplary story on the subject of enemies or fear is found in the account of David and Goliath in the 1st Book of Samuel, 17.

1.

Goliath is an overwhelming hero before whom everyone trembles and who wishes to defeat Israel. He begins to taunt his enemies and everyone is horrified!

Do you know Goliaths too?

2.

Little David (later King of Israel) on the other hand is not a soldier. He can look after sheep – and apparently also play the flute and the lyre – also as accompaniments to his singing of wonderful self-composed poetry... but he is completely out of place in this tough setting. As he brings bread to his brothers, he recognises the danger from Goliath and asks what gives Goliath the right to inspire so much fear.

David recognises / names the danger and the fear and questions them. Have you had the same experience, that naming fear is a first step towards overcoming it? Or, putting it another way: fear will not go away just because one ignores it! And courage does not mean having no fear. Courage means taking action despite fear.

3.

David's brothers are furious because they do not want him to get involved. From those on the same side with him, then, no encouragement is received, for the brothers themselves feel fear.

Are you familiar with this: others want to infect you with their fear.

4.

But David wants to do battle against Goliath, for God has helped him to kill wild animals on previous occasions.

Are you familiar with this: you gain courage because you are reminded how (with God's help?!) you have previously been "victorious"?

5.

They put heavy battle armour on David. But it is too heavy and David can hardly move. David then takes this armour off and picks up his own weapon: a sling and six stones.

Are you familiar with this: You try to defeat the "enemy" with weapons which you cannot handle. You are trying to play another role. But everything goes better when you recall who you really are.

6.

David speaks to Goliath and threatens him. Rhetorically, he already has Goliath under control!

Anyone suffering stage fright, for example, should recognise this and name it. He takes the fear onto the stage with him, so to speak, but has it under control. Not the other way round: the stage fright does not have him under control! Are you familiar with this?

7.

David says: "You come to me with sword, spear and shield; but I come to you in the name of God." David defeats Goliath with only a stone and a sling, but he trusts in God. There are many Bible passages in which God says to man: "Do not be afraid!" Jesus says to the disciples, for example: "In the world you will have tribulation [trials, and therefore fear]. But be of good courage, I have overcome the world." (Gospel of John 16: 33).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "I believe that God is ready to give us, in each testing situation, as much strength to resist as we need. But he does not give it in advance, making us rely not on ourselves, but on him alone."

Has trust in God (e.g. in prayer) helped you in the past to be courageous?

Part VII

Making courageous decisions

Every day, we have to make many decisions. We do not notice this, because they are small decisions which need no courage: Do I go shopping now or later? What shops shall I go to? What shall I cook for my guests? etc. But we all know, naturally, situations in which we face major decisions and where a portion of courage is necessary because the course of our life depends on them. Where shall I study? With which teacher? In what direction do I want to go professionally and in my private life? Along which path of faith shall I go?

Do you find it easy or difficult to make decisions? Tell us about courageous decisions in your life. What helped you with these?

Perfectionism

Anyone with a tendency towards perfectionism has trouble making decisions.

Examples:

- Person A has not put up any pictures in his flat. When he is asked why he has white walls, he answers, "I cannot decide. I am afraid that the pictures would be hung wrong. So I prefer not even to start with it."
- Person B is a very good student. But she cannot finish her diploma dissertation, because she always discovers yet another mistake. Only after a long struggle, and with the help of friends, does she succeed in finishing.

Are you familiar with this connection between perfectionism and discouragement? If so, what thoughts can help you here? (What attitude does the perfectionist need in order to be able to win through to a courageous decision?)

How do we interpret this statement by the famous Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar: "Allowing time for ripening is silver, deciding is gold"? Do you agree with him?

Courage in taking responsibility

Our society, our cultural life needs people who take responsibility and participate in shaping things. This begins where we take responsibility for our own life.

Self-pity

There are good reasons why many can make this kind of statement: “I have had an inadequate upbringing” – “I come from poor parents” – “I have been through many things that have hurt me deeply.” – “I had the wrong teachers” etc.

Such thoughts can lead into self-pity and block the will to take responsibility for one’s own life.

Are you familiar with this kind of thinking? What helps you in overcoming self-pity?

Getting involved for others

An inspiring text has the title “Small goals kill us”. That means that, if we only pursue our small individual goals, our life will become deadly boring and we will not change anything!

Conversely, we grow where we get involved for others and for “shared interests”. And we learn to be courageous!

Where do you notice that we today (in the cultural world, too) are being inoculated with this message: “Each person is his own neighbour in need! Each person must look after himself!”

What does the following passage tell us in this context: “If anyone wants to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”

(Gospel of Matthew, 16: 24,25)

What responsibility is “waiting” for you in the near future and how can we perhaps support you in this?