



 REYNOLDSBURG
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Written by: Christina Bohn and Laura McCoy

Edited by: Dennis Franko

Character Illustrations by: Christina Bohn

Graphic Design by: Steven Thompson

Podcast Scripts Written and Directed by: Aaron Bohn

Podcast Mixed and Edited by: Todd Hixenbaugh

INTRODUCTION

For those of you who are the best of the best, the brightest of the bright, the star athlete in high school, the one voted most likely to succeed, the victor in every challenge, we have good news for you: ***God can still use you.***

You see, God has a habit of using the most unlikely people to accomplish His mission of saving the world. All throughout the biblical narrative, God tends to pass over the strong and powerful in favor of the ordinary, the unconventional, and the unexpected.

Join us this summer as we take a look at eight unlikely heroes from the Old and New Testaments. Their stories show us God can use the outcast, the unwanted, the passed over, and the unlikely in heroic ways. God can use our past and present stories—no matter how ordinary—for the manifestation of His kingdom here on this earth. We may be the unlikely heroes, but God is the Hero. All we really have to do is show up.

SMALL GROUPS

Is your small group continuing to meet over the summer? Embrace a natural summer rhythm by keeping your study time simple. Instead, spend more time connecting with one another and having fun. Below is a sample model for group discussion.

Welcome & Prayer

Discussion: read this past Sunday's Scripture passage aloud.

Ask:

1. What seems to be the main message or point of this passage? (Take into consideration context, tone, and genre)
2. Is there anything particularly profound, hopeful, or inviting about this passage?
3. What do you find difficult or challenging?
4. How might Jesus be inviting you to apply this passage of Scripture to your life?

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

There are two components to this study: a personal, devotional guide and interactive, family cues.

The **Devotional Guide** gives you three opportunities every week to connect with Jesus. We recommend forming a rhythm around three days, such as Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Summers can be hectic, so consider scheduling your devotional rhythm into your mobile phone or paper calendar.

The **Family Cues** invite parents/grandparents to utilize two special resources with their kids: our radio theater podcast and our conversation cards. The **Family Audio Experience** podcast (FaX) can be accessed online at ReynoldsburgUMC.com/Heroes and the **conversation cards** are available at our Resource Center.

We encourage you to adapt the different components to your needs and interests. After all, the fun stuff isn't just for the kids!

WEEK ONE



DEBORAH

DAY ONE

Read: Judges 4:1-10

Reflect: Deborah may not appear to be an unlikely hero to 21st century readers—but to the original listeners of her story, Deborah was all kinds of unlikely! The idea that God would choose a woman (a woman!) to serve as both a judge AND a prophetess was absurd. God’s choice broke so many social rules and conventions, and the first listeners would have viewed Deborah with suspicion and doubt because of her gender.

Unfortunately, we, too, do not often view people the way that God views them (see 1 Samuel 16:7). **Where God sees valor, we see a threat to our position of privilege. Where God sees potential, we see a challenge to our status quo. Where God sees heroism, we see impossibility.**

God’s message to the ancient recipients is the same message to us today: God chooses to use people as God pleases, without regard to our human standards. We don’t get to define a “hero”; God determines the prerequisites, and we get to fall in line with God’s unlikely plan.

Respond: What are some prejudices or labels that you tend to place on others? What would it take for you to see people the way God sees them? Ask God to open your eyes to new possibilities. And if you feel overloaded and burdened by the labels others have put on you, know this: God sees you. Your identity is not the sum of what others think about you. God has a better story for you.

For families: FaX - listen to the Family Audio Experience (podcast) of the lesson together. Identify who the “unlikely hero” is in the Bible story. (Deborah) What was her job? (She was a prophet of God and a judge) What is a “prophet”? (Someone who listens to God and tells the people what He said)

DAY TWO

Read: Judges 4:11-24

Reflect: What are some of the surprising twists of this story? What are some parts that made you feel uncomfortable? Why do you think God chose to work through the unlikeliness of this victory?

Respond: God is a master of the “plot twist.” Recall a time when God did the unexpected in your life. Maybe there is a situation right now that needs a “plot twist.” Commit the situation to God, trusting Him to right any wrongs and work things out according to His will.

For families: Meal Time Moment - take some time together at a meal to discuss the questions on the back of your Deborah character card.

DAY THREE

Read: Judges 5

Respond: “Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers! I will sing to the Lord, I will sing; I will make music to the Lord, the God of Israel.” (Judges 5:3)

Listen to worship music today, and praise God in the way that most resonates with you - whether singing, silently meditating, kneeling, or dancing. Thank God for all the ways that He’s accomplished the “unlikely” in your life.

For families: Action Item - let your child/children choose a family activity to do this week that would show kindness or God’s love to someone. Let them be the “unlikely hero” and take some leadership—just like Deborah—by coming up with an idea (with maybe a little prompting from you!).

WEEK TWO



BEZALEL

DAY ONE

Read: Exodus 31:1-11

Reflect: When you think about the Spirit of God coming upon someone in the Bible, who do you think of? Do you think of warriors—like Samson? Do you think of prophets—like Isaiah? Chances are, you don't think of tradesmen—like Bezalel. Yet, in the instructions for the tabernacle's construction, the Spirit's empowerment of Bezalel is mentioned twice (here in Exodus 31 and again in Exodus 35:30-36:7). God's Spirit came upon Bezalel—not to fight, not to perform miracles, not to issue a divine message—no, God's Spirit came upon Bezalel to make the tabernacle beautiful. **God's Spirit can be manifested through the work of prophets and kings, but He can also be made known through the work of poets, artists, architects, designers, and carpenters.**

Unlikely? Absolutely.

Respond: This passage tells us that the Spirit was made manifest in Bezalel's skills, abilities, and knowledge (v. 31). What skills, abilities, and knowledge do you have that God can enliven and empower for His kingdom? List them below and pray over them, committing them to the Spirit to do what He desires.

For families: FaX - listen to the Family Audio Experience of the lesson together. Identify who the "unlikely hero" is in the Bible story. (Bezalel) What was his job? (He was an artist or builder) What did he make that was special for the Israelites? (the tabernacle, or God's special tent)

DAY TWO

Read: Joel 2:28-29

Reflect: In the book of Acts, Peter recognized that this prophecy from Joel was coming true right before his very eyes (Acts 2:14-21). Before, in the Old Testament, God's Spirit only came upon certain people at certain times. Now, God's Spirit was available to all people—they only had to repent and believe in Jesus (Acts 2:38-39).

The Spirit isn't just for the spiritually elite—like Moses or Elijah—and certain people don't have more of the Spirit than others. When we are in Christ, we are gifted the full presence of the Holy Spirit, no matter who we are or what calling we may have. **So the question isn't how to receive more of God's presence or how much of the Spirit we have. The question is how attuned we are to the fullness of God's Spirit—Who is already present in our lives.**

The amazing idea that seems to have come from nowhere? Maybe it's from the Spirit.

The mistake that somehow worked out better than the actual plan? Maybe it was a redemptive work by the Spirit.

The subtle prompt that changed the entire course of a conversation? Maybe it was a cue from the Spirit.

God's Spirit can show up in the most unlikely places at the most unlikely times. Will we be receptive to what the Spirit wants to do?

Respond: Create something today. It doesn't matter if it's any "good." Doodle on a scrap sheet of paper. Pick at your guitar. Rearrange your back patio. Draft a letter. Prepare a simple meal. Fix a chair leg. Whatever you do, invite God's Spirit to be a part of it and view the activity as an act of worship.

For families: Car Conversations - choose a time when the family is in the car together to discuss the questions on the back of your Bezalel character card.

DAY THREE

Read: Psalm 139

Respond: Take at least 10 minutes to sit quietly in God's presence today. If it helps, listen to your breathing to help center yourself in the current moment. Anytime you get distracted (which you probably will—and that's ok!), use the words from the psalm, "Search me, O God," to draw you back into the awareness of God's presence. Ask the Spirit to make you more attuned to His work in your life.

For families: Action Item - create something together. Draw with chalk on your driveway, put together a simple snack, make up a silly song... As you create, reflect on how your activity can be a way to worship God—and then thank God for the gifts He has given you.

WEEK THREE



MORDECAI
& ESTHER

DAY ONE

Read: Esther 4

Reflect: Very few of us who grew up in the church probably remember this part of Esther's story from our childhood. Mordecai, one of the great heroes of the story, has been reduced to a shameless cry-fest in the courtyard. And we're not talking about the soft, gentle crying where you're still photogenic after you've dried your tears; we're talking about the full-on, snotty sobbing—complete with loud wailing that draws everyone's attention.

It's easy for us to skip right over this part so that we can jump right back into the story's action, but don't miss the significant thing happening right here. You see, Mordecai's act of crying is actually an act of heroism.

That's right—Mordecai's crying = heroic.

Mordecai's mourning was a signal that not all was right in the world. Mordecai recognized the great injustice that had been dealt against his people, and he was unwilling to stop lamenting over this wrongdoing—not even when Esther begged him to cease. You see, lament is the first step in bringing change. **Lament is a signal that it doesn't have to be this way.** Pausing to mourn proposes the possibility of an alternative reality whereby God's justice and mercy are realized.

Mordecai is an unlikely hero because he mourned over the wrongness in the world. And because of his mourning, he garners the attention of a person in a powerful position. Mordecai's crying becomes the catalyst for change.

Respond: What is something that is unjust in the world right now? Ask God to awaken a sense of grief in you to this injustice. Resist the urge to alleviate the discomfort of pain. Instead, welcome the pain as an opportunity for change. Open yourself to the ways God can turn your grief into change, whether that change be in you or in the world around you.

For families: : FaX - listen to the Family Audio Experience of the lesson together. Identify who the “unlikely hero” is in the Bible story. (Mordecai) How was he related to Esther? (He was her uncle)

DAY TWO

Read: Esther 5

Reflect: Esther could have easily forgotten about her exchange with Mordecai. After all, the king had no idea she was Jewish (Esther 2:10). If she kept quiet, she could maintain her position and carry on as though nothing happened. Instead, Esther does the unlikely. She uses her power to approach the king on penalty of death and persuades him to spare her people.

We may easily become callous to the suffering of those around us. If it doesn't involve us or interfere with our standard of living, it's easy to remain on the sidelines.

But justice is not a spectator sport. Justice requires courageous engagement—regardless of whether it directly impacts us personally. Our God is a God who takes pain and suffering seriously, and as God's subjects, we have a radical call to love and advocate for the “other.”

Respond: The first step in advocating for the “other” is to practice deep listening to those most affected by injustice. When we listen, we gain clarity and wisdom on how best to fight. When we refuse to listen, we run the risk of causing harm to the very people we vowed to support. How can you practice deep listening? Instead of being a voice for the voiceless, how can you pass the microphone?

For families: Meal Time Moment - take some time together at a meal to discuss the questions on the back of your Mordecai character card.

DAY THREE

Read: Amos 5:21-24

Respond: The prophet reminds us that worship and justice are not mutually exclusive. We cannot come to church, sing songs, and tithe only to leave apathetic to the needs in the world around us. Spend some time in prayer today, asking God to convict you of any patterns of worship that have become routine and devoid of real meaning.

For families: Action Item - teach your child something new this week. It can be something big (like how to ride a bike) or something small (like how to cut their own food at dinner) or an important life lesson (like it's never okay to hurt another person on purpose). Reflect on the influence that YOU have in your child's life every day, and thank God for the opportunity to show Him to your family.

WEEK FOUR



ENOCH

DAY ONE

Read: Genesis 5:1-24

Reflect: Ah, yes...the dreaded genealogy. Unless we are especially inclined to family history or have an account at Ancestry.com, most of us probably skip over these segments in Scripture. This genealogy, however, is not separate from the narrative occurring in Genesis. In fact, this genealogy is not only a significant part of the larger story, it's in some ways a story unto itself.

This genealogy reminds us of the identity all of humankind possesses: we are all made in God's likeness (Genesis 5:1-2; cf. Genesis 1:27). It is our responsibility to represent God in this world—to be instruments of God's love and justice. The authors of Genesis, however, note something significant about Adam's son, Seth: he bears his father's likeness. While Seth was made in the image of God, he also inherited the sinful nature of Adam.

A cycle ensues after Seth: people are born, live, bear children, live some more, and then die. Over and over again. That is, until we arrive at this man named Enoch.

Unlike those before him, Enoch did not just live and die. He also "walked with God" (v. 24).

In a world prone to evil, Enoch did the unlikely: he cultivated a committed, intimate relationship with God. **Enoch shows us there is more to life than merely living for a while and then dying; life is meant to be lived in relationship with our Creator.**

Respond: Write a short autobiography in the pattern of these genealogies in Genesis 5. When did you first begin a steady relationship with God? Has that relationship been an essential part of your story so far—or is it yet to begin? What are some ways you've broken your family's cycle? If future generations were to tell your life's story, what would you like them to know about you?

For families: : FaX - listen to the Family Audio Experience of the lesson together. Identify who the “unlikely hero” is in the Bible story. (Enoch) What was special about him? (He walked faithfully with God)

DAY TWO

Read: Hebrews 11:5-6

Reflect: The author of the book of Hebrews notes that Enoch had to exercise faith in order to walk with God the way he did. Enoch may have lived only a few generations after Adam, but unlike Adam, Enoch did not have the privilege of physically meeting with God. The second creation account tells us God often walked with humankind in the garden, but this is the first instance we read in the Bible of someone choosing to walk with God (see Genesis 3:8). Because God could no longer dwell with humanity because of their sin, Enoch’s walk with God was different. Since Enoch did not have the physical cues indicating God was present, his walk required a larger dose of faith. Yet, Enoch persisted in his pursuit of God and pleased God with his efforts (Hebrews 11:5).

Respond: How are the rhythms of your life pleasing God? How are your daily habits drawing you into the presence of God? One of the disciplines in the Christian tradition is called the “rule of life.” This practice guides us and trains us in our walk with God. Unlike the goals we often set for ourselves, the “rule of life” helps us not to do—but to become.

Spend some time today examining your current habits—both on a daily and weekly basis. How are you currently making space to connect with God? What are some habits (good or bad) you need to let go of in order to make room for God’s presence? This may include avoiding certain activities, such as hurrying, stretching yourself beyond your limits, overeating, or watching violent shows.

For families: Car Conversations - choose a time when the family is in the car together to discuss the questions on the back of your Enoch character card.

DAY THREE

Read: Psalm 19

Respond: Look back at the “rule of life” you created on Day 2. Now that you have let go of some habits, what are some rhythms you can put in your life to help you connect with God more fully and more regularly? Don’t limit yourself to simply reading the Bible or praying, although these practices are a great starting point. Your rule of life can also include such things as: spending time in nature, exercising, silence and reflection, Sabbath, days alone with God, time with life-giving people, creating, etc.

In the space below, reflect on some ways you can develop a rhythm of “walking with God”:

On a daily basis, I will...

On a weekly basis, I will...

For families: Action Item - do a “trust fall” with your child (make sure that an adult or responsible older sibling is the one catching a child when he/she falls back). Reflect on what trust has to do with things we can’t see. How important is trust in our relationship with God?

WEEK FIVE



PARALYTIC MAN'S FRIENDS

DAY ONE

Read: Luke 5:17-19

Reflect: There's nothing "likely" about this story. The very fact that a man who was paralyzed could have friends was extremely unlikely in this first-century context. Unfortunately, the common assumption was those who were born with physical disadvantages were cursed by God. As such, people like this paralytic man were largely ostracized, isolated, and alone.

These people in the paralytic man's life, however, are far from the norm. They clearly love this man so much that they stop at nothing to get this person to Jesus. You see, the friends believe Jesus is for everyone. Jesus isn't just for those in the "in crowd"—Jesus is for the outcast, the unloved, the unwanted.

Their resolute belief that Jesus is for everyone fills them with a sense of urgency. There are no excuses, no compromises. The crowd doesn't discourage them—they will not wait and come back later when Jesus is less busy. They tackle unlikely feats and obstacles—such as carrying a paralyzed man up to a rooftop, digging through the ceiling tile, and rigging some sort of pulley system to lower him safely. There doesn't appear to be anything they won't do.

What would it look like if we really believed Jesus is for everyone? If we really believed Jesus is for everyone, we would know that nothing can stand against us (Romans 8:31). What would it look like if we had an urgency to connect our friends, our neighbors, and our community to Jesus?

Respond: As you go about your day today, ask God to help you see your interactions as opportunities to connect others to Jesus. Get to know the coffee barista you see every morning. Pray with your work colleague who's having a difficult week. Invite your neighbors over in the evening for ice cream. As you form these relationships, ask God for discernment as to when and how to share your faith.

For families: FaX - listen to the Family Audio Experience of the lesson together. Identify who the “unlikely hero” is in the Bible story. (The paralyzed man’s friends) How did the paralytic’s friends help him meet Jesus? (They lowered him through the roof to Jesus)

DAY TWO

Read: Luke 5:20

Reflect: Notice the plural pronoun in this verse: Jesus saw “their faith.” Not “his faith.” Not the paralytic man’s faith. Their faith. This act of faith was a joint effort. The paralytic man couldn’t get to Jesus by himself (literally!). It was the faith of his friends that drew him to faith in Jesus.

None of us is meant to do faith alone. We need a community to come alongside us and strengthen us.

Respond: Name the people who either brought you to faith or have been instrumental in shaping your faith. Thank God for their friendship and the ways they allowed God to use them. Then, tell these people for whom you are grateful via phone call, text message, snail mail, or email.

For families: Meal Time Moment - take some time together at a meal to discuss the questions on the back of your “Friends” character card.

DAY THREE

Read: Luke 5:21-26

Respond: The paralytic man received a two-for-one special: not only was he forgiven of his sins, but he was healed of his paralysis. As if to demonstrate the magnitude of Jesus' miracle, the man carried his own mat on the way out. That mat—the very thing that had once held him in bondage—was now his symbol of triumph. As believers, we believe the Jesus who healed this man is the same **Jesus who is alive and active in this world. Jesus can give triumph to the poor, the prisoner, and the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19), so what's preventing us from doing whatever it takes to get those we love to Jesus?**

Take a moment today to name something that typically prevents you from sharing Jesus' good news—whether it be embarrassment, awkwardness, fear, or a sense of being unqualified. Sharing what Jesus has done in your life and inviting others to live life with God takes some vulnerability—especially since we can't control the outcome. Lay your concerns before God today, asking Him for courage to take the risk often associated with sharing your faith. Relinquish your control to God's hands, trusting that He is already at work in people's lives before you say or do anything.

For families: Action Item - ask each family member to commit to inviting a person—or maybe even a whole family—to church in the next week. The invitation can be for Sunday morning or an upcoming event—such as Family Paint Night on July 12. Reflect on how important it is for us to help others know Jesus.

WEEK SIX



GIDEON

DAY ONE

Read: Judges 6:1-18

Reflect: Gideon is unlikely in that he does all the hero things completely wrong.

Gideon doesn't just doubt God—Gideon is reluctant to even follow God. It's like he's looking for any excuse not to do God's will.

In other words, Gideon is the hero for the rest of us.

Instead of moving on from Gideon to choose another hero, the author of Judges tells us "the Lord turned to him" (v. 14). And when Gideon still persisted in doubt, God promised to wait for Gideon, to stay with Gideon and earn his trust (v. 18). When Gideon expressed his doubt and reluctance, God didn't draw back from Gideon. If anything, God leaned even more into Gideon!

God doesn't abandon us when we allow fear and reluctance to replace belief and trust. **God stays with us through our struggles, even when the very person with whom we're struggling is God Himself.**

Respond: God is pursuing you right now. It doesn't matter if you are reluctant or conflicted; God will lean even more into that tension and find you there. You might not feel ready for God to confront your fears. Does that make you want to withdraw, anxious about what God will find in your heart? Let God find it—He can handle it. Stay with God in the awkwardness. Give as much of yourself as you can over to as much of God as you understand. God will meet you there.

For families: FaX - listen to the Family Audio Experience of the lesson together. Identify who the "unlikely hero" is in the Bible story. (Gideon) What was Gideon's job? (He was a farmer) Who told Gideon that God wants him to lead an army? (An angel)

DAY TWO

Read: Judges 6:19-24

Reflect: Despite the fact an angel has approached Gideon and he has heard God's voice, Gideon nevertheless insists on a sign. The amazing thing is God decided to work within Gideon's methods. God could have reprimanded or berated Gideon for his distrust. Instead, God rushes to comfort Gideon when he is afraid by pronouncing peace over him.

This story isn't so much about Gideon as it is about God and His mercy. Many times, we are like Gideon—wary of trusting God's direction and fearful of what God expects of us. But God can take the unfaithful, the ambivalent, and the obligated and teach them how to be joyful, committed participants in God's kingdom.

Respond: God remains committed to us even when we aren't committed to God. What are some ways you have not demonstrated a committed relationship to God? Mindful of God's love and grace, allow God to examine your heart and convict you of any practices, habits, or motives that have prevented you from living according to God's best for you.

For families: Car Conversations - choose a time when the family is in the car together to discuss the questions on the back of your Gideon character card.

DAY THREE

Read: Judges 6:25-32

Respond: Gideon may have obeyed, but he did so in private. Instead of being confident in God's plan, he cowered in fear. Prior to this, God called Gideon a "mighty warrior" (v. 12). It's clear that Gideon doesn't believe he is who God says he is, because mighty warriors don't accomplish feats of strength in the secret of night. **What are some ways you have doubted you are who God says you are?** Sit today in silence, listening to what God says about you. Do you meet these words with any resistance? Why is that? Present your resistance before God and see what He has to say about it.

For families: Action Item - celebrate your child's ordinary act of courage today. Walk with him through a dark hallway to turn on the light. Help her speak to an adult she is shy around. Encourage her to ask a kid she doesn't know to play with her. You can even model bravery for your children by conquering some of your own fears! Brave parents raise brave kids, so show your children that sometimes you're uncomfortable doing brave things, too. Remind your child God has given us a spirit of courage—not of fear. And even when we don't feel brave, God can show His power through us—like He did with Gideon.

WEEK SEVEN



LYDIA

DAY ONE

Read: Acts 16:11-15

Reflect: Imagine making travel plans without solidifying where you'll be staying each night. You plot a general idea of where you'll be going, but when it comes to finding accommodations, you'll just "wing it." For us Type A personalities, this is a nightmare. But in the first-century world, travelers relied on the generosity of strangers to take care of them. Imagine all of the homes the Apostle Paul and his traveling companions inhabited. Yet, while there is little mention of where they stayed in the book of Acts, the author makes a special point to mention Lydia's hospitality not just once, but twice (Luke 16:40).

In a world where hospitality to strangers was the norm, it appears there was still something unlikely about Lydia's hospitality. Lydia does not appear to be generous just because it was expected of her. According to the book of Acts, Lydia was generous out of response to the work God had done in her life. In fact, this is the first thing she did after her baptism (v. 15). **Lydia didn't just give God her heart; she gave God her home.** Her life was no longer her own, and neither were her resources.

Respond: What has God given you, and how can you trust God to use your belongings as God sees fit? Think about the resources you have, and list ways you can give them freely to others. For example, you can invite your neighbors over for brunch, even if your house is a mess and your kids are hyperactive. God doesn't expect you to offer the "best"—just what you already have.

For families: FaX - listen to the Family Audio Experience of the lesson together. Identify who the "unlikely hero" is in the Bible story. (Lydia) What did God bless Lydia with? (Money and a house) Who did she help? (Paul and his friends)

DAY TWO

Read: Acts 4:32-37

Reflect: The early church was radically generous. When needs arose, they sold their belongings to finance those needs. They recognized their possessions weren't really their own; God had generously provided for them so that they could be generous to others.

What would it look like today if the Church had such a loose hold on her possessions? What would it look like today if we were soft-hearted to the needs around us? What would happen if we opened our tight fists and gave freely to those in need (Deut. 15:7-8)?

Respond: The early believers trusted God, not just with their soul, but also with their belongings. Oftentimes, the last thing we're willing to surrender over to God is our wallet—we'll surrender our souls before we surrender our money. **But if we can trust God with something as significant as our soul, why can't we trust God with our stuff?**

During your prayer time today, examine the posture you currently have toward your belongings. What are some things you are holding onto too tightly? What are some things, if God were to call you to give them freely to someone else, you would hold onto even more tightly? Open your palms in front of you and ask God to change your hold on your possessions. Ask God to do the unlikely in your heart by showing you ways you can give to benefit God's kingdom.

For families: Meal Time Moment - take some time together at a meal to discuss the questions on the back of your Lydia character card.

DAY THREE

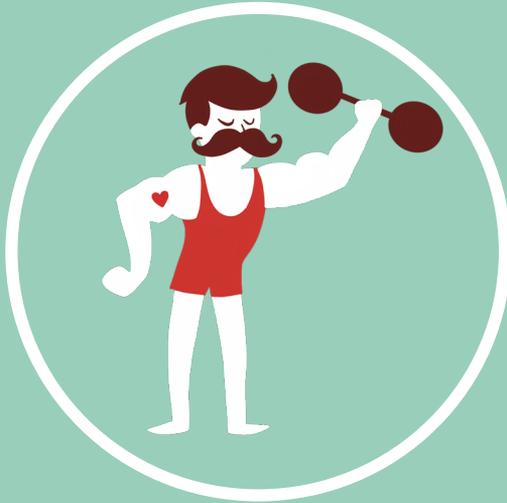
Read: Chronicles 29:10-20

Respond: David offers this beautiful prayer in response to his gift for the temple. Note the irony here: we would expect the people to praise David for his generosity, but instead David praises God for God's generosity. That's because **David recognizes that he doesn't own anything that hasn't already been given to him by God.**

Make this your prayer today: "Who am I, that I should be able to give generously? Everything comes from You, God, and I can only give You what comes from Your hand" (v. 14, modified).

For families: Action Item - ask each family member to choose something they have and can share with another family member this week. These resources could be time (doing an activity together), a belonging (such as a toy they could play with together), or a talent (something they could create and give). Be creative with the things God has given you, and make it a fun challenge!

WEEK EIGHT



JAMES

DAY ONE

Read: James 1:1-12

Reflect: James is one of the most unlikely people to affirm Jesus really is the Son of God. As the brother of Jesus, James had grown up with Jesus and had a front-row seat to Jesus' human life. He doubted his brother's claims at first, but clearly Jesus' death and resurrection changed James' mind (John 7:1-5).

James went against the grain of his background. His perseverance was extremely counter-cultural against his own Jewish upbringing, and like many Jewish Christians in the first century, his letter indicates he was persecuted as a result. Yet, James does the unlikely and persists. He urges other believers to persevere and receive the "crown of life" (v. 12).

Respond: Perseverance is one of the hallmarks of a hero. Movies glorify the unlikely hero who stuck with it despite the opposition mounted against him. We Americans love an underdog story, but the truth is, living counter-culturally isn't as glamorous as it's portrayed on the big screen.

If you profess the living Christ, you are in some ways an unlikely hero. Choosing to love our enemies and hold fast to what is true is not for the weak. **What does perseverance look like for the current season in which you find yourself?** What are some areas you need more maturity? What wisdom do you need from God to help you remain faithful to God's call in your life?

For families: FaX - listen to the Family Audio Experience of the lesson together. Identify who the "unlikely hero" is in the Bible story. (James) Who was James' brother? (Jesus) In what city did James lead a church? (Jerusalem)

DAY TWO

Read: James 1:13-18

Reflect: All heroes face temptation of some kind—whether narcissism, selfishness, greed, or a certain vice. James reminds us God has given us every perfect gift we need to overcome temptation. This even extends to the ultimate gift of God Himself, who does not change and is not susceptible to our sinful desires. **If this is the kind of God who is on our side, who’s to say we can’t do the unlikely feat of overcoming sin in our lives?**

Respond: What are some temptations that have crept into your life recently? Are they ones you have wrestled with for a while now? Are they new? Do they surprise you? What tools or relationships has God given you that can help prevent you from being “dragged away” (v. 14)?

For families: Car Conversations - choose a time when the family is in the car together to discuss the questions on the back of your James character card.

DAY THREE

Read: James 1:19-27

Respond: In our current culture, it's unlikely to find people who are quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Moreover, **it's easy for us to pinpoint other people who fail to live up to these ideals rather than to be honest with both God and ourselves about the sin present in our own lives.** But James reminds us to use God's Word to examine our lives and correct our mistakes. If we read Scripture but then fail to live it out, we're like a person who looks in a mirror but then fails to wipe the smudge off our face or fix the cowlick in our hair.

Go before God today and ask Him to examine your heart for anything that is not of Him. Be mindful of the things that anger you, and ask God to show you how to try to understand others when these angers are triggered.

For families: Action Item - circle up in your family for prayer. Invite each person to thank God for His blessings, then ask God for His help with a struggle. Pray for each other and ask God to help you all know God more.

EPILOGUE

Did you notice a common theme in these unlikely heroes?

There was nothing special about any of them. All they really had to do was show up.

God used who they were, what they had, where they already were.

The real hero is God—who does the unlikely in the most unlikely of people.

So keep showing up.

Give what you have.

Make yourself available.

Let God be the Hero.



REYNOLDSBURG
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH