

# FEARLESS CONVERSATION™

IS GOD IN  
CONTROL OF  
MY LIFE?

DISCUSSIONS FROM JOSHUA,  
RUTH, AND ESTHER

LEADER GUIDE

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Loveland, CO

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**Learner-based**—Learners understand and retain more when the learning process takes into consideration how they learn best.

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## Fearless Conversation: Is God in Control of My Life?

Discussions from Joshua, Ruth, and Esther

### Leader Guide

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Fearless Conversation adult Sunday school curriculum is created by the amazing adult ministry team at Group. Contributing writers for this quarter are:

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15

# CONTENTS

<b>Lesson 1:</b> Does God expect <i>me</i> to be strong and courageous? (Joshua 1:1-9)	9
<b>Lesson 2:</b> Why are imperfect people part of God's plan? (Joshua 2:1-21)	17
<b>Lesson 3:</b> Why does God's plan seem so complicated? (Joshua 6:1-21)	25
<b>Lesson 4:</b> How does my sin impact others? (Joshua 7:1, 19-26)	35
<b>Lesson 5:</b> How can we live with integrity in a world that doesn't? (Joshua 9:3-21)	43
<b>Lesson 6:</b> Why would God protect lawbreakers? (Joshua 20:1-9)	51
<b>Lesson 7:</b> How do my relationships affect my walk with God? (Joshua 23:6-16)	59
<b>Lesson 8:</b> Why does God use tragedy as part of his plan? (Ruth 1:6-18)	67
<b>Lesson 9:</b> Are my actions alone enough to let others know I'm a Christian? (Ruth 2:1-13)	77
<b>Lesson 10:</b> What is a redeemer, and what does this have to do with me today? (Ruth 4:1-12)	85
<b>Lesson 11:</b> When is it okay to hide my faith? (Esther 2:8-20)	93
<b>Lesson 12:</b> How far should I go to right a wrong? (Esther 4:8-17)	101
<b>Lesson 13:</b> How do I know God is in control? (Esther 7)	109

# ARE YOU READY FOR **FEARLESS CONVERSATION?**

Jesus loved getting people to think. He asked provocative questions, such as “What do you want?” “Where is your faith?” and “Who do you say that I am?” And he often asked just one simple question: “What do you think?”

On the flip side of this, Jesus never quizzed his followers on facts such as “Where was I born?” or “How many commandments are there?” He didn’t pass out fill-in-the-blank worksheets. And he didn’t offer simple, pat answers. Instead, he helped people wonder, grapple, and wrestle with the hard questions of life and faith. That’s what Fearless Conversation is all about.

Through this Sunday school curriculum, you’ll lead adults on a 13-week journey of respectful and faith-filled conversation. This involves:

- seeking to understand others and their perspectives
- listening before you speak
- asking questions that likely don’t have an easy answer
- inviting others to talk instead of listen to you lecture
- having people form small groups, even if it means moving a few chairs
- avoiding judgment if someone expresses a different opinion
- trusting that God can guide the conversation—because he can!

## HERE'S WHAT A LESSON LOOKS LIKE

Each week you'll guide participants through four sections of the lesson. You'll need this book, and each person will need his or her own copy of the participant guide. These guides are not photocopiable, so be sure everyone has their own book.

### GREETING

You'll welcome everyone warmly and introduce the topic of conversation for the day. Participants will get into smaller groups during this time, which will help them share more openly and also allow time for everyone to participate in the conversation. If you try to keep everyone in one large group, it will be difficult for people to truly engage, so be sure you guide people in keeping the groups to no more than four people per group.

### GROUNDING

This is where you read the Scripture for the week. You'll find the Bible content for every lesson in this leader guide, and it is also always provided in the participant guide. Feel free to read the Scripture passages from the guide or from your own Bible. After hearing God's Word read aloud, each person will have the opportunity to follow the inductive method of writing down first responses, questions, thoughts, or ideas that are sparked by the reading.

### GRAPPLING

Here's where the conversation deepens. You'll ask everyone a few questions that are intentionally challenging to answer. These won't have easy answers, and you won't have a fill-in-the-blank option. Everyone will wrestle with the questions that the lesson provides, as well as their own questions that they're wondering about. You'll be guided to pray before each "Grappling" section, asking God to guide the conversation. And you'll also remind everyone to treat each other with respect.



# GROWING

Here's where the personal application comes in. Participants will have the chance to reflect on what God's Word, as shared in this lesson, means to their own lives and determine what their personal response is.

**Throughout each lesson you'll also find two other helps:**

## BEHIND THE SCENES

These sections of commentary are provided for you and they are also in the participant guide so everyone can have access to these readings. You can read them ahead of time, and encourage those in your class to read them either ahead of time or during the lesson. These notes from Bible scholars will help everyone have additional context into history, language, culture, and other relevant information.



## LEADER LEARNINGS

These notes to you will help you improve your leadership skills. You'll find tips on group dynamics and on being a stellar leader of fearless conversations.

## GUIDELINES FOR A SUCCESSFUL CLASS

**Be a facilitator, not a lecturer.** You're here to direct the conversation, help others get involved, and keep the discussion moving along. This curriculum is about everyone being a part of the conversation, which means it's more about the participants than it is about you.

**Direct adults into small groups.** When people are in groups of about four, they will open up more easily and share more openly. Asking a question in front of 30 people is intimidating, and no one wants to look like a fool! Smaller groups also allow everyone the opportunity to talk and express their thoughts. If the groups are too large, there simply won't be enough time for each person to contribute. There are sections of each lesson that involve the entire group, but when the lesson calls for small group discussion, be sure you help adults get into those groups.

**Encourage relationships.** People are more likely to keep coming back once they've made a few friends. Always share your name, and invite others to do so, as well. If topics of conversation during the lesson are especially compelling for your group, see if a few people want to keep talking about it over coffee later in the week. Plus, friends are more likely to pray for each other, support each other, and encourage each other.

**Expect the unexpected.** The conversations that will begin in your class could very easily get off track. That's okay! God is involved in this conversation too, and he might have a different plan. Be open to the different directions the Holy Spirit may lead. Take advantage of teachable moments. Don't panic! Instead, relax and trust God to be the guide.

**Have a sense of divine anticipation.** Approach each class with a heart full of anticipation over what God might do that day. God is alive and present with you and your class. Always prepare by praying, asking God to help you see his hand at work in the conversation. And if you start to have a moment of stress as the lesson takes a turn you didn't anticipate, it's okay to just stop everyone and say, "Let's refocus by taking a moment to ask God to guide us," and then pray for just that.



# LESSON 2: WHY ARE IMPERFECT PEOPLE PART OF GOD'S PLAN?

## LEADER PREP

- Read the entire lesson ahead of time. Also read the corresponding pages in the participant guide, as there may be additional information there that will be helpful to you.
- You'll find "Behind the Scenes" boxes with Bible commentary throughout this lesson. They're there to help you gain a better understanding of the Bible. The people in your class will have these, too.
- Take some time to pray that God will help you lead fearless conversations in a way that would be pleasing to him.
- Read the Bible passage ahead of time so you'll know what parts you will read and when to prompt your two readers.

## GREETING

- Welcome everyone, and introduce yourself if there are new people.
- Be sure everyone has a copy of the participant guide.
- Let everyone know what page they should turn to in the participant guide so they can follow along.
- Explain there are "Behind the Scenes" commentary notes

throughout the lesson. These can be read as participants come to that section of the lesson, or people can plan ahead and read them during the week to be ready for the next lesson.

Then say to the whole group:

**Imagine this scenario: You leave work late on a Friday night to join a church retreat out in the country. You make a wrong turn, get lost, and run out of gas on a deserted road. There is no cellphone service in that area. Soon a car pulls up behind you, and the driver gets out and comes to your car door. When you crack the window, the stranger offers to drive to a gas station 10 minutes away and bring back some gas for your car. Will you accept the stranger's offer of help?**

Ask for a couple of responses from the group, without providing any more information or further elaboration of the scenario. After a few responses, ask everyone to turn to the "Greeting" section of their participant guide and jot down their answer to the first question there.

**•You have run out of gas on a deserted road. A stranger has offered to drive to a gas station**

**10 minutes away and bring back some gas for your car. If you had no other choice, which of the following persons would you most likely agree to let them help you?**

- A. A greasy-haired, bling-wearing used-car salesman**
- B. A meth-addled woman of uncertain age**
- C. A pot-bellied, cigar-smoking U.S. Congressman**
- D. A profanity-spewing goth girl covered with tattoos and piercings**
- E. A bearded, swarthy man speaking with a heavy foreign accent**

After a few minutes, when it appears everyone has written their response to the five different scenarios, ask them to share their response with three other people (groups of four total) and briefly explain the reasoning behind their choice.

After 4 or 5 minutes, get the attention of all the small groups and say:

**Thanks for sharing with your groups. Would a few people be willing to share with everyone some highlights of your small-group conversation?**



## LEADER LEARNING

Some people can be reluctant to share their own answers, but asking them to share what others in their group had to say is a great way to get people talking.

After a few spokespersons have shared their groups' discussions, say:

**Let's move away from this hypothetical scenario and talk about our real life experiences. Who would be willing to share with our group about a time when you received help from someone you would not have expected (or wanted)?**

Take about 5 minutes for people to share their stories; then introduce the Scripture for this lesson.

**Today we are going to be talking about how imperfect people are a really important part of God's plan. Throughout the Bible, God used people who might get some funny looks if they walked into our church today. Rahab was one of those people.**

## GROUNDING

**Before we read today's passage, let's ask God to be with us and guide our discussion.**

Lead your group in prayer for your discussion time together.

**Now let's get grounded in God's Word. Today's Bible passage is Joshua 2:1-21. If you remember, last week we read how God commanded Joshua and the Israelites to be strong and courageous as they took possession of the Promised Land and he promised to be with them the whole way. Now Joshua is directing the first step into conquering that land.**

**We're going to need two readers today. One person will read what Rahab says, and the other person will read what the spies say. I'll read the other parts of the passage.**

Find volunteers to read what the spies say and what Rahab says. Make sure you've read through the passage before your meeting so you know which parts you will be reading and can prompt the readers for Rahab and the spies. Encourage people to follow along in their Bibles or in their participant guide.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

Jericho was a city-state in Canaan with its own king. The city covered an area of about 8 or 9 acres. Based on evidence found, some archaeologists believe the city had double walls about 15 feet apart protecting the city.

## God's Word: Joshua 2:1-21

<sup>1</sup> Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.

<sup>2</sup> The king of Jericho was told, "Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." <sup>3</sup> So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land."

<sup>4</sup> But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from." <sup>5</sup> At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them." <sup>6</sup> (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.)

<sup>7</sup> So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

<sup>8</sup> Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof <sup>9</sup> and said to them, "I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. <sup>10</sup> We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. <sup>11</sup> When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

<sup>12</sup> "Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign <sup>13</sup> that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death."

<sup>14</sup> "Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land!" ►

15 So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. 16 She said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way."

17 Now the men had said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us 18 unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. 19 If any of them go outside your house into the street, their blood will be on their own heads; we will not be responsible. As for those who are in the house with you, their blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on them. 20 But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear."

21 "Agreed," she replied. "Let it be as you say."

So she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

**Let's take a few minutes to reflect on what we just read.**

**• What questions do you have? What caught your attention?**

**Write down those initial thoughts and questions in your participant guide in the space provided in the "Grounding" section.**

Give people 1 to 2 minutes to write down their thoughts (individually, not in their discussion groups). When it looks like people are finished, continue.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

The Hebrew word in the book of Joshua used to describe Rahab could mean "innkeeper." But in the New Testament, the writers of James 2:25 and Hebrews 11:31 use the Greek word that explicitly means "prostitute."

Rahab could have been a common prostitute or a prostitute in the fertility cult, which was an important aspect of Canaanite religion. Whatever the precise nature of her occupation, two strange men could enter her household without looking as conspicuous as they would at other households.

# GRAPPLING

## LEADER LEARNING

During this lesson be especially sensitive to the different backgrounds of the people in your group. Some may have had a perfectly respectable and conventional life, whereas others might have more of a wild background. Make sure this lesson is edifying for both!

**We will come back to your questions and thoughts a little later. Right now, there are some other questions we'll address. As we head into our discussion time, let's remember we want this to be a safe and comfortable place for people to share. We each have different backgrounds, and we can learn from one another. Now let's discuss a few questions together. You'll find them in the "Grappling" section of your participant guide. Let's talk together about the first three questions.**

- **The Israelite spies received help from a surprising source. What do you think is most scandalous about Rahab? Her gender? (Female in a male-centric culture.) Her occupation? (Prostitute.) Her ethnic identity? (Canaanite.) Her society's religious practices?**

**(Worship of the pagan god Baal.) Others?**

- **Rahab is praised in Hebrews 11 for her great faith. What did Rahab say in Joshua 2 to make the spies trust her and justify her place in the Hebrews' list of heroes of the faith?**
- **Rahab is praised in James 2 for her acts of faith. What did Rahab do in Joshua 2 to make the spies trust her and justify James' mention of her?**

Take about 5 minutes to discuss these three questions, allowing just a few responses to each. When time is up, direct people to gather back into their small discussion groups.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

Hebrews 11 is known as the Faith Hall of Fame, listing people throughout the Bible who have shown great faith in God. Rahab is one of those listed—one of only two women! (The other is Sarah, the wife of Abraham, who is the father of the Israelite people.)

In James 2:25, Rahab is mentioned as an example of someone whose faith is proven by her deeds. The other person in this chapter praised for great faith is Abraham. James says that both were considered righteous because of their faith that led to deeds.

**Let's get back together in our small groups and consider the last two questions in the "Grappling" section of your participant guide. You'll have about 10 minutes.**

- **Why do you think Rahab helped the Israelites? What clues in the passage tell you this?**
- **What does Joshua 2 say to you about how God works through people to accomplish his purposes in the world?**

Allow 10 minutes for people to discuss these questions with their small group. Give a 1-minute warning so they can wind down this discussion in time. Next, direct them to share their own personal observations and questions from earlier in the lesson.

**Now is a good time to share with one another what you wrote down earlier regarding your personal observations and questions. You'll have about 10 minutes to share and discuss each others' insights.**

Give people time to discuss in their groups, and then ask if anyone would share a summary of their group's discussion or questions that were raised. If time allows, invite anyone from the larger group

to respond to one of the insights or questions.

**Thanks for sharing your conversations with all of us. Let's look now at some ways we might dive into this Bible story in more specific ways.**

## BEHIND THE SCENES

In Matthew 1:5 we read something pretty amazing. In the list of Jesus' genealogy, Rahab is listed as an ancestor of Jesus! Rahab is the grandmother of Boaz—the great and honorable man we read of in the book of Ruth who was the great-grandfather of King David! Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, came from the lineage of David.

## G R O W I N G

**In your discussion groups, answer this question and jot down your group's responses in the "Growing" section of your participant guide:**

- **Who are our "Rahabs" today? Who are people—Christian or not—through whom God is working?**

When it appears the groups have finished answering this question, guide them into the next activity, which is to be done individually rather than in groups.

**What do you think God might be whispering into your ear, based on the passage we read today? Take a few minutes to reflect and journal your responses to today's passage. Let's be silent for a minute or two. You can pray silently that God would help you learn from this passage. Then write down your responses to the last questions in the "Growing" section of your participant guide.**

- **Put yourself in Rahab's place and in the Israelite spies' place. What does Joshua 2 say to you about your role in God's mission?**
  - **As Rahab, what does this story tell you about God's willingness to accept and use anyone, regardless of background, who wants to serve God?**
  - **As the Israelite spies, what have you learned about recognizing God's grace at work in the world through people you don't expect—and accepting them?**

Give people 1 to 2 minutes to process what they think God is saying to them. Close by thanking God for speaking to your group through his Word, and ask God to

use it to draw them closer to him in the coming week.