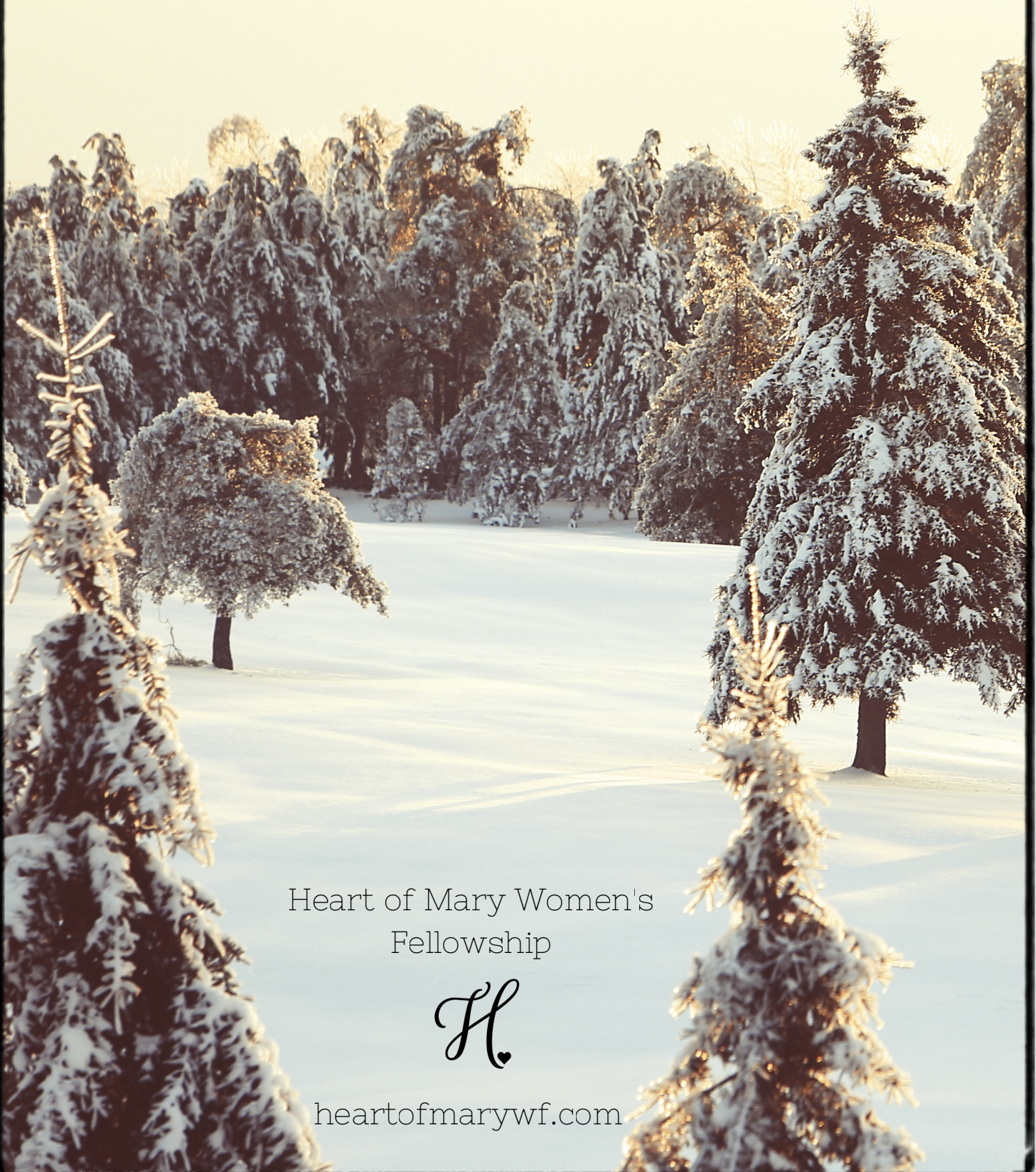


The Jesse Tree

A day by day journey through Advent



Heart of Mary Women's
Fellowship



heartofmarywf.com

About this Study

We hope that you'll dive in, grow in the Lord, and share with others what beauty God reveals to you through it. If you are doing this study independently, know that we at HOM are here for you & that you also have a LARGE community of women through our website and social media that are participating too! You are truly never alone!

If you are completing this study in a group setting - we are excited that you have found a local community to grow with, on top of our online sisterhood. Please use this study journal for your reference, resource, and more during your meetings and the personal time leading up to it.

Looking for a group? Please visit www.heartofmarywf.com/groups to find a meet up near you.

Are you already in one but not listed on our website? Looking to start one? Please contact us for more information about our "HOM Ambassador" program. We have team members available specifically to help you grow a local group and lead other women through community, prayer, and devotion. Their support is available at all times. We also want to help you grow! We will advertise your group on our website & social media! And we have free resources for you as well. Please email us at heartofmarywf@aol.com

Note: All written content has been reviewed by a Catholic spiritual director to cross check that all statements align with the teachings and tenants of the Roman Catholic Church.

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[Genesis 27:8-30 Genesis 28:10-19](#)

Do you ever feel like you're not good enough, or that you have to pretend to be someone you're not in order to get ahead or feel holy? I'm sure most of us can raise our hands at one moment in our life or another. If so, then the story of Jacob is for you.

Jacob and his twin brother, Esau, are the only children of Isaac, whose father was Abraham. Abraham held the promise of God that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. It wasn't until his grandson, Jacob, that this prophecy started to come to life. Just as God changed Abraham's name, Jacob eventually is given the name Israel, and his sons formed the 12 tribes of Israel.

But we haven't gotten to that part of the story yet.

During their birth, Esau was born before Jacob, which was a big deal. In ancient Israel, the firstborn son was given the father's blessing and everything was eventually handed down to him, including authority, priesthood/kingship, and material goods. Although Esau and Jacob were twins, Esau was born first and therefore possessed the birthright. However, at

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their birth Jacob held on to the heel of Esau and it was prophesied that the older would serve the younger (Gn 25:23).

Fast forward to when they are adults, and Isaac is old and blind. Jacob convinces Esau to sell him his material birthright over a meal (hungry men can do desperate things). However, in order to receive the blessing as well, he disguises himself as Esau by putting fur on his arm (Esau was quite hairy) and going to his father, who gives him the blessing before his death. He then flees for his life from Esau, back to the land of his mother's family.

On his way in the wilderness, he stops to sleep. He cozies up with a rock as a pillow (because who wouldn't?) and has a dream that night of a stairway to heaven, with the angels ascending and descending (Gen 28:12). God gives Jacob a prophecy that one day He will give this land to Jacob's descendants, whom will spread out over the entire earth (Gen 28:13-15). Interestingly, this is near the site where God also appeared to Abraham and gave him the prophecy of his descendants. It is also near the future temple in Jerusalem, and can be seen as a foreshadowing of the location where heaven and earth, through the 12 tribes of Israel, will eventually meet in worship.

When God tells Jacob it's time to return home, after living with his kinsman for years and marrying two of his daughters, he earnestly prays to God. While he left his homeland in deceit, he seeks to return in honesty. On the night before he and his family are to cross over into Esau's land, Jacob has another encounter with God, this time as a strange man with whom he wrestles with all night (Gen 32:25-31). At daybreak, the man tells Jacob that his new name is Israel (meaning "one who wrestles with God"). Jacob pleads for a blessing, and this time receives it the honest way. He returns home and embraces Esau in forgiveness, and continues to grow his family of 12 sons.

So how does this story apply to our lives as women of God, as daughters of Christ?

We are the spiritual family of Israel, who descend from Jesus. We are the 12 tribes, more numerous than the stars. His birth as the firstborn son was in place for all of us as God's children, for through Him we receive the ultimate birthright. Much like Jacob, we don't deserve it, but it is freely given to us over a meal. Jesus descends the stairway of heaven so that we may ascend with Him.



[Genesis 37:23-28, 45:3-15](#)

The story of Joseph is a familiar one to me, as a cradle Catholic. It's a long narrative about a beloved son with jealous brothers. Then Joseph goes through a cycle of rising up to power, losing it, and then regaining that power again. In spite of being sold into slavery and being put in prison, Joseph remained faithful to God and eventually became the Egyptian equivalent of a prime minister.

You think that the story would end there, but of course, there's one loose end to tie up. Joseph's brothers find their way to Egypt during the famine in the hopes of getting food for their families. Joseph puts his brothers to the test to see if they are sorry for selling him into slavery. It seems a bit callous and vengeful at first, but the brothers' sorrow over their actions is clear. Vengeance turns into forgiveness, and eventually Jacob's family is reunited again.

There's a video from Father Mike Schmitz of Ascension Presents that asks "*Why does God let bad things happen?*" In this video, he explains that God has a perfect, divine will and a permissive will. For whatever reason that we don't know yet, God allows us to have the



[Exodus 2: 1-10](#)

When I reflect upon this story, I often think of the cute, animated movies that I've seen regarding Moses. He's chubby, smiling, and wrapped up in a sparkling, white blanket. He floats peacefully down the river until a beautiful woman picks him up and calls him her own. What a beautiful picture, right?

What we don't see, is his mother crying out in anguish for her newborn son. Can you imagine giving birth, rocking that baby, soothing his cries only to give him away 3 months later? He was probably wrapped in rags, and placed in a basket. I'm sure the baby cried out for his mother as she placed him in the basket. The pain and fear she must have felt as she placed her baby in the water must have been excruciating.

She obviously had enough faith in God to entrust her child to him, but, as we all know, fear is difficult to drive out. Sometimes, just as Moses' mother did, we need to recognize our fear and our faith at the same time. These two emotions can co-exist if we keep in mind that our faith must always be greater.

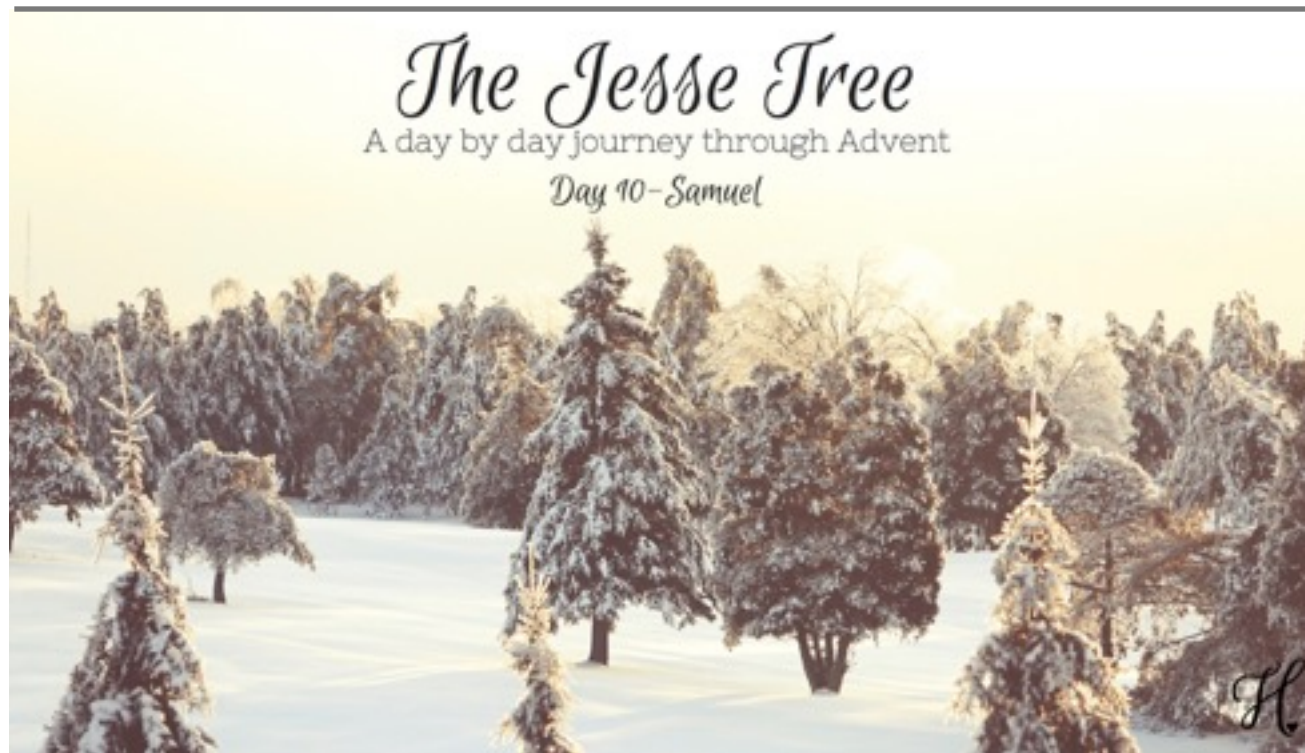
Because Moses' mother was able to see her child every day, we may think to ourselves, *"well, it worked out for her in the end."* Yes, this is true, but, she had a front row seat to him becoming someone else's boy. We've all experienced the pain of seeing someone have something (or someone) that we so desperately want for ourselves. This child, that she fought so hard to save, now belonged to the same family that vowed to kill every newborn son. The sacrifices that she made for her son are undeniable. What is also undeniable, though, is her sheer trust in the Lord.

I have to admit, I have been through far less than this woman, and my faith has been shaken a number of times. I have cried out in pain and anger. There have been times when I was giving God the silent treatment because I couldn't handle life at that moment. I can't help but wonder where she found the strength to continue on each day as she did. She was truly a living testament of faith for Moses and for us.

The state of the country they lived in at the time gives me anxiety. The desperation, the stress and fear, the physical pain the Hebrew's endured is palatable. They were slaves, and were treated as such. The treatment they received while living in Egypt would be enough to break one's spirit. However, the Hebrew's kept the faith and continued to work for the life they were promised by God, not the one they were currently living. Because of their faith, and the faith of Moses' mother, the Hebrew's were eventually lead out of Egypt under the guidance of Moses.

When we are at our darkest hour and we have to make challenging, sometimes unthinkable choices, our faith can wane. But, we can imitate Moses' mother, and become a living testament of faith. We can show those around us that even when life beats us down, the Love of Christ will always, always, raise us up. -Ashley

Reflect: Reflect upon a time that you had to give something up that you loved. How did you feel, who did you turn to for comfort during this difficult time? Think about his mother's love and faith. How can you incorporate elements of her love and faith into your everyday life?



In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.

[1 Samuel 3:1](#)

The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"
Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

[1 Samuel 3:10](#)

The story of Samuel has always intrigued me, even as a child in Sunday school. God rarely spoke in those days and of all the people God chose a young boy to become a prophet.

How many of you can relate to 1 Samuel 3:1 "In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions"? Sometimes I look around at our world and wonder "Where is God?" Where are all the miracles from the Old Testament? Why doesn't God appear as a pillar of fire to guide us? Why don't we hear his voice rumbling from the heavens? Why doesn't he just call me up and answer me?

The truth is that God often speaks to us through other people. God spoke to Samuel, but his message wasn't for Samuel, it was for Eli. I may not hear God's voice booming around

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me as I'm kneeling next to my bed for nighttime prayer, but I hear his wisdom in words from my husband, my mother, or a concerned friend.

Advent is a season of waiting, and boy, do I hate to wait! As soon as Thanksgiving is over I am ready to haul the Christmas tree out of storage and get the carols cranking. I've been using Christmasy scents in my wax warmer for a month already! The waiting of Advent is not all about waiting for presents and Christmas traditions, it's about waiting to hear God's voice. I know I have been waiting for answers to some prayers for a long time. Each morning I wake up and present to God my petitions and my praise, but sometimes all God needs from us is to be quiet, to wait, to listen.

The holidays are probably the most chaotic time of the year. As you busy yourself buying presents, donning ugly sweaters, and crafting the perfect holiday card, don't forget to squeeze some quiet into your days. I'm sure that God often wants to speak to me, but I am too busy talking, too busy cleaning, too busy thinking up all the ways I can solve my problems.

What might our hearts look like if we simply stopped and prayed as Eli instructed Samuel: *"Speak, your servant is listening"*? Often times I pray like if I simply talk enough I can force God into doing what I want. I wonder how many times I've missed out on something God had to tell me simply because I couldn't quiet my mind and my mouth for long enough to hear him?

I hope you'll join me in taking a few moments each day to simply listen and be in God's presence. I pray you'll open your ears and hearts to what others around you are saying. Let's make this advent a season not only of waiting, but of listening. -Sarah

Reflect: How can you be more receptive to what God is trying to tell you? Is there anyone in your life that God has spoken to you through?

Act: Spend a few minutes in quiet prayer and simply listen for God's voice. Begin by saying *"Speak, for your servant is listening."*



[1 Samuel 16:7 Isaiah 11:1](#)

In praying recently through my normal levels of anxiety, and bemoaning God why He hadn't healed me of this cross yet, I realized something. There were so many parts of my heart, so many situations throughout the day, that I hadn't given over to Him in prayer. I was trying to do all the small things on my own, even though I felt like I surrendered to Him on the big things. As soon as I opened up these other parts of myself to Him in trust, I felt my chest get lighter and the Spirit get to work. There is nothing insignificant to God.

This brings us to Jesse. The one whom this entire study and tree is named after. Mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus, he is the father of David, grandson of Ruth, member of the Tribe of Judah, and farmer and shepherd from Bethlehem.

For someone with such an impressive pedigree, the only time we ever really hear about him in Scripture is in 1 Samuel, when the prophet Samuel is sent by the Lord to Bethlehem, to the house of Jesse, to anoint one of his sons to become the next King of Israel in place of the disobedient King Saul.

When Samuel enters Jesse's home, Jesse immediately presents to Samuel his eldest son Eliab. They are both sure he is the one. Yet the Lord reprimands Samuel, saying *"Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."* (1 Sam 16:7)

In this fashion, Jesse presents seven of his sons to Samuel and each one is rejected by the Lord. Reminiscent of the Cinderella story, Samuel then asks Jesse if he has any other sons. He replies that the youngest is out in the fields, tending the sheep, and agrees to bring him into the house. This ruddy, handsome youth becomes the next King of Israel.

At first Jesse presented to Samuel, and to the Lord, everything that he thought was worthy of presenting. He looked with the eyes of man, not the eyes of God. Yet the Lord was waiting the entire time for him to present what Jesse thought was the least, the most insignificant, the most worthy of hiding - his youngest son who smelled like sheep.

And then, look what happened. By giving David over to the Lord, Jesse's tree bore the most amazing fruit - including Jesus Christ himself, who is descended from David's line. Just as David was a simple shepherd, so too was Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd, born in a humble stable and placed in a feeding trough. This is why Jesse's symbol on the Jesse Tree is a shepherd's staff. This is how Isaiah could prophesy, after the Kingdom of David had already past, that *"a shoot shall come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots."* (Isaiah 11:1) What shoot was he talking about? He was prophesying about a new shoot, a new King that would restore Israel. We know his name. His name is Jesus.

As his spiritual offspring, it's our job to remember our roots and shoot up as new creations in Christ. Sometimes it's hard, sometimes our roots feel dried up and we are more of a stump than a fruitful tree. Especially in this time of Advent, when the world is rushing by at a ludicrous speed, we can bring our stumps to the foot of Jesus, to the life giving water, and ask to be transformed. Then a new shoot will spring up.

It's also our job to bring our hearts to Him. How many times do we present to the Lord in prayer all the things that we think are worthy? We pray for the big things. We hand over the



[1 Samuel 17:12-51 Ephesians 6:13-17](#)

It's an underdog story that's as old as time. A young shepherd faces off against a powerful giant. And against all odds, he slings a rock at the giant and takes him down. What intrigues me about David and Goliath isn't that David chose to fight against Goliath, but that he chose to do so without wearing any armor. King Saul offers David the use of his armor, but David refuses.

Learning how to fight without armor was a central theme in an episode of *Legends of Tomorrow*, a show about time traveling outcasts and misfits who protect history from those who try to change it. In the episode "Shogun," Ray Palmer AKA The Atom, loses his superpowered suit of armor when he gets taken prisoner by a Japanese warlord, also known as a shogun. (It's a time travel show. Just go with it.) Ray and the other Legends escape from the warlord's manor and take refuge at the house of a peasant family. The head of the family, Ichiro Yamashiro, teaches Ray how to fight with his late son's armor. Ray eventually faces off against the shogun, who is wearing Ray's ATOM suit as his armor. In this

battle, Ray tells the shogun, "An armor is only as good as the man who wears it." With the help of his friends, Ray is able to defeat the shogun.

"An armor is only as good as the man who wears it." I think this applies to David as he chose to make his faith in God his "armor." And as Christians, we can take inspiration from David and do the same. How? This quote from Ephesians has the answer:

"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

If the armor is only as good as the one who wears it, we need to be able to use these gifts wisely. You might feel intimidated at this idea: being worthy of wearing the armor of God. Except none of us are perfect. God's grace can help us use the armor of God in our lives. By taking on this armor, we can train in becoming God's warriors.

Joshua 1:9 says *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* David had the courage to put on the armor of God in spite of the giant standing in front of him. In a similar way, we need courage during Advent. It takes courage to face the darkness, to deal with uncertainty, and to prepare for the coming of Christ. I pray that whatever giants you have to face against, you may have the courage to do the same. -Monique

Reflect: What are some "giants" in your life that you need to face off against? Reflect on a time in your life when you had to put on the armor of Christ.

Act: Take some time to read the passage from Ephesians. Ask God for courage.

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