

## ***International Women's Day Worship Resources, Reflections on Courage***

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. John 14:27

“Be like the bird that, passing in her flight awhile on boughs too slight, feels them give way beneath her, and yet sings, knowing that she has wings.” Victor Hugo

“You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, ‘I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.’ You must do the thing you think you cannot do.” Eleanor Roosevelt

### ***Wangari Maathai***

“Wangari Maathai was the founder of the Green Belt Movement and the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. She founded the Green Belt Movement (GBM) in 1977 under the auspices of the National Council of Women of Kenya to respond to the needs of rural Kenyan women who reported that their streams were drying up, their food supply was less secure, and they had to walk further and further to get firewood for fuel and fencing. GBM encouraged the women to work together to grow seedlings and plant trees to bind the soil, store rainwater, provide food and firewood, and receive a small monetary token for their work.

“Shortly after beginning this work, Professor Maathai saw that behind the everyday hardships of the poor—environmental degradation, deforestation, and food insecurity—were deeper issues of disempowerment, disenfranchisement, and a loss of the traditional values that had previously enabled communities to protect their environment, work together for mutual benefit, and to do both selflessly and honestly. The Green Belt Movement instituted seminars in civic and environmental education to encourage individuals to examine why they lacked agency to change their political, economic, and environmental circumstances. Participants began to understand that for years they had been placing their trust in leaders who had betrayed them and that they were sabotaging their lives by not working for the common good and failing to use their natural resources wisely.

“The Green Belt Movement continued under Professor Maathai’s leadership, as founder and Chair of the Board, until her death September 25th, 2011, at the age of 71.”

*The background information above on Wangari Maathai is from [www.GreenBeltMovement.org](http://www.GreenBeltMovement.org).*

### ***Courage***

In her work with the Green Belt Movement, Wangari Maathai was beaten and jailed for her strong stand against systems and powers that she saw doing harm to her community. In her chapter in the book *Speak Truth to Power*, a book on activists around the world edited by Kerry Kennedy, Dr. Maathai says this about the courage that kept her moving:

“Courage. I guess the nearest it means is not having fear. . . . A lot of people say, ‘They could kill you.’ And I say, ‘Yes, they could, but if you focus on the damage they could do, you cannot function. Don’t visualize the danger you can get in. . . .’ This helps you to go on. You look very

courageous to people—and maybe you are courageous. But it is partly because you cannot see the fear they see. You are not projecting that you could be killed, that you could die. If you do that, you stop. It's not like I see danger coming, and I feel danger. At this particular moment, I am only seeing one thing—that I am moving in the right direction.”

Sometimes, in the moment, we are so driven and focused that we are able to take courageous action in the face of uncomfortable, and even frightening, circumstances. With the great strength of our faith and a deep commitment to justice, and perhaps a big surge of adrenaline, we do not feel fear. To paraphrase Victor Hugo, the bird does not fear falling from the bending branch upon which she sits, for she knows she has wings.

However, for those of us who *do* feel fear when confronting harmful systems, physical threats, systematic oppression, lack of control, and uncertainty about how to protect ourselves and those we love most; for those who feel fear when ignored or beaten down by the system; for those who feel fear as our faith sometimes waivers and falters, how do we find the courage and the strength to take another step forward in the direction toward hope? Perhaps that requires as much courage, and certainly great faith—to feel deep fear and to keep going anyway.

### ***Reading in Two Parts, by Brenda Petry***

Reader 1: On this International Women's Day, we consider the lives of women who live next door and who live across the world; those we learn about in history books and in the news; those who live in our own homes,

Reader 2: And we recognize common strengths, common fears, common loves, and common efforts to do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with our God.

Reader 1: On this and every day, we consider the children we love and nurture, those we birthed and those we support, those we have raised and those we have lost,

Reader 2: And we work for a world that is safe and kind and wondrous, and is filled with opportunities for more individuals to be beloved and to make their own positive impact in the world.

Reader 1: On this International Women's Day, we feel hope and delight for all we accomplish, sometimes in isolation but most often united with others,

Reader 2: And on this and every day, we also feel terror and fear and lack of control, on behalf of ourselves, our families, our communities, the environment, and the world,

Reader 1: On this International Women's Day, we seek courage,

Reader 2: And on this and every day, we seek courage.

**Excerpt from *Blessing Song*, by Marsie Silvestro**

Bless you my sister, bless you on your way.  
You have roads to roam before you're home,  
And winds to speak your name.

So go gently my sister, let courage be your song.  
You have words to say in your own way  
And stars to light your night.

And if ever you grow weary and your heart song has no refrain,  
Just remember we'll be waiting to raise you up again.

And we'll bless you, our sister.

***Amen***