

Five Stones

BIG IDEA When something goes wrong in a crowd, most people wait for someone older or more official. The one who changes the outcome is usually the one who stops waiting, and what it takes to walk at a giant is not a fact but a Person.	SCRIPTURE 1 Samuel 17:26–50 (David volunteers; the lions and bears; the sling)
SUPPLIES Bibles, index cards, pens, printed quiz sheets (two versions), a timer, whiteboard, a room you can spread out in	PATTERN UNDERNEATH The bystander effect: the more people present, the longer everyone waits, because each person reads everyone else's stillness as evidence that nothing is wrong. Leader-only until the Look phase.

Phase 01 · Psych Lab Open: The broken sheet.

0:00 – 0:12

The game (don't explain it yet)

Frame it as a speed contest: “General knowledge quiz, twelve questions, fastest accurate sheet wins.” Then split the room two ways without announcing that you have. About a third of the students work alone, spread out, no talking. The rest work in groups of four to six, one shared sheet per group, and they may talk freely.

Every sheet is identical, and every sheet is broken in the same way. Question 7 reads: “Using the map printed on the back of this page, name the two countries that share the longest border.” There is no map on the back. Nothing on the sheet acknowledges this. Start the timer and then look busy at the front, unavailable but not absent, and quietly write down the moment each solo student and each group first says out loud that something is wrong.

Solo students usually flag it within seconds. Groups sit on it, sometimes for minutes: each person scans the others, reads their calm as evidence that they are the one missing something, and keeps quiet. Some groups never say it at all and just leave question 7 blank. Score the quiz, award the win, and stop there. Do not explain what you were timing. Say only: “Remember how long your table sat on question seven.”

LEADER NOTE

The Pattern Underneath · Leader Only This is the bystander effect, specifically the group inhibition Latané and Darley documented in 1968. In their smoke-filled-room study, 75% of people sitting alone reported smoke pouring into the room, while with two calm strangers present only 10% did; in the seizure study, help came from 85% of people who thought they were the only witness and from 31% of those who thought five others were listening, and the average response time stretched from 52 seconds to 166 seconds. Nobody in those rooms decided not to help. They were each waiting to see what everyone else made of it, and everyone else was doing the same. That is Mai Khao Beach with the sea pulled back, and it is Israel's army for forty days. Do NOT name it yet.

LEADER NOTE

Setup note Print two versions only in the sense of solo vs shared; the content is identical. If your room can't spread out, run the solo condition in a hallway or a side room. Never call out a student who stayed quiet: this lab measures a group curve, not a person's nerve, and the whole point of the Look reveal is that the quiet ones were behaving completely normally.

Phase 02 · Hook Hook: The sea went out.

0:12 – 0:20

Tell the Modern Mirror story

Tell the story from Chapter 14: the morning of December 26, 2004, Mai Khao Beach in Thailand, crowded with holidaymakers. The sea is doing something strange. The water has pulled far back from the shore, further than anyone there has ever seen, and what is left behind is bubbling and frothing. The adults stand and watch it. Some take photos. Nobody moves.

Tilly Smith is ten years old. Two weeks earlier, in a geography lesson back home in England, she learned exactly what the sea does right before a tsunami: it retreats and foams, and then it comes back as a wall of water, fast. She is the youngest person on the sand. She is on vacation. She has no authority to tell anyone anything. And she is the only person on that beach who understands what she is looking at.

So she tells her mother. Her mother does not believe her at first. Tilly keeps insisting, loud and certain, until her parents listen, warn the hotel staff, and get everyone off the beach. Minutes later the water comes back exactly the way she said it would. Mai Khao was one of the only beaches in the region where nobody was killed. Around a hundred people walked away because a ten-year-old refused to stay quiet.

SAY THIS

Say "Every adult on that beach had more authority than she did, and every one of them was waiting to see what everyone else made of it. Tonight we're looking at an entire trained army doing the same thing for forty days, and the kid who walked out of the crowd."

LEADER NOTE

Backstory Screener · optional, preview required Tilly Smith and the Mai Khao beach warning · news coverage ≈ 3–4 minutes · major-outlet news segments · preview before showing Content warning: the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami killed roughly a quarter of a million people. Segments about Tilly are usually gentle, but footage from other beaches is not; screen anything you show all the way through, and skip it for younger groups. Search YouTube: "Tilly Smith tsunami geography lesson beach" . The book's dig-deeper phrase: Tilly Smith tsunami .

LEADER NOTE

Launch question "When has something felt wrong to you in a room full of people, and you said nothing because nobody else was saying anything?" Take two or three answers. Don't resolve it, and don't praise the ones who spoke up; you'll undercut the reveal.

Phase 03 · Book Book: The Religious Root.

0:20 – 0:35

Teach the passage

Set the scene, and set it as a crowd problem, not a courage problem. For forty days Goliath walked out between the lines and dared Israel to send one man. For forty days King Saul and an entire trained army heard the dare and did nothing, “dismayed and greatly afraid” (vv. 11, 16, 24). David is the youngest son, not a soldier, sent to the front by his father with food for his brothers. Three teaching beats for the whiteboard:

1. The newcomer asked the obvious question. David’s first move isn’t a sword, it’s a question: what is being done for the man who kills this Philistine, and who is this man to defy the armies of the living God (vv. 26–27)? Everyone qualified had stopped asking. The person who had just walked up hadn’t been standing there long enough to stop.
2. The crowd punished him for asking. His oldest brother Eliab turns on him: “Why have you come down? ... I know your presumption and the evil of your heart” (v. 28). Name this plainly. When one person breaks a room’s silence, the first response is usually not gratitude, it’s irritation from the people who were managing fine with the silence.
3. His nerve came from a track record, not a feeling. Saul says he’s only a boy. David answers with the lion and the bear, and then names who actually did the rescuing: “The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (v. 37). He takes off Saul’s armor because he never trained in it (v. 39), picks five smooth stones, and walks out saying “the battle is the LORD’s” (v. 47). What he brought was not equipment. It was a memory of who had shown up for him in an empty field where nobody was watching.

LEADER NOTE

Watch for this misconception The predictable wrong takeaway is “believe in yourself and giants fall.” The text says the opposite twice: David refuses the armor because he can’t use it, and he credits the LORD for the lion and the bear before he credits himself with anything. Also block the flip side, the idea that the adults were cowards. They were doing what crowds do. That’s what makes it worth talking about.

Phase 04 · Look Look: Everyone was waiting.

0:35 – 0:50

Small group discussion · break into groups of 3–5

Round one, harvest the Psych Lab. Now explain it. Psychologists call it the bystander effect. In Latané and Darley’s 1968 studies, 75% of people sitting alone reported smoke filling the room, but with two calm strangers in the room only 10% did; when someone appeared to have a seizure, 85% of people who thought they were the only witness helped, against 31% of those who thought five others were listening, and the average response time went from 52 seconds to 166. Then post the room’s own numbers from question seven, solo times against group times.

- The students working alone said something almost immediately. What exactly was happening at the tables that sat on it? Be specific: what were you telling yourself?

- Nobody in this room decided not to speak up. So what actually did the deciding?

Round two, the story and the mirror:

- A beach full of adults watched the sea pull back and took photos. An army stood still for forty days. What did the ten-year-old and the shepherd boy have in common that none of them had?
- Both of them were carrying something picked up earlier, in an ordinary season, when nobody was watching: a geography lesson from two weeks back, a trust in God built alone in a field. What are you picking up right now that you won't need for a while?
- Here is where the two stories split, and the split is the point. Tilly's courage came from a fact: she knew what the water meant, and knowing it was enough to make her loud. David's didn't come from a fact, it came from a Person. What made the difference? (Push toward this: her danger could be fled, and a fact is enough to move a beach. His had to be faced, up close.)

Round three, your life:

- Where are you the youngest one there right now, the newest, the least experienced, the one not in charge?
- What's something you can see that the people with more authority than you seem to be missing? What would it cost you to say it out loud?
- David's nerve came from remembering who carried him through his own lions and bears, the small rescues nobody else saw. Name one of yours. What has God already brought you through that you rarely think about?

LEADER NOTE

Leader Note Two failure modes to watch. If the room stalls, go back to the lab and ask what would have made it easy to say something at question seven; usually the answer is "if one other person had said it first," which is the whole lesson. And if a student says they spoke up and got shut down, sit in that rather than fixing it. Eliab is in the text for a reason, and a kid who has been an Eliab'd speaker needs to hear that the text saw it coming.

Phase 05 · Took Took: Your Move.

0:50 – 0:60

The Lions and Bears card

Hand out index cards. Three numbered lines.

Line one: the room where you're the youngest one there. A team, a class, a job, a family, a group chat.

Line two: the thing you can see that nobody in charge seems to be saying, and the one sentence you would use to say it. Write the actual sentence, not a summary of it.

Line three, the one that carries the other two: a lion or a bear. One time God carried you through something, however small, that nobody else witnessed. David's answer to "you're only a boy" was a list like this, and he had it ready before he needed it.

Line three is theirs and nobody collects it. The assignment is line two: say the sentence this week, to one person, out loud.

SAY THIS

Say "You are going to be the youngest one in the room more often than you think. That has never been the disqualification you think it is. And when the thing in front of you can't be outrun, only faced, what moves your feet is line three."

Close in prayer. Thank God for the lions and bears nobody saw. Pray over the rooms students wrote on line one, unnamed, and ask for the nerve to be the one who stops waiting.

LEADER NOTE

Mid-week follow-up Text the group around Wednesday: "Said line two yet?" Nothing else. The card only works if someone asks about it.