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Be Strong

Joshua 1:1-9

1 After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, who had served Moses: **2** "Moses My servant is dead. Now you and all the people prepare to cross over the Jordan to the land I am giving the Israelites. **3** I have given you every place where the sole of your foot treads, just as I promised Moses. **4** Your territory will be from the wilderness and Lebanon to the great Euphrates River—all the land of the Hittites—and west to the Mediterranean Sea. **5** No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or forsake you. **6** "Be strong and courageous, for you will distribute the land I swore to their fathers to give them as an inheritance. **7** Above all, be strong and very courageous to carefully observe the whole instruction My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go. **8** This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to recite it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. **9** Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Exploration

Few things have more influence on our actions than our greatest fears. If you fear what other people think about you, that fear will dictate how you dress, who you hang out with, and how you talk. The fear of failure can keep you from taking worthwhile risks or making important choices. On the other hand, the fear of missing out can cause you to take unnecessary risks or make reckless decisions. If left unchecked, our deepest fears will begin to control us. Jesus understood this as He constantly told His disciples “Do not fear” (Mark 4:40; 5:36; 6:50).

The Book of Joshua is a continuation of the story of God’s rescue of His people out of slavery in Egypt. It begins with God challenging Joshua, the new leader of His people, to not let fear control him. As God commissions and confirms His promises to Joshua, three times He commands Joshua to “be strong and courageous” (Josh. 1:6,8,9). Doing God’s will and living for His glory requires courage. If this sounds difficult to you, it should. The calling God placed on Joshua’s life was intense. God was going to use him to establish His people in a foreign land among foreign people. The good news, however, is that the courage this task required would not come from Joshua himself, but from God’s promises. When we lean into the promises of God, we find the courage necessary to live on mission for Him.

CONTEXT (JOSH. 1:1-18)

Chapter one of Joshua serves as a transition between this book and Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy concluded with the death and burial of Moses (34:5-6); the Book of Joshua begins: “After the death of Moses the LORD’s servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua.”

Deuteronomy 34:10 states: “No prophet has arisen again in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.” Consequently, the Israelites undoubtedly experienced some anxiety regarding Moses’ successor. Who would now lead them? Could this person be as effective as Moses? The Lord prepared Joshua for such a task: “Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him” (Deut. 34:9). Joshua had been a constant companion to Moses. He had the opportunity to observe Moses’ leadership style, decision-making approach, as well as his spiritual strengths and weaknesses. From an early period, the Lord readied Joshua for this particular time and need.

Joshua proved to be a gifted leader. He molded 12 loosely connected tribes into a respected, even feared, military. He led the Hebrews to victory after victory against superior numbers and fortified cities. We recognize Joshua’s military prowess because his ambush at Ai (Josh. 8) is one of the earliest examples of the use of such a tactic in military history.

After conquering the land (Josh. 1–12), Joshua successfully divided it among the tribes (chaps. 13–19) and led them as they began to transition to an agricultural, non-nomadic lifestyle. What greater acclaim might be attributed to any leader other than the fact that “Israel worshiped Yahweh throughout Joshua’s lifetime” (24:31)?

Conversation

After covering the context of this passage, discuss what students gained from that information. Then turn their attention to the following quick response questions and allow time for students to share their answers.

› **If you were to ask your friends and peers to share their deepest fears, what kinds of answers do you think you would get?**

› **How do our fears influence our attitudes and actions?**

If we are honest, we all have fears, worries, and anxieties that deeply influence our attitudes and actions. For many students, the fear of what other people think creates deep insecurities in them that dictate the way they dress, think, and act. For others, the fear of failure keeps them from trying new things, causing them to always wonder “what if.” Joshua faced both of these fears as he was called upon by God to lead His people into the promised land. It would have been easy for Joshua to give into his fears and to throw in the towel in the face of an incredibly daunting task, but God challenged Joshua to be strong and courageous. He reminded Joshua of His perfect faithfulness and unchanging promises. Like Joshua, God has given students an incredibly important task—the task to live for Christ and make disciples. Simply put, this task is too big for us to do on our own. However, when we lean into the promises of God, we will find the courage necessary to live on mission for Him.

JOSHUA 1:1-2

The Book of Joshua begins with God speaking directly to Joshua after Israel’s great prophet and leader, Moses, passed away. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and throughout their wilderness wanderings. But God did not allow him to enter the land of promise. He died after viewing it from a mountain (Deut. 34).

› **What did God command Joshua to do? Put yourself in Joshua’s shoes. How would you respond to this command?**

› **What would obedience to God’s command require of Joshua? What might obedience to God require of you?**

›› **ITEMS 2 & 9 (LEADER PACK)** Direct students attention to the **Timeline** pack item. Help students put the story of Joshua in its historical context. You might also consider showing students **The Promise of Land** pack item. Point out how God’s call on Joshua is connected to God’s plan for His people throughout the ages.

Leader Prep

JOSHUA 1:1-3

The death of Moses must have been a devastating event for the Hebrews. This man, who knew the Lord in such an unusual manner (“face to face,” Deut. 34:10), led the Israelites out of Egypt and out of a bondage for which they suffered for 430 years (Ex. 12:40). The Lord gave the Israelites the Law through Moses, as well as instructions for the construction of the tabernacle and the worship that was to take place in it. Moses led the Israelites through one of their most trying experiences, the 40-year wilderness wandering. He led them to the plains of Moab (east of the Jordan River), on the cusp of entering into the promised land. Doubtless, the Israelites joyfully anticipated crossing the Jordan River and entering the land that the Lord had promised their forefathers (Deut. 34:4). The death of Moses must have suppressed much of this joy.

Verse 1 describes Moses as the Lord’s servant. While the Hebrew word can be translated “servant,” it can also be rendered as “slave.” Similarly, Paul used the Greek word for slave (*doulos*) to refer to himself (a “slave” of Christ Jesus; Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10, Phil. 1:1). The word *servant* demonstrates Moses’ humble submission to the Lord.

While Moses is described as the Lord’s servant, Joshua is described as one who had served Moses. This participle in the original text is a different word from the noun previously translated as “servant.” This word communicates the idea of a chief assistant. Joshua did not serve Moses as a slave, but as an assistant.

Notice the stark reality: *Moses My servant is dead*. With this announcement, God summoned His children to focus their attention away from the past. He alerted them to the present and pointed them to the future: *Now you and all the people prepare to cross over the Jordan*.

The Lord communicated His plan as though the victory had already been accomplished. The Israelites had to fight for the land, but God had promised the land to Moses, leaving no doubt as to their victory. Biblical writers sometimes used the past tense to describe future events that are so certain in God’s purpose that we may speak of them as already accomplished. Paul said that God has “raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavens” (Eph. 2:6). Our future resurrection is so certain that Paul speaks of it as a past event. The Hebrews’ possession of the promised land was as good as done—because God promised it.



God’s call on Joshua to cross the Jordan into the promised land was not new. God had placed this same call on Moses (Num. 27:12) and Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). Further, God’s promise of establishing His people in a His land goes all the way back to Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 1:22-28).

Conversation

God chose Joshua to take Moses' place and lead His people into the promised land in fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Abraham to give him a land and make him a great nation. This was no small task. It would require of Joshua not only foresight and leadership, but also tremendous courage. He would face tremendous opposition both from foreign nations and from the people of Israel as they struggled to live out their identity as God's people.

JOSHUA 1:3-5

Instruct a student to read verses 3-5, then walk through the following discussion questions.

- › **Why did God promise to give land to Joshua and the people of Israel among pagan nations (v. 3)? What was required of the people of Israel if they hoped to receive this promise?**
- › **What else did God promise to Joshua and the people of Israel in these verses? What do these promises tell us about God?**

The Book of Joshua is a continuation of the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to Abraham, one of which was to give His people a land. By giving His people a land of their own among pagan nations, God not only demonstrated His kindness, but also His plans and purposes for His people. God specifically chose to situate His people among pagan nations because He intended Israel to stand out, to be distinct among all the other nations. In other words, God wanted Israel to be an example, a model to all other nations of what it looks like to follow the one true God (Gen. 12:3; Ex. 19:6).

- › **Why did God choose Joshua to lead this initiative? Why did God choose Israel to be His special people in His chosen land (see Deut. 7:6-11)?**

While Joshua had been Moses' protégé for some time and had certainly learned much from his mentor about godliness and leadership, none of those things are mentioned as criteria for God's choice of Joshua. Additionally, God did not choose the Israelites to be His special people because of any particular qualities or achievements. Deuteronomy 7:7-8 makes clear that God's choice was rooted in His own love and faithfulness.

JOSHUA 1:6-9

- › **Three times in these verses, God commands Joshua to be strong and courageous. Why did Joshua need this charge?**

Leader Prep

JOSHUA 1:4-6

The expanse of the land must have been difficult for many of the Israelites to fathom. Less than 50 years earlier, the ancestors of these same Hebrews dwelled as slaves in Egypt. Now they were free. Their ancestors eked out a meager living in a foreign land. Now they would have their own land—a large land.

The commissioning of Joshua as Israel's new leader provided assurance of God's continuing presence. God's presence promised the Israelites of complete victory over their enemies in possession of the promised land. As the Lord had been with Moses, He would be with Joshua. The writer of the New Testament Book of Hebrews applied this promise to believers today (Heb. 13:5). We have the promise of God's presence in every challenge we face.

The Hebrew name Joshua means "Yahweh is salvation." The name Jesus is the Greek form of the name Joshua (see Matt. 1:21). As God gave the promised land to the Hebrews, He gave His Son to all humankind. Jesus, by His death, offers salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

The Lord promised Joshua complete victory. One day Joshua would distribute the land as an inheritance to the Israelites. But he knew before any distribution of land could occur, the land had to be conquered. Some Israelites may have insisted on their inability to take the land. Perhaps someone again reiterated that they could not go up against the people because, by contrast to the inhabitants of the promised land, they were but "grasshoppers" (see Num. 13:31-33). Any person, including Joshua, might have succumbed to fear and cowered from the difficult task ahead. But the Lord called Joshua to be strong and courageous.

The Hebrew verb translated *be strong* communicates the idea of physical strength. Joshua needed to be physically strong for the grueling events of the immediate future. The second verb, translated *be courageous*, can also be translated as "be bold" or "be assured." It communicates the idea of confidence. Joshua would soon face the fortified city of Jericho. The Lord instructed him to wage war not with sword and shield, but with ram's horns (6:13). Joshua would find the boldness to undertake this task in the fact that the Lord had commissioned him and promised to be with him.

Both of these verbs, *be strong* and *courageous*, are commands in the original Hebrew. The Lord did not merely ask Joshua to be strong and courageous; the Lord commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous. The Gospel of John records that after the crucifixion, the disciples (minus Thomas) "gathered together with the doors locked because of their fear of the Jews" (20:19).



Jesus more or less repeats God's promise to Joshua to always be with him (v. 5, 9) in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). God's mission for His people has always been and will always be empowered by His presence.

Conversation

› What else did God command Joshua to do in these verses? What did God promise to Joshua and the people of Israel if they kept these commands?

Given the opposition Moses faced from Egypt and even from the Israelites, the task of replacing him must have been overwhelming to Joshua. Therefore, three times God commanded him to be strong and very courageous to carefully observe the whole instruction Moses commanded him. The instruction hadn't come from the mind of Moses, but from the heart of God. As God's servant, Moses simply reported what the Lord had told him to say. Following the Word of God was to be the basis of Joshua's power and authority in leadership. More than merely teaching the law to the people, Joshua personally was to obey the whole instruction. He was not to deviate from it to the right or the left.

God promised that Joshua's strong and courageous obedience would result in success for him and God's people (v. 7). This promise is tied to a specific people in a specific place—we should not to assume that our obedience will always be rewarded in this life. Jesus promised us that oftentimes the opposite will be the case (John 15:18-25). Obedience to God always invites His blessing. Those blessings, however, are not always immediate, nor are they always experienced in this side of eternity.

› What promises are connected to these commands (vv. 6,9)? How might remembering the promises of God empower us to live on mission for Him (see Matt. 28:18-20)?

As the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, God could have simply told Joshua to be a man and lead the Israelites into the promised land, but God did not stop there. Each of God's commands in these verses are followed up with His promises. As God commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous, He promised Joshua that he would lead the Israelites to inherit the land (vv. 6-7). Immediately after commanding Joshua to carefully and thoroughly obey His Word, He promised to be with Joshua everywhere he went (vv. 8-9). In other words, we should not think of God's command to be "strong and courageous" as a challenge to toughen up, but rather a call to lean more fully on God. If Joshua hoped to faithfully complete the mission God gave him, he would have to rely on the presence and power of God. Similarly, when Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission, He reminded them of His all encompassing authority (Matt. 28:18) and His constant presence among them (Matt. 28:20). It is only when we lean into and truly believe the promises of God that we will find the courage necessary to live on mission for Him.

GO DEEPER OPTION: Remind students that their calling and commission may not be the same as Joshua's, but we can still trust God and His Word in all areas of our lives. When we accept the Lord's commission, trust in His Word, and count on His presence, we will find courage to face whatever He calls us to do.

Application

CENTRAL TRUTH

When we lean into the promises of God, we will find the courage necessary to live on mission for Him.

➤➤ **ITEM 5 (LEADER PACK)** Direct students attention to the **Joshua 1:9** poster. Discuss how the promise of God's presence empowers us to obey His commands.

NOW WHAT?

Guide your group to try to put the Central Truth in their own words. Challenge them to stop and think about how God's promises empower us to live on mission for Him. After they have shared their thoughts, walk through the Central Truth and use the following questions to help them process how the truth affects their daily lives.

› **In what specific areas of your life do you need to lean on God for strength and courage?**

› **Why are strength and courage necessary to fulfilling the mission God has given us?**

› **What keeps you from leaning on God for strength and courage?**

Jesus was constantly telling His disciples, "do not fear" (Mark 4:39-40, 5:36, 6:50; Luke 12:22-26). In the Sermon on the Mount He told them "do not be anxious . . ." (Matt. 6:34). Our anxieties and fears often reveal the idols of our hearts, those things we've been looking to for peace, security, or comfort, things like popularity and success. Jesus calms those fears through His power, presence, and the purpose He gives us. Like the disciples, we too need to be reminded not to fear, but rather trust in God's power and presence. As a side note, you may encounter students who struggle with anxiety attacks and may have even seen a doctor about their anxiety. Stress that these anxiety attacks are likely not their fault, but the result of living in a broken world where the curse of the fall has affected everything, including our minds. For some, seeing a doctor is a crucial part of overcoming anxiety, as is trusting in God's power and presence.

› **Devise a plan of action. How will you lean more heavily on God's strength and presence this week?**

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Finish your group time with these thoughts and encourage students to memorize the verse listed for this session. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our times of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the Keep on Digging section in their Personal Study Guides and to take the truths of this section and apply them to their lives.

› **Dwell:** Read Psalm 16. Take special note of the psalmist's awareness of God's presence and how that influenced his attitudes, actions, and perspective. Journal a prayer to God asking Him to help you grow in your awareness of His ever-presence in your life. Pray that knowing this would help you live confidently for His glory.

› **Memorize:** Joshua 1:5

› **Pray:** Ask God to give you the courage you need to live on mission for Him in your school, your neighborhood, and in your activities. Pray that He would help you to remember and lean on His promises, knowing that in and of yourself you are not strong enough to fulfill the mission God has given you. Thank Him for promising to see you through and to be with you every step of the way.

KEEP ON DIGGING

Read the following verses. List them in a journal or jot some notes here about what each tells you about our source of strength in living on mission for God.

- › Psalm 22:19; 46:1; 119:28
- › Isaiah 40:29-31
- › Mark 12:30

- › Ephesians 6:10
- › Philippians 4:13
- › 2 Corinthians 12:9-10



For an expository verse-by-verse sermon outline/discussion guide that complements this session with a study in Galatians, see lifeway.com/ETBWIN17JJR. For **free** training, go to MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible.