Be Courageous

Third in the series “Life Skills for Happiness and Success”

# Scripture: Joshua 1:1-9

# Key idea: Because God is with us, we can be strong and courageous in facing life's challenges.

# Intro: Why we need courage

There are many situations in life that require courage:

## Health or addiction issues in the family

We might suffer a decline in our health; maybe someone we love contracts an illness. Or perhaps a loved one suffers from emotional or mental health issues. Maybe there are issues of addiction in our family. These can be very discouraging matters. And these are the kinds of times that we need to hear the words of God to Joshua;

“I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous!” Josh 1:5-6 NIV

Or the words of Jesus as he spoke to the frightened disciples in the boat.

Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid! Matt. 14:27 NRSV

## Challenging circumstances

Perhaps we are facing challenges not of our making that are causing us hardship and heartache. A life-partner is making bad decisions or has left us. A business is going under despite our best efforts due to circumstances out of our control. We have suffered a major loss from an accident or weather event or crime. The stress of it is getting to us.

These are also exactly the kinds of times tailor made for hearing and applying to our own hearts the assurance of God to Joshua;

“I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous!” Josh 1:5-6 NIV

## Uncertainty

Perhaps we are entering a time of uncertainly. Maybe there are great opportunities; possibly there is also great risk. Maybe there is a great challenge ahead and we are uncertain the path to take. Maybe our job has become more and more demanding and we are not certain what to do to meet the challenge.

In such times too, we would be inspired and renewed by hearing in our hearts the words of Jesus to his disciples;

Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid! Matt. 14:27 NRSV

## Taking a stand

Sometimes we need different kind of courage, the courage to confront injustice, to take a stand for the right on a controversial issue, or to give a testimony of our faith in a new situation. This is the kind of courage that Peter needed as he spoke before the Sanhedrin. It is the kind that Paul needed as he preached in Athens. It was the kind that Peter needed to go to the house of Cornelius as God told him to do, when he knew that all his Jewish friends would think he was doing the wrong thing.

In such times too, we need ringing in our hearts and minds the assurance of God to Joshua;

“I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous!” Josh 1:5-6 NIV

David used those words, “Be strong and courageous,” to admonish and encourage his son Solomon at the time of the transition of power from David to Solomon (1 Chr. 22:13).

Perhaps there are some of us here this morning who need to hear them. Courage is our next topic in the series “Life Skills for Happiness and Success.”

# Be strong

The Hebrew word translated “be strong” does not have a passive idea behind it but rather an aggressive one. The idea is to take advantage of the moment. To lay hold of that opportunities presented. To be firm and act with confidence and strength.

The greatest leaders of Israel, especially Moses and King David knew the same secret. They were not strong because of their great leadership even though they were both great leaders. They were not strong because of their big armies though they both served their nation at a time when it had large armies. They both were convinced that they were only strong because the Lord fought for them. Listen to David for example.

 “Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed; he answers him from his holy heaven with the saving power of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” Ps 20:6-7 NIV

What does the Bible say to us today?

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Eph 6:10 NIV

To Timothy, Paul wrote

My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 Tim 2:1 KJV

So, the good news is that we are not left to our own devices. More on this in a moment.

# Be courageous

## Concepts of “be strong” and “be courageous” were close in meaning

The Old Testament word translated “courage” in Joshua 1:7 means to be alert, steadfast minded, brave, bold, determined. It is a synonym for the word for strong and vice versa.

The word translated courage in Joshua is found in Ps 31:24 where it is translated as strong in the NIV

Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord. Ps 31:24 NIV

Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord. Ps 31:24 NRSV

King Jehoshaphat encouraged the newly appointed judges over the nation to be courageous (2 Chr. 19:11).

Ezra records that he acted with courage when he left the protection of the royal court in Persia and led a group of exiles back to Jerusalem. (Ez. 7:28)

## Paul needed courage

After Paul had been put under what we today would call police protection by Roman guards lest the Jewish leaders kill him, a Roman citizen, God spoke to him. We read in Acts,

That night the Lord stood near him and said, "Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome." Acts 23:11 NRSV

It is the same Greek word as is used in the account of Jesus’ words to the troubled disciples on the sea. “Take heart!” “Keep up your courage!”

## We need courage too!

Life gives us situations where courage is required to move forward. Sometimes, it is great courage as is needed by soldiers in battle or by public leaders who must often choose between what is right and good on the one hand and what is popular and seems in their immediate self-interest on the other. Most of the time the kind of courage needed is a day-to-day variety that helps us to get up and take the next step, the step we know is the right or best one but one that is not coming easy, for one reason or another. Courage is needed to overcome the inertia of indecision. Courage is needed to overcome the pressure of peers who are pushing in a direction we don’t want to go. For example, say Fred is a new Christ follower struggling to overcome an alcohol addiction. His old friends keep encouraging him to go out again for a good time as they call it. Fred needs courage to say no. Georgiana is a Christian and is a college student in English where they are reading the Bible book of Job as ancient literature. Her discussion group leader picks up a Bible and quips, “Nobody really believes this stuff anymore, do they?” Georgiana needs courage to speak up for her faith. Jacob is seventy-five and lost his wife about a year ago. He really wants to go to the family reunion on his wife’s side that they had gone to for years. He had become good friends with several in her family. But he knows that this year it will be a painful time. He can’t decide. He needs courage. Perhaps while I have been relating these, you have been thinking of a scenario in your life, an area where it is becoming clear under the Sprit’s guidance that what you need is courage.

We need to be reminded of the encouraging words God gave to Joshua;

“I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous!” Josh 1:5-6 NIV

# God is with us!

## But how do we have courage?

God made it very clear to Joshua. You do not need to depend on your own abilities.

Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Josh 1:9 NRSV

God’s promised that presence would go with Joshua. God’s presence had often been a physical reality in the era of Moses. God had sent a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night to guide and guard the Israelites. They had sensed God’s presence in the fire and quaking of Mt. Sinai. But Joshua had also known how God meet with Moses in the tent where he prayed. Joshua had seen Moses do miracles like providing water from the rock at God’s command. And God kept his promises to Joshua. He instructed Joshua as he had instructed Moses. At the first sign of trusting obedience by Joshua, when the feet of the priests carrying the ark touched the Jordan River, the waters parted, just as they had at the Red Sea for Moses. God’s presence was real.

God’s presence is real for us too. As God promised to us in Hebrews,

I will never leave you or forsake you." So, we can say with confidence,
"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?"
Heb 13:5-6 NRSV

Paul clarifies this first secret of our strength and courage. Paul testified about the source of his strength using this same Greek word that he used when he told us to “Be strong.” He wrote about the source of his own spiritual power.

I can do all this through him who gives me strength. Phil 4:13

In other words, Paul wants us to know that God does not just cheer us on to be strong and leave us to figure it out. God imparts to us inner strength to meet the challenges that we face. God’s presence is real. So, we have faith, not just about certain facts and beliefs about Jesus, we can have faith that God is at work to enable us, to empower us to be strong, to carry on, to stand firm, to have courage, to move ahead—whatever it is that God is asking of us! As Paul taught us.

It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Phil 2:13 NRSV

God will provide the strength we need. What an awesome understanding!

## Power from God’s Word

There is one more secret of this awesome strength and courage that God wanted Joshua to have and the he wants us to have as well. God said to Joshua;

“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.
 Josh 1:7, 8 NIV

Notice in this passage the close interrelationship between the strength Joshua was expected to show, the success he was expected to have and one other huge factor. What was that factor? It was Joshua’s relationship to the Book of the Law, God’s Word given to Moses. Joshua was instructed to have a three-fold relationship to God’s Word.

1. Joshua was to keep God’s law “on his lips.” What did this mean? It might include reading it aloud, reciting it from memory, talking about it to the people he was leading. I think it speaks of something in our lives that is so important that we cannot help but talk about it. It also speaks of being very familiar with the Word of God. Today we are living in a day of terrible Biblical illiteracy. It’s one reason I keep recommending YouVersion Bible App. I believe it will help increase Biblical literacy today. What do you do to stay familiar with your Bible’s contents?
2. Joshua was to meditate on God’s law. He was to study it, think about it, and think about how it applied to his life and to the life of Israel. It is so easy for us to be exposed to God’s law without digesting it, without applying it. That’s what preaching is about on Sunday. We think about passages from the Bible and what they mean to us. But God instructs Joshua to be about this task day and night. So one hour a week on Sunday is definitely not enough. How else do we meditate on the Word of God? If you are not a Bible app person, the function of devotional booklets like the one our church supplies is to encourage you and I to set aside at least one time each day to mediate on God’s Word.
3. Joshua was to obey God’s law. Jesus warned us that it is not the man who simply hears the Word of God whose house stands the test in the storm. It is the man who hears the Word of God and puts it into practice whose character stands strong amid life’s storms. It is the woman whose life has been built on the foundation of Biblical values and whose thinking is being shaped by exposure to Scripture who overcomes the struggles that life sends our way. It is the person whose perspective has been honed by the gentle grit of discipleship disciplines who seems to know the way when others have lost theirs. It is the one whose character has been shaped by looking at Jesus whom others ultimately admire for virtues like humility, truthfulness, compassion, faithfulness, gentleness, purposefulness and joyfulness. Daily obedience leads to life success.

Let me excerpt from Psalm 1

Blessed is the one… whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers. Ps 1:1-3 NIV

The Relationship between A blessed life and the word of god