



Scripture



Joshua 1:6-9; 3:5-8, 14-17; 4:20-24

Unit .08

Session .01

The Call to Courage

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 observe carefully 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 meditate on 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.” ... **5** Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, because the LORD will do wonders among you tomorrow.” **6** Then he said to the priests, “Carry the ark of the covenant and go on ahead of the people.” So they carried the ark of the covenant and went ahead of them. **7** The LORD spoke to Joshua: “Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so they will know that I will be with you just as I was with Moses. **8** Command the priests carrying the ark of the covenant: When you reach the edge of the water, stand in the Jordan.” ... **14** When the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carried the ark of

the covenant ahead of the people. **15** Now the Jordan overflows its banks throughout the harvest season. But as soon as the priests carrying the ark reached the Jordan, their feet touched the water at its edge **16** and the water flowing downstream stood still, rising up in a mass that extended as far as Adam, a city next to Zarethan. The water flowing downstream into the Sea of the Arabah—the Dead Sea—was completely cut off, and the people crossed opposite Jericho. **17** The priests carrying the ark of the LORD’s covenant stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel crossed on dry ground until the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan. ... **20** Then Joshua set up in Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken from the Jordan, **21** and he said to the Israelites, “In the future, when your children ask their fathers, ‘What is the meaning of these stones?’ **22** you should tell your children, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’” **23** For the LORD your God dried up the water of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, just as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up before us until we had crossed over. **24** This is so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD’s hand is mighty, and so that you may always fear the LORD your God.”

Intro Options

Main Point:
God's presence and promises empower His people to obedience.

Option 1

Forty years before, the Israelites had failed to trust God and had refused to enter the promised land God had given them. Because of their faithlessness, God forced that generation to wander in the wilderness until all of them, except Joshua and Caleb, had died off. God had given Israel everything they needed—plagues to secure their release from bondage, a miraculous Red Sea crossing, manna from heaven, water from a rock, and so much more—yet, that generation didn't live according to God's authority or His direction. Their eyes were constantly cast on themselves: *We're tired! We're hungry! We're thirsty! We're going to die!* If their eyes had been on God, their statements might have been different: *He's all-powerful! He promised to be with us! He loves us!*

Now, it was time for the next generation—those who were children or who were born during the wilderness wandering—to enter the land. And just like before, they had a mighty leader urging them to follow God and a big river to cross. Unlike the first time, no army pursued them; but surely the memory of the previous generation getting it wrong was never far behind.

- **Imagine yourself in the situation of the new generation of Israelites. How would you respond? How would the past impact your trust and hope? How would you take advantage of the do-over?**

Option 2

- **What are some things people put their trust in? (For example: car, parent, sports, cell phone, relationship, technology.) Is there anyone or anything completely trustworthy on earth?**

The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror™ is a classic Disney thrill ride. Participants step into an elevator with full expectation that it will drop. And drop it does—a whopping 13 stories! Thousands ride the Tower of Terror each year and trust that they will make it out alive.

The Israelites had been through a lot since their exodus from Egypt. Now, the person they had looked to for leadership was gone, and they were being asked to trust “the new guy” who was telling them to walk through a river that was so high it was overflowing its banks! Are you kidding me?!

Today, we will see how Israel's trust in Joshua as their new leader was put to the test. Their response would require faith—faith in God and faith in Joshua as their leader.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Joshua 1:6-9



At the very beginning of Joshua 1, we read that Moses has died (v. 2). We saw in the previous session how Joshua was hand-picked by God to succeed Moses and lead the people into the promised land. But before that would occur, God spoke to Joshua for all to hear.

- **List the duties Joshua was supposed to do in these verses. Next, list God's promises.**
- **How might God's promises give us the courage and strength to move forward and persevere?**

Three times, in a rather brief paragraph, God instructed Joshua to be strong and courageous. Why? For starters, Joshua needed to hear this message. He needed the encouragement, and he needed to hear it more than once. Joshua knew the challenge that was before him. He had seen the Canaanites before. He knew the land he was about to lead his people into was full of strong armies and fortified cities. But it was more than that. Joshua also needed strength and courage to lead God's people. He had seen how the people had treated Moses, often with contempt. He had seen how they had grumbled against Moses, accused him of leadership failures, and rebelled against him. Yes, Joshua needed to be reminded—over and over—to be strong and courageous.

- **What promises of God do you need to be strong and courageous to believe?**
- **In what particular area do you need to be strong and courageous to obey God this week?**

Obedience matters to God. Yes, God had promised the land to Joshua and the Israelites and He would be the one to give them victory over the Canaanites who dwelled in it. But that does not mean the people had no responsibility. They could not do whatever they wanted. They needed to obey God, to carefully obey Him, to prosper and succeed. And it would take courage and strength on Joshua's part to call the people to such an obedience.

COMMENTARY

Joshua 1

Main Point:
God's presence and promises empower His people to obedience.

6-9. Let's consider each instance of God repeating this imperative to Joshua to move beyond a general understanding of why Joshua needed strength and courage.

First, Joshua was to be strong and courageous to distribute the land (v. 6). Before Joshua could distribute the land, he would first have to lead the Israelites to possess it. And before the Israelites could possess the land, they would first have to conquer it. And this is where Joshua would need strength and courage. The Canaanites were not just going to walk out of the promised land because the Israelites had walked in to claim it; they would not go down without a fight. While Joshua needed strength and courage to lead the Israelites into battle, the emphasis should be on the source of his strength and courage. As we will see in a moment, God was not calling him to muster strength and courage from within. This was not a call for Joshua to believe in himself and his abilities. It was a call to believe in God—to trust the one who had promised the land would be the inheritance for His people.

Second, Joshua was to be strong and very courageous to observe carefully the law (v. 7-8). The Pentateuch, the first five books of the law, had been written down by Moses before his death (Deut. 31:9). Now, as Joshua began his leadership over God's people, he had this gift from God through Moses to rely on—to give him guidance and direction. But the written Word of God was not an object for Joshua to keep in his tent. He would need it to flow continually from his mouth—he would need to speak of it, to lead God's people based on it—and he would need to meditate on it—to ponder and seek to understand it, and God's heart and character behind it. If he did this, he would be able to obey it. And this was key. Because through obedience, he would find success.

Third, Joshua was to be strong and courageous, not afraid or discouraged, because God was with him (v. 9). This was the key to it all. Joshua's courage was to come from God, who was with him, and nowhere else. Not his leadership abilities. Not his wisdom. Not the might of his military. Not the praise of his people. There is nothing wrong with any of those things, but the root of Joshua's courage was the one thing that mattered most: God's presence.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 40, DDG)

God is Omnipotent

God is all-powerful: there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Joshua 3:15-8, 14-17



The Israelites were preparing to cross the Jordan River and to leave behind forty years of wilderness wandering, as well as relative safety. The river provided a barrier—a natural fortification—between them and the Canaanites who knew where the Israelites were and what they wanted to do. And so, the moment they stepped foot on the opposite bank of the river, they would be at risk. Joshua knew this, and he also knew that just as God had called on him to be strong and courageous, the people needed to be the same. But more importantly, God knew this. And He was about to do much more than call on the people to believe—He was about to show them.



Read Joshua 3:5-8, 14-17



Notice that God's desire was for the ark to lead the way into the land. Not Joshua and not scouts or warriors, as might have been expected. No, it was the ark of the covenant, carried on the shoulders of the priests, who were set apart to monitor the holiness of God's people.

The ark of the covenant may be considered the most significant of all the holy tabernacle furnishings. The ark contained physical reminders of the Word of God, the power of God, and the presence of God. God made it clear from the start of the conquest that He would lead the way, that His presence and power would win the victory, and that He would be the people's shield and protection.

Read Joshua 4:20-24



Considering our not-so-perfect memories, we shouldn't be surprised that God told the Israelites to remember His miraculous stoppage of the Jordan River and gave them a way to do just that. He knew they would be prone to forget, He knew they could not afford to, and He knew they needed help. And so, God commanded Joshua to have one man from each tribe select a stone from the Jordan River bed, twelve stones in total (4:1-3). These stones would be a memory peg for the Israelites.

- **What stones of remembrance have you set up, or can you set up, to help you remember God through His power and faithfulness?**

The Israelites would add this story to the collection they already had, that Moses had recorded in the books of the law, starting with creation, the fall, the flood, the patriarchs, and the exodus out of Egypt. The stones commemorating the crossing of the Jordan would be one more pearl on the strand, and many others would follow, culminating in another stone of great importance: the stone rolled away from the empty tomb.



- **How can you use what God has done, your stones of remembrance, to point others to the power and beauty of the gospel?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God's presence and promises empower His people to obedience.

Joshua 3–4

3:5-8, 14-17. Notice the repetition of “stood” in these verses: The water stood still (v. 16); the priests stood firmly (v. 17). Though standing water and standing feet may seem like different concepts, the same Hebrew word, *amad*, which indicates standing, both in the literal and figurative sense, is used in each case. It is the same word used to describe Moses staying on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights (Deut. 10:10), the Levites standing before the presence of the Lord (Deut. 19:17), and God’s promise that no one would be able to stand against Joshua (Josh. 10:8).

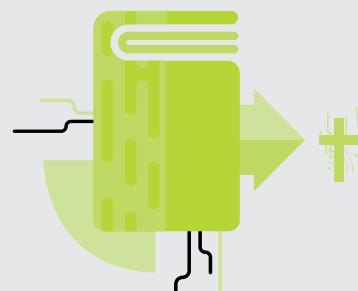
The only reason the priests could stand firm was because the Lord’s presence and might caused the waters to stand still. God had gone before His people to make the way, and this is what gave them the strength, courage, and ability to follow and obey Him. The priests holding the ark in the middle of a dry river was the picture the Israelites needed of how God would give them the land.

4:20-24. God didn’t want the people to take just any stones; they were to take stones from the middle of the Jordan River (4:5), which was also where the priests stood firm with the ark (4:10). Taking stones from this spot represented at least three things:

- The point of God’s providence. The Israelites were to gather the stones where the priests continued to stand, holding the ark, symbolizing God’s presence. It was a reminder that God was the One holding back the waters, allowing the people to cross and the twelve men to retrieve stones that had been submerged in the flowing waters of the Jordan. No power of man could have done what God did; He proved His might from that spot in the middle of the river.
- The point of greatest danger. If the people feared that the waters would come rushing back over them, which they may have at least to some degree, the middle of the river would be the most dangerous place to be. This would be where the ground was the lowest, far from the banks and the safety it afforded.
- The point of the people’s faith. God performed the miracle to pave the way, but the Israelites still had to step out in faith and cross the riverbed. It was in the middle, at the point of greatest danger, where the Israelites trust in God was most evident. They would need to remember that they did believe God and that He was worthy of their faith then, as He always would be throughout the conquest and beyond.

(p. 41, DDG) Christ Connection

God went before Joshua and the Israelites into the land and showed His power to them so they would trust in Him. When Jesus came into the world, He showed His power so that we would trust in Him and receive salvation through Him.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



What can we learn from this narrative about needing God's presence when facing difficult situations?

What should our response be when we doubt God's guidance in our lives?

Heart



What is the connection between obedience to God and trusting in His Word?

What word or promise of God are you standing on, or do you need to stand on, during this season of life?

Hands



How does this account teach us to be prepared for God to work in mighty ways?

What are some examples of things we can do to prepare our hearts for God to work? What are some ways we can implement these things in the weeks ahead?

Main Point: **God's presence and promises empower His people to obedience.**



Head

God's presence is what gives us courage to face even in the darkest, most daunting situations before us. In Psalm 23:4, we observe David saying that even when he goes through the darkest of valleys, God is with him. Sure, there are times that are frightening and intimidating. But when we walk with Almighty God—when we follow Him—He gives us the courage we need to overcome all our fears. Joshua had seen God draw near to Moses and guide him through adversity; and now, he could believe that same presence was with him too.

For your own life you might think, “But I don’t have that. God is not guiding me the way I have seen Him guide Moses and Joshua.” True, but we have something better: Jesus’ promise to be with us always (Mt. 28:20) and the living, breathing Spirit within us (1 Pet. 4:14). Your Jordan River encounter where God is calling you to trust in Him for strength and courage might have to do with getting through school, a difficult relationship with a parent, or loneliness. But God’s Word to us is the same as it was to Joshua: we can be courageous because He is with us. Focus on Him, obey Him, enjoy His presence—and believe He will act.



Heart

There was something else the priests and all the Israelites were standing on that day besides a dry river bed: the promises of God. God had promised to be with them and give them the land, to lead them and empower them. Now, they were seeing God beginning to fulfill these promises in a tangible way. And so, as the Israelites made their way across the Jordan, they were all stepping out in faith—in obedience—trusting in the promises of God, even if that trust still needed to blossom as they “hurried across” (4:10).

In the same way, when God calls us to move, we can believe that we will succeed not because of our own abilities, but because of His. Like the Israelites, we are to stand firmly on God’s promises, recalling our eternal God’s works in the past, observing His hand move in the present, and trusting in what He has promised to do in the future.



Hands

Joshua informed the people that God would perform mighty acts on the next day (Josh. 3:5). The mighty acts were not described; however, they were anticipated. It was the people’s responsibility to prepare themselves for what God had planned. This often takes place through the act of consecration, which is not just getting rid of outward distraction, but includes wholeness of the heart, an inner preparation for God to move in and through us. The people needed to be ready for the miracles God would perform on their behalf.