

Be Strong and Courageous

A Study in Joshua

Kevin McGill | Harvest Community Church

The book of Joshua takes its name from the Hebrew *Yehoshua*—“the Lord saves.” It is the same root that gives us the name Jesus. Moses has finished writing. The wilderness years are over. Joshua picks up where Moses left off, leading a new generation into the Promised Land. The catch: they must do the fighting. The promise: the Lord is with them.

Remember the context. God raised up Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with a covenant promise—blessing, descendants, and land—but a famine drove Jacob’s family to Egypt, where they became slaves for 430 years. God broke them out through Moses. The first generation marched toward Canaan but did not have enough faith to enter. Now the next generation is ready. But to step into the Promised Land, they must raise a sword. They are going to need courage.

The book moves in three parts: Mission (chapters 1–5), Character (6–12), and Trust (13–24). In the opening chapter, God gives Joshua the same command three times—be strong and courageous—but each repetition answers a deeper question. The first addresses the why of courage. The second, the how. The third, the source.

Before we look at each, we should define the word. Courage means there is a threshold. On one side, you are safe. Your life, your reputation, your resources remain untouched. On the other side, who you are is put at risk. For a follower of Jesus, courage has an accent. It is not fulfilling a vision board. It is doing what God asks—which often means stepping toward something you would not have chosen on your own.

And courage is not always obvious. Sometimes courage is remaining faithful in an ordinary marriage. Sometimes it is repenting when you are wrong. Or forgiving someone who truly hurt you. Or staying present with your children. Free-climbing Half Dome is courageous. But so is sitting with a three-year-old for four hours, reading the same story over and over. At that point, someone give me a rock to climb—because I can do that, but I cannot do this.

A writer once reflected on this kind of courage. He had a child because life was so wonderful he wanted to expand it. The irony: overnight, the things that most enlivened him—reading, friends, quiet—were crowded out by a child whose needs absorbed all his energy. From freedom, he entered constriction and fatigue. The boredom of playgrounds, picture books, Cheerios, and the relentless demand: again, again, again. That is courage—the kind that changes another person’s life.



1. Mission — The Why of Courage

Joshua 1:6; 4:19–24

“Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.” — Joshua 1:6

The first command ties courage to inheritance. God does not simply say “be brave.” He says be brave because someone else is counting on it. These soldiers are preparing for war—javelins, spears, leather vests—and they are about to open themselves to the enemy’s attacks and to death. The reason: so that the next generation can inherit the land God promised.

One of the reasons courage fails is that we lose the why. Maybe we do something out of conviction. Or someone tells us we have to do it. Or it’s a command in Scripture. We try to drum up courage, but weeks or months later it fades—because we never had a reason strong enough to sustain it. Viktor Frankl, the Jewish psychologist who survived the concentration camps, observed this: the prisoners who endured held on to a why. Those who had no one to live for did not survive.

After the army crosses the Jordan—God splitting the river just as he had the Red Sea—Joshua instructs each tribal leader to take a stone and pile them on the far bank. The reason is generational: “When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you shall let your children know: Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground” (Joshua 4:21–22). An eight-year-old points at the pile of rocks. And the father says, “That is when God made a way—so we could fight and take this land for you.”

For you. That is the why of courage. Your courage translates into someone else inheriting God’s blessing. Everyone has a threshold God is asking them to cross. And on the other side, someone else receives what your courage made possible.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. *Hebrews 11:8–29 shows that every act of faith produced something for someone else. Whose inheritance might depend on your courage right now?*
2. *Where is God asking you to be courageous? When you picture stepping over that threshold, is the reward you imagine for you or for someone else? (2 Corinthians 4:5)*
3. *Joshua stacked twelve stones so the next generation would ask, “What do these mean?” (Joshua 4:6–7). What evidence of God’s faithfulness would the people closest to you find in your life?*

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2. Character — The How of Courage

Joshua 1:7–8; 7:20–21; 10:12–14

“Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left... You shall meditate on it day and night.” — Joshua 1:7–8

The second command answers a different question: not why you should be courageous, but how. God instructs Joshua to meditate on his Word. In the original language, the word carries the sense of fixing on something. In the heat of battle, when adrenaline is high and decisions come fast, God says: fix on who I am and how I would have you live.

This matters because there is a reckless kind of courage. You charge into the hard conversation or the big decision—and in the heat of the moment, you make choices you later regret. Courage without character is recklessness. God wants courage contained by his Word.

The book of Joshua gives us two men who illustrate the difference. After the victory at Jericho, a soldier named Achan takes what God had set apart—a little something for himself. His courage was real. But **the battle was not for God. The battle was for Achan.** We know this pattern. We fight the good fight, but at some point we say, “I deserve this. I sacrificed. I put my life on the line.” We take what does not belong to us and call it a reward. When that is the logic, the battle was always for us.

Then there is Joshua. In a campaign against a five-king coalition, he is running out of daylight. God had commanded him to destroy the enemy utterly, but there are not enough hours. So Joshua—fixed on what God wanted—turns to the sky: “Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the valley of Aijalon” (Joshua 10:12). And God stops the rotation of the earth so Joshua can complete the mission.

We often ask why there are not more miracles today. Perhaps most of the miracles we request are about us. Joshua was not asking for himself. He was partnering with God, fighting God’s battle, and he needed more time to obey. God said, “I will take care of it.” **Achan fought Achan’s battles. Joshua fought God’s battles. That is the distinction of courage.**

DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. *Achan took what God had set apart and called it his reward. David did the same with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). Both men were courageous in battle but lost themselves in the spoils. Where in your life are you most vulnerable to winning the fight but losing yourself in the process—and what would it look like to “fix” on God’s Word in that specific moment?*
2. *James 1:14–15 says that temptation begins when we are “lured and enticed by our own desire.” Achan’s theft did not start in Jericho—it started in his imagination. What desire are you carrying into your current battle that could quietly redirect the whole fight toward yourself?*

3. *Joshua asked God to stop the sun because he needed more time to obey (Joshua 10:12–14). Most of us ask God for miracles to make our lives easier, not to make our obedience more complete. Write down one area where you are asking God for something. Then ask yourself: is the request about your comfort, or about finishing what he told you to do?*



3. Trust — The Source of Courage

Joshua 1:9; 24:2–15

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” — Joshua 1:9

In the first two commands, courage produces a result: inheritance for the next generation, success through obedience. The third command flips the structure. Here, the cause is not Joshua’s effort. It is God’s presence. Because God is with you, you are courageous. Though it comes last in the sequence, it belongs first—because everything begins with God being with us.

In Joshua’s final sermon in chapter 24, now an old man passing the torch, he recounts God’s faithfulness: “I took your father Abraham. I gave him Isaac. I sent Moses and Aaron. I brought you out. I gave you land” (Joshua 24:2–13). Each sentence carries the same weight: I was with you. I was with you. I was with you. Therefore, you can be courageous.

Then comes Joshua’s response: “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15). Joshua says God was with us, therefore we will be with him. The logic is complete. God was with you. Now you be with God. **It is God’s presence that makes you courageous. He is with you. You be with him. And the courage will show up.**

If your courage is failing—if the fight is harder than you expected—the answer is not more willpower or a better strategy. The source of courage is the presence of God. So if you find the courage fading, just get back to God. Be with him who is with you. The courage will show up.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. *In the first two commands, Joshua’s effort produces the courage. In the third, God’s presence does. Paul experienced the same reversal: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). What would change in your daily life if you stopped trying to manufacture courage and started asking God to make you aware of his presence in the places where you are most afraid?*
2. *Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” Stillness is the opposite of striving. When your courage fades, do you go still—or do you start scrambling? Write about a recent moment when you scrambled. What would it have looked like to be still instead?*
3. *In Joshua 24:2–13, God recites his own resume: I took, I gave, I sent, I brought, I delivered. Write your own version of that list—not what you did for God, but what God*

did for you. Be specific. Let the weight of his faithfulness redefine where your courage comes from.
