

JOSHUA LEADS COURAGEOUSLY

Aaron backed his way out of the men's restroom, swishing the mop from side to side as he went. It was the last of three at the small church. And he had diligently cleaned them all. He had to get there early Saturday morning instead of enjoying his weekend. But the church custodian was on medical leave, and Aaron's pastor had asked him to step in to clean the restrooms before the men's breakfast fellowship.

Aaron had happily agreed. The custodian left a list of responsibilities, which Aaron was careful to follow. As he checked one more thing off the list, it stood out to him how much was required to keep the church running. The custodian did a lot more than he realized.

Aaron's fiancé had expressed concern for him when she heard about his "Saturday morning plans." But he could tell how impressed she was by his attitude. "And when is Pastor going to let you lead Bible study again? When was the last time, three months ago?"

"Oh, it was something like that," Aaron had replied. "But I'm ready whenever Pastor calls on me. I've been studying the Word."

Coming back from the janitor's closet, Aaron washed up and made his way to the fellowship hall. He wanted to see if the hospitality committee needed any last-minute help for breakfast. He loved his church, and loved God. And for him, the two were closely connected.

1 What does it mean to be a leader?

2 Are we born with leadership skills, or do we become leaders through experience and practice?

¹ Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, ² Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. ⁴ From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. ⁵ There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. ⁶ Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.

¹ After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

God Commissions Joshua

At the close of Deuteronomy, Moses has just given his final sermon urging Israel to “choose life” by holding to the requirements of God’s covenant (Deut. 30:19). Moses prepares the people for the succession of leadership after his death, naming his assistant Joshua as next in line (Deut. 31:1–3). Moses climbs Mount Nebo, looks upon the land that he will not enter, and dies (Deut. 34:1–5).

The book of Joshua picks right up at the scene after Deuteronomy ends. God acknowledges the special relationship with Moses, “[God’s] servant” (Josh. 1:2). Now that the period of mourning is at an end, it is time for Joshua to take the momentous step of leading the people to cross the river that borders the territory of Abraham’s

inheritance (see Gen. 17:8). But Joshua faces a challenge. Even when they had Moses to guide them, the first generation to leave Egypt were hardhearted and rebellious. God delayed their entry into Canaan until every person had died, Moses last of all (see Num. 14:29–30).

A giant question mark hangs over this new generation. They have a fresh opportunity to obey, even though their parents had rebelled. Will they follow Joshua as they had followed Moses? Or will they falter? At this moment of great uncertainty, God steps in to reassure Joshua. God says that He shall give them “every place where you set your foot” (Josh. 1:3). Wherever they go, God is claiming territory for His presence to dwell with His people; each step forward is a small victory.

Their territory would extend from the desert currently occupied to Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea in the west, and north and east to the Euphrates River. God encourages Joshua that no one will be able to stand against him, as long as he lives. God’s promise to Joshua recalls the promise to Joshua’s mentor of forty years; as God was with Moses, He will be with the younger replacement: “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (v. 5). Thus Joshua can stand up, strong and courageous, as he leads the people into the land that God has promised them since the days of Abraham (v. 6; see Gen. 12:7). If the great Moses felt fear at being sent to confront Pharaoh (Ex. 3:11–4:13), imagine how Moses’ successor must feel!

1 Put yourself in Joshua’s place. What’s going through your mind and heart?

2 How does God address Joshua’s concerns?

3 Joshua is told to take the concrete step of preparing to cross the Jordan. What obstacles might God be preparing you to face?

⁷ Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. ⁸ This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. ⁹ Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. ¹⁰ Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, ¹¹ Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it.

⁷ “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. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” ¹⁰ So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ¹¹ “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.’”

Listen and Succeed

God repeats encouragement to Joshua to be “strong and very courageous” (v. 7). This time, the nature of God’s encouragement is about moral leadership. Joshua and the people are not only to occupy the land, but they first must check themselves for obedience to the law that God had given to Moses. Joshua had witnessed long years of wandering about in grumbling rebellion (see Num. 14:21–23). That simply would not work in this new territory. God reminds Joshua and the people to focus first on obeying His instructions, turning neither to the left nor to the right. If they will only be obedient, they shall be successful wherever they go.

Knowledge of what is good is one thing. But God promotes the close, intimate study of His instructions according to their every detail. The statutes of God should always be on His people's lips, a constant source of insight after everyone has meditated on what the words mean (v. 8). Pondering the word of God—for ordinary people, listening to it repeated by priests and leaders—would allow the kind of blessing that God's people long to achieve: victory in conflict, security in food supply, the gift of children (see Deut. 28:1–14).

A third time God encourages Joshua to “be strong and courageous” (v. 9). God has commanded him to lead the people, and Joshua does not need to be dismayed or hesitant. Joshua has not seen the land since spying it out decades earlier (see Num. 13–14), but the Creator would be Joshua's protector as he enters the territory.

And thus, the new leader of Israel springs into action. He orders officers to spread word through the camp on the plains of Moab: everyone must gather their provisions and ready themselves to move. In three days, they would cross the Jordan to “take possession of the land” (v. 11). Ultimately, it was God, not Joshua and his soldiers, who would clear the land for something never before seen: a nation of priests who could reflect the faithful presence of God.

1 What kind of instruction does God give for Joshua, beginning in verse 7?

2 What's the difference between reading God's words and meditating upon them?

3 How does Joshua respond?

Strength and Courage for the Work Ahead

Joshua knew that the task of leading Israel into the promised land was too big for him to do alone. Even his friend and mentor, Moses, with whom he served faithfully for forty years, had struggled and failed (see Num. 20:2–13). The people before Joshua were at a critical juncture of their relationship with God.

Sometimes people like to treat this story as demonstrating that God can use anyone (which is true). The thing is, Joshua was the obvious and expected choice of leader to replace Moses. He was as prepared and experienced as a person can be, and still God stepped in to offer reassurance. Joshua's story is a good reminder that experienced and mature people need God's guidance too.

All along, God had been preparing Joshua to succeed Moses. He was an established military leader—something critical in the work ahead. And Joshua was “filled with the spirit of wisdom” (Deut. 34:9). Those whose parents had disrespected Moses' leadership could recognize the anointing of God upon Joshua. Joshua is, in God's own words, a “man in whom is the spirit of leadership” (Num. 27:18). The Spirit would enable Joshua to be strong and courageous and to complete a work that Moses had started.

Our own futures may seem uncertain. We may doubt our capabilities. We may doubt whether others will follow or listen. But it's about God's capabilities, our willingness to follow wherever God leads, and our willingness to accept the mission of our calling, no matter how we might feel. God has put us here and now for a reason. With the Spirit, we can be strong and courageous for the tasks ahead (see Eph. 2:10; 2 Tim. 1:7). If we will be obedient to God's instruction, we will see the job to the end.

1 When has God prepared you for something new, even if you didn't feel ready?

2 How does knowing that God is always with you help you step into the unknown?

3 What's your “promised land” right now? Where and how do you need strength and courage?

We Are Not Alone

When God revealed His plan for Joshua to guide the Israelites to inherit the land, He emphasized a comforting promise: “The LORD your God will be with you” (Josh. 1:9). As believers under the new covenant, that same promise holds true. The Holy Spirit lives in us and goes with us. Place a sticky note in a prominent place as a reminder this week (by your keys, on your door, on the coffee pot, etc.). Write “God goes with me.” As you walk into the situations before you, whether familiar and comfortable or foreign and stressful, repeat those words as a quiet prayer before God and reminder to yourself. We are never alone!

In every moment, God goes with me.

Key Text

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. —Joshua 1:9 KJV

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” —Joshua 1:9 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of September 7 through September 12

Mon. 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17—Hold Fast to the Teachings.

Tue. Exodus 14:21–31—Victory at the Sea.

Wed. Numbers 10:29–36—The Lord Goes Before Us.

Thu. John 6:15–21—Do Not Be Afraid.

Fri. Psalm 77:10–20—Remember God’s Mighty Deeds.

Sat. 1 Corinthians 11:23–27—Remember Jesus’ Saving Work.

Next Week: Joshua 4:14–24

We will talk about God’s role as redeemer for all generations. Ask yourself, how do you keep the memory of family traditions alive?