

Title: "The Struggle for Courage"
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Text: Joshua 1:1-6
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Several years ago, a Psychologist and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Angela Duckworth wrote a book titled "*Grit*." The book and the TED talk by the same title were both highly praised. The book was heavily researched and supported by scientific study, and it concluded that the single most determinative factor in success was grit. She defined "grit" as passion plus perseverance. Her studies concluded that with pretty much any goals in life whether vocational, personal, athletic, artistic or academic, the best predictor of success was not IQ or SAT scores but "grit." Passion with perseverance outperformed talent or giftedness over and over again. ¹ I thought of that this week when I studied the words, "*strong and courageous*" in **Joshua 1:6**. The two Hebrews words are similar, but one seems to describe courage in the face of danger and the other resolve in the face of weakness. Sometimes you are up against a threat that requires courage. Sometimes you are up against weakness, and you need resolve. The two are closely related. Together they relate to that idea of grit, or passion with perseverance, that is crucial to achieving almost any goal. The life of faith requires both.

These words from Joshua, *strong and courageous* lead to the theme for this summer's series on the books of Joshua and Judges. This is part of our larger series: "*The Story of God and the Struggles of Life*." We started last year. You can think of this sort of like an extended Netflix drama with various seasons and each message an episode.

Season 1 was *How it All Began: Creation to the Tower of Babel*.
Season 2 was *The Struggle to Believe: Abraham and the Patriarchs*.
Season 3 was *The Struggle to be Free: Moses and the Exodus*.
Season 4 is *The Struggle for Courage: Joshua and Judges*.

I. WE NEED COURAGE BECAUSE EVEN WHEN WE ARE FOLLOWING GOD LIFE IS FULL OF DIFFICULT TRANSITIONS.

Verses 1-2, *After the death of Moses, the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel.*

It's hard to imagine a better example of a difficult transition.

Moses was a towering figure who cast his shadow over the whole story of the Bible. Listen to how he is described toward the end of the book of Deuteronomy. **Deuteronomy 34:10-12** says, *And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹ none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, ¹² and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.* Imagine you are an Israelite on the edge of the wilderness facing multiple dangers and many enemies and this is the only leader you've known, and now he's lost! Imagine you are Joshua and Moses was not only a friend and mentor but also the leader you are currently replacing!

Transitions are often difficult. I read an article on the neurology of strategic leadership, that said that any change in an organization can be unexpectedly tricky because change is perceived by the brain as pain.² Imagine the pain of losing Moses. It seems hard and huge at the time and yet this type of transition and change is all through Scripture. All the patriarchs and matriarchs and prophets and poets and psalmist and apostles died. God didn't wring his hands in fear about his plans. He just said, "next" and brought forward another servant.

What transitions - changes are you facing? How do they affect your walk with God? Maybe it is the death of an important person in your life. Maybe the transition is work related or family or health related. I hear millennials talking about debt burdens and work opportunities as they transition to the workforce after graduation. Middle-aged people transitioning to their retirement years worry about health and money. Everyone's concerned about politics, polarization, culture, the church, the environment, morality, and sexuality. *"The times they are a changing."* When the transitions of life and history awaken fear in our hearts, the danger is that in the feeling of fear, we retreat from the calling of God. The Bible says perfect love casts out fear but fear, if not dealt with in faith, can also cast out love. We become self-protective. Unable to control the changing world, we grab onto something we think we *can* control. Like a fearful flyer hitting turbulence we clutch our armrest. We hold tight to our comforts and cautions and become that much less available to God. ***And yet God alone remains truly constant in all of life's changes. There is no shadow or turning in him. To face difficult transitions, we have to find courage in him.***

There is another reason we need courage. Not only because of the difficult transitions of life but the many battles of faith.

II. WE NEED COURAGE BECAUSE EVEN WHEN WE HAVE PROMISES FROM GOD, WE FACE MANY BATTLES.

Joshua knew conflict was coming. **Verses 5-6**, *No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. ⁶Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.* Look at **verse 6** carefully. Who does God say is going to cause the Israelites to inherit the land? God says, *“You shall cause this people to inherit the land!”* God is saying *you are going to have to fight for what I am going to give.* The fact that victory was promised did not mean conflict wouldn’t happen or that courage wasn’t needed. It was! It is for us too.

The issue of conflict is a major theme in the book of Joshua. This is disturbing for many modern people. God is going to lead his people in a holy war of conquest. That raises at least three questions: 1. How does this fit into the story of redemption? 2. How is it okay for this to happen? 3. What does it have to do with our lives today?

1. How does this fit into the story of God – the story of redemption? *One thing to understand is that this is a very limited part of a much larger story.* The kind of total warfare we see in Joshua is not found in the Bible’s from the time of creation, through the patriarch, until the time of Moses and Joshua. It disappears again in the days of the prophets and through the time of Jesus and the New Testament Scriptures. It takes place after God chooses the descendants of Abraham to be his chosen people, he delivers them from slavery and forms them into a new nation. His purpose is that they are going to be the means by which his truth is preserved in the world and through whom our Savior comes for *the world*. The warfare in Joshua secures the place from which God will bless the whole world.

2. How is it okay for this to happen? How is it okay for God to command his people to go displace the Canaanites? I did a whole sermon on that question a couple of years ago. You can find it on our website and download text or audio. It is titled; *“How Can God Command So Much Killing?”* If you use an ESV Study Bible, you’ll also find a good treatment of this issue in the introductory notes for the

book of Joshua. But briefly, This is is not just war of conquest; it is also an act of God's righteous judgment.

The most basic answer to the question: "How can God command this?" is that God is exercising his prerogative of divine judgment. Almost 500 years before in **Genesis 15:16** when God was telling Abraham the future of his people he said your people are going to have to suffer and wait for 400 years before they can come to the Promised Land. Why did they have to wait? God said the reason for the wait was that the iniquity of the tribes in Canaan was not yet complete. God is saying, *"I am not going to judge them as a people until the level of evil is sufficient to warrant my judgment."* In **Deuteronomy 9:4-5**, Moses told the Israelites, *"it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you."* If you read the Bible and think it pictures God as a tyrant with a hair-trigger temper you are reading it like an entitled child you are reading it like an entitled child who gets indignant over any judgment or accountability. The reality is God waits and warns and offers grace while people take advantage of his patience, dismiss his warnings, and rebel against his laws. Eventually there comes a time when God says, *"enough."*

3. How does this story of land and warfare relate to us today?

This is challenging but worth wrestling with and understanding. Most Christians do not understand how the promise of the land relates to Christians today. Do you know the famous statement of Jesus from **Matthew 5**, *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth?* He was quoting an Old Testament Scripture, **Psalms 37:11**, which originally referred to the Promised Land. Jesus expands it to include the whole planet! Then in **Romans 4:13**, we read an amazing verse that can easily just slip past us. It says, *For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.*

What these verses teach us is that that slice of war-torn real estate we call the Holy Land was not all that God had in mind for his people and his kingdom. He promised that land but he never said that was all he had in mind and in fact he later revealed that he would give not less but more. The book of the Revelation tells us God's plan of redemption will ultimately lead to people from every tribe and ethnicity redeemed and possessing together a renewed and restored planet in all evil is expelled and Jesus makes all things new! The conquest of the Promised Land in the days of Joshua serves, not only

as a step in the unfolding story of redemption, and place for God's people to be preserved until Jesus comes, but also at the same time as a picture and symbol of God's conquest of a broken world at the end of history!

Application: There are all kinds of lessons this teaches us! It teaches us to have hope! Even when it seems like multiple enemies are going to oppose God and his people, and there are giants in the land, God will fight for us, and the ultimate victory will be His! It teaches us to fight on in that hope. There may be suffering, and even setbacks, but what God has promised you will inherit. We need strength and courage - grit: passion married to perseverance. Jesus said so, in **John 16:33**. He said, *In the world, you will have tribulation, But take heart: I have overcome the world. To take heart means to be strong and courageous.*

It's clear God understands the human heart. That's why you have God telling Joshua to be strong and courageous. He needs to fortify his heart. What about you and me? Where do you need courage? Is it personal? Is it something big God is calling you to face for him? If you are following Jesus, there will most likely be seasons of major challenges but also lots of opportunity for what you might call everyday courage. There is moral courage, standing up for what is right and true when it may cost you. Not walking away from a responsibility because of selfishness. There is intellectual even psychological courage, being willing to question your emotional reactions, biases, and assumptions to sincerely seek the truth about yourself, and life in God.

Illustration: I once read a beautiful essay on surrender by a man who described a turning point in his life that happened when he was eleven years old. On a hot summer in July at a public pool, he climbed the thirty-five steps to the high dive. He walked out on the long concrete diving board and thought he might die. He started to backpedal, looked over his shoulder, and saw some girls in line behind him chuckling, and knew he had to go for it. So he crept up to the edge, let go and jumped. He hit the water hard and went down deep but then came back up. He said he was dazed but utterly alive, not only alive, but transformed, liberated, and renewed. He said he shook his head of wet hair and laughed. He had let go of everything and was more alive than ever because he had tasted the joy of surrender.

Application: I wonder if in the difficult transitions of life and in the many battles of faith we are tempted to choose security and comfort over strength and courage and in doing so forfeit the most ecstatic joys of surrender to God. Don't try to play it safe if and when playing it safe compromises your commitment to God. Be strong and very courageous.

III. WE CAN BE COURAGEOUS BECAUSE GOD WILL KEEP HIS PROMISES.

Verses 5-6: *No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.* Rely on his promises. What he has sworn he will do he will do. Remember his presence. He will not leave you or forsake you.

The promise that no man shall be able to stand against you is echoed in **Romans 8:37-39** *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. **God alone remains constant in all the changes and conflicts of life. To live with courage, stay focused on him.***

Conclusion

Verse 6 said Joshua would *cause his people to inherit* the Promised Land. In this Joshua points us to the greater Savior we have in Jesus. Joshua's name was initially *Hoshea*, which means salvation. But in **Numbers 13**, Moses changed his name to *Joshua*. He was the first person in the Bible to be given a name that incorporates the personal name God revealed to his people, Yahweh. Moses took a generic name that just meant salvation and changed it so that it was an affirmation of faith in Yahweh; *Yahweh is salvation. Joshua, Yeshua*, The Greek form *is translated Jesus in our New Testament. Joshua points us to Jesus.* Joshua was strong and courageous and through him God brought salvation and gave his people their inheritance. Jesus was strong and courageous for us. He went to war in his

suffering on the cross and actually gave his life trusting God to raise him up in victory. His death paid for our sins and secured our inheritance for us. Through faith in Jesus, we receive a victory we ourselves could never have won. We receive a promised inheritance we do not deserve the new heavens and the new earth. Trust in Jesus. You will inherit all that God has promised if you trust in him. So trust him and fight on for him confident that you are more than a conqueror in him.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Our Father, who is in heaven, thank you for your patience with us, your weak and fearful children. We confess that while you call us to be strong and courageous too often we prefer to avoid what's hard or scary. We have been given your gracious presence and powerful promises but we have acted as if we were alone and on our own. We have sometimes clutched at control and comfort instead of surrendering to you in faith and obedience. Thank you for the promise you will never leave us or forsake us.

¹https://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_grit_the_power_of_passion_and_perseverance?language=en

² <https://www.strategy-business.com/article/The-Neuroscience-of-Strategic-Leadership>