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June 7, 2026

STRONG AND COURAGEOUS: JOSHUA 1:1-11,16-18

Introductory Activity Option 1 (Adapted from ETB LG, 17)

“Introduce: Invite the group to read the opening paragraph on page 10 of the PSG. [It is also found on page 16 of the Leader Guide: Russell Kelso Carter was a professor at the Pennsylvania Military Academy in 1886 when he wrote “Standing on the Promises.” For well over a century this great hymn has been sung by believers all over the world. Why? Because its lyrics remind believers that God is trustworthy and His promises “cannot fail.” Consequently, those who are trusting in God “cannot fail.” Joshua discovered these truths and grounded his courage in the assurance of God’s trustworthiness.]

Ask: *What makes a person trustworthy? (PSG, p. 10)”*

Skip to Summarize and Transition

Introductory Activity Option 2

Ask: Have you ever been in over your head? Does anyone want to give an example from their life?

Say: Sometimes we feel in over our heads in the middle of a remodeling or refurbishment project. In the workplace, we sometimes feel in over our heads when we get a tough assignment. When a person holds their first child for the first time, they might feel in over their heads. Today, we are going to see that Joshua was in a situation where he might have felt in over his head.

Summarize and Transition: Joshua is the 5th book in our Bibles. Joshua picks up where the book of Deuteronomy leaves off. God’s people are camped on the plains on Moab just east of Canaan (modern-day Israel). They had been “wandering” for 40 years after the Lord delivered them from Egypt, and their parent’s subsequent refusal to enter the land out of fear. Now it was time for them to take the land that God had promised. The book of Deuteronomy tells us that while they camped there, “Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the Lord’s word.” (v. 5) Moses, the nation’s longtime leader and main human subject of the Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, was dead. Would there be a power vacuum? No. Because the Bible tells us “Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites obeyed him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.” (v. 9)

Joshua chapter 1 picks up at this moment of succession. Joshua might have been wondering about all the promises God had made to the people. He might also have been wondering about his ability to lead. Would God keep His promises? Will I be able to lead these people? Today, we are going to examine Joshua chapter 1 and see that “Joshua’s courage was grounded in the assurance of God’s trustworthiness.” (ETB LG, 15)

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Joshua* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Matthew* (NAC)
- Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Joshua (TOTC)

Strong and Courageous: Joshua 1:1-11,16-18

1. GOD'S PROMISE (JOSH. 1:1-5)

Read (or have someone read) Joshua 1:1-5.

Explain: In this passage, the writer introduces us to three people. First, he tells us that Moses has died. He identifies Moses as “the Lord’s servant.” Beginning in the book of Exodus, God determined to have a special relationship with Moses that was more intimate than any of the other Israelites experienced. He spoke with Moses regularly. He acted through Moses to do mighty things. Upon his death, the book of Deuteronomy tells us about Moses’ legacy.

Read Deuteronomy 31:10-12. (See Notes Box.)

Explain: Moses is unparalleled among leaders and prophets of the Old Testament. But his position, power, and authority were not innate.

Ask: In our culture, how do people attain lofty positions, power, and authority?

Explain: In our culture, people attain position, power, and authority through the exercise of their abilities. They move up in the business world because they are talented or maybe “cutthroat.” They have power in a community or politics because they “get things done” or “know the right people.” They exercise authority because others give them that authority based on past actions. Moses’ abilities were the result of the Lord’s position in his life. Moses was the servant of the Lord. The Lord placed him in a position of leadership. The Lord’s power flowed through him to do great things. It was in the Lord’s authority that he spoke and acted. Now Moses is dead, and Joshua is left in charge.

This is not the first time readers of the Bible have encountered Joshua, and he was a known commodity to the people of Israel. Verse 1 calls him “Moses’ assistant.” He had first come on the scene in Exodus 17 when Moses selected him to lead the army of Israel in defense against the attacking Amalekites. After that, he was present with Moses on Mount Sinai when God revealed His law. He was also one of the two faithful spies who encouraged the nation to enter and take the promised land 40 years before. He has now served as Moses’ assistant for more than 40 years. Joshua was “by no means a young man at this stage, but with his real life's work just about to open up before him.” (Preaching, 15)

Ask: Does anyone remember how Joshua became the heir apparent?

Explain: In Numbers 20, Moses sinned against the Lord, and the Lord announced that he would not enter the promised land. Moses, ever the faithful leader, accepted the Lord’s judgment and asked the Lord to provide the people with a leader “who will go out before them and come back in before them, and who will bring them out and bring them in, so that the Lord’s community won’t be like sheep without a shepherd.” (Numbers 27:17) God responded in verses 18-21.

Notes:

"A wooden translation of the first portion of the verse would read 'And it happened, after the death of Moses.'" (NAC, 71)

Deuteronomy 31:10-12

¹⁰ No prophet has arisen again in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. ¹¹ He was unparalleled for all the signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do against the land of Egypt—to Pharaoh, to all his officials, and to all his land— ¹² and for all the mighty acts of power and terrifying deeds that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

TEACHERS NOTE: Just know we have spend a little time introducing the group to Joshua. You might think this unnecessary because “everyone knows who Joshua is.” In Sunday morning small groups, we need to treat the lesson and the group as if there is a new person present every week and that unbelievers and those who know little about the Bible are present.

Read Number 27:18-21 (See Notes Box). **TEACHER'S NOTE: YOU WILL COME BACK TO THIS PASSAGE WHEN YOU GET TO GOD'S COMMAND TO KEEP THE LAW LATER IN THE LESSON.**

Explain: David Jackman writes, God's words in Joshua 1 "are like a starting pistol to a race that Joshua had always known he would one day run and for which he has been trained and has prepared for decades." (Preaching, 15)

Discuss: Joshua was the hand-picked successor to Moses. He was chosen by God to lead the people. Does God still choose people to do His work? What kind of person does He choose?

Explain: God still chooses people to do His work. He sets some apart to be leaders (Ephesians 4:11 and following). He sets all of us apart for good works (Galatians 6:10). He calls all of us to the ministry of reconciliation and gospel proclamation (Matthew 28:19-20). God had a special assignment for Joshua. Chapter 1:2.

Reread Joshua 1:2. (See Notes Box.)

Explain: God's words in Joshua verses 2-4 were given to both Joshua and the people. The time had come for the people to cross into the Promised Land. And Joshua was to lead the people to follow God's command to cross the river. We will talk more about this command as we go along, but note the simplicity of the command: cross the river into the land I am giving you. While they will have to fight battles and develop plans later, the command now is simply to take possession of the gift. That gift was amazing. In verses 3-5, we get God's two-part promise to the people and Joshua.

The Promise of Land

God's promise of the land dates to the time of Abraham. Yet now, hundreds of years later, the descendants of Abraham do not control the land God promised. The only piece of it they own is the family burial site at Hebron (Genesis 23). Nevertheless, God says that He has given it to them. God owned the land, and it was His to give away. In this verse, "the past tense to express the absolute certainty of a future occurrence." (Preaching, 25) Now it was time for them to take it. "It is as though Israel already possessed legal title to the land (ever since Abraham's day), but they were awaiting God's timing for the actual possession." (NAC, 76) The land was expansive as well. The description given here was a general description of the land (see notes box for explanation), but it presents a picture of a truly vast territory.

The Promise of Power

In verse 5, God turns His attention to Joshua and speaks a word of promise to him. In general, God says, "You will succeed. You will succeed because I am with you. I will never leave you." This is a powerful promise of power. The simple words "I will be with you, just as I was with Moses" should bring to mind all of the great things God did through Moses. It would also remind

Notes:

Number 27:18-20

¹⁸ The Lord replied to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man who has the Spirit in him, and lay your hands on him. ¹⁹ Have him stand before the priest Eleazar and the whole community, and commission him in their sight. ²⁰ Confer some of your authority on him so that the entire Israelite community will obey him. ²¹ He will stand before the priest Eleazar who will consult the Lord for him with the decision of the Urim. He and all the Israelites with him, even the entire community, will go out and come back in at his command."

Joshua 1:2

"Moses my servant is dead. Now you and all the people prepare to cross over the Jordan to the land I am giving the Israelites.

According to David Oginbe's African Bible Commentary "In terms of current political boundaries, the boundaries, the promised land would thus cover modern Israel, the whole of Jordan, a large part of Saudi Arabia, half of Iraq, the whole of Lebanon, part of Syria and the whole of Kuwait." (Preaching, 25)

"As we have noted, this is a general description of Israel's borders. The intent here is not to give the specific boundaries of the land, or of various tribes' inheritance within the land, that we find in many other passages (see especially Josh 14-19). Rather, it is a general summary painted with broad brush strokes. The details will come later." (NAC, 83)

Strong and Courageous: Joshua 1:1-11,16-18

Joshua of the great leadership that God provided to Moses during difficult times and when making difficult decisions.

Summarize Transition: During leadership transitions, people can be on edge. There might have been some in the Israelite camp asking if the new guy was up to the challenge and if God would keep His promises? Joshua might have been wondering the same thing. In these five verses, God assures the people and Joshua that God will be with them, He will be with Joshua, and He will keep His promise. Likewise, we can know the same thing. If God calls an individual or an organization to a task or gives them a promise, He will provide. We just need to have courage, and “we can find courage in the truth that God keeps His promises.” (ETB LG, 19)

2. JOSHUA’S ASSIGNMENT (JOSH. 1:6-11)

Read (or have someone read) Joshua 1:6-11.

Explain: This passage can be broken down into two main parts

- God’s Command to Joshua
- Joshua’s Command from God.

God’s Command to Joshua

God’s command to Joshua is to be “strong and courageous.” That command comes in three waves in this passage.

- Wave 1 relates to taking the land
- Wave 2 relates to obeying the law
- Wave 3 relates to relying on the Lord

Wave 1: Be Strong and Courageous in Taking the Land. (v. 6)

God again assures Joshua that the land will be theirs. He does so by directing Joshua’s attention to the end of the conflict. There will be three major campaigns in the conquest of the land, but God jumps to the end. He tells Joshua that he will distribute the land to the people. The book of Joshua tells us that he does just that, beginning in chapter 13 of the book. God is telling Joshua to be strong because He knows the end of the story.

Discuss: How does God encourage us likewise?

Explain: The primary means by which God encourages us in this way is the Bible, particularly the last book of the Bible. The book of Revelation tells us that God wins in the battle between good and evil. When we read the book with a full understanding of God, we know that the battle is already won. In the same way that God speaks as if the Israelites already possess the land, He speaks of His victory in the battle between good and evil.

He also encourages us in Ephesians 6. **Ask: Does anyone know what Paul tells us to put on in Ephesians 6?** He tells us to put on the Armor of God, not the armor of man, not the armor of faith, not the armor of trying really hard.

Notes:

Exodus 10:21-23

²¹Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, and there will be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt.” ²²So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for three days. ²³One person could not see another, and for three days they did not move from where they were. Yet all the Israelites had light where they lived.

Amos 8:9-10

⁹And in that day—this is the declaration of the Lord God—I will make the sun go down at noon; I will darken the land in the daytime. ¹⁰I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will cause everyone to wear sackcloth and every head to be shaved. I will make that grief like mourning for an only son and its outcome like a bitter day.

Strong and Courageous: Joshua 1:1-11,16-18

He tells us to put on God's armor. God fights for us just as He fought for the people of Israel.

Wave 2: Be Strong and Courageous in Obeying God's Law (vv. 7-8)

It is interesting that in God's command to be strong and courageous, more words are used in reference to Joshua's commitment to God's Word than to battle plans. God tells Joshua, "be strong and very courageous to observe" the law. Now we need to be careful here to read this passage correctly. It would be easy to take this passage out of context. We might interpret God's words here to mean be strong and courageous to observe God's law because others will come against you and persecute you for doing so. While that sentiment is true, it is a very NT reading. Instead, we need to understand the way the writer uses the word "courageous." According to David Howard, the use of the word "courage" in verses 6 and 9 is fitting. Have courage in the face of conflict and battle. In verse 7, though, a better word would be "resolute." Be resolute in keeping the law.

Discuss: If someone were to command you to be resolute in keeping God's Word, how would you interpret that?

We might say be determined, be dedicated, be deliberate in keeping the commands of God. Joshua is in an interesting position as the leader of Israel. In verse 7, he is told to keep "the whole instruction my servant Moses commanded you." Unlike Moses, the law of God will not come to him via the verbal command of God. Yes, God will guide him in decision-making, but Joshua is the first leader of Israel who has the written word of God. He, like us, must base our decision-making on that. He also has the priest Eleazar. Numbers 27 states that the priest will help him determine God's will when it is not explicitly stated in Scripture. We likewise must be resolute to rely on God's word when living our lives. God's character is revealed in the Word, and it is to be God's character that we exhibit when living our lives. There will be times when we need direction from the Lord for things not explicitly addressed in Scripture. We do not have to go to someone like Eleazar. Instead, we can go to the Holy Spirit for guidance in those situations.

Wave 3: Be Strong and Courageous while Relying on the Lord. (v.9)

God provides one final command to be strong and courageous in verse 9. This is a general restatement of the command with the additional reminder of God's presence. Here, He also provides a negative command. He tells Joshua not to be "afraid or discouraged." This is the opposite of strong and courageous. The truth is, there will be many opportunities for Joshua to be afraid and discouraged. The Apostle Paul had many of those opportunities as well. In 2 Corinthians 11:24-28, Paul lists all the things that could have made him afraid or discouraged. Yet in another letter, he writes that whether things were good or bad, "I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me." (Phil. 4:13) God is saying something similar to Joshua here. He tells Joshua that He will be with him so he can "succeed." And like with Paul, this success is not a promise of health or wealth. God's reference to success in Joshua 1:7 is a reference to success *in completing His God-given task*. We should take note that God promises us success with the command to be strong and successful in the Gospel tasks set before us.

Applying God's Command to be Strong and Courageous

Notes:

Joshua "will not have the face-to-face fellowship Moses experienced. He has a written record by which God's will is made known, coupled with access to Eleazar the priest 'who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the Lord' (Numbers, 27:21) In this sense he is the first Israelite leader who, although directly commissioned by God, is dependent on the word of God already spoken and written and the prayerful inquiry of the priest to provide the wisdom he needs to make godly decisions for the people." (Preaching, 19)

Strong and Courageous: Joshua 1:1-11,16-18

God's command to Joshua has an internal component and an external component. Inwardly, Joshua needs to set his mind and heart on the reality of God's promise and presence. This will enable him to consistently be reminded that he has no need to be afraid or discouraged. Externally, he is to meditate on God's Word. As 21st-century people, we tend to think of meditation as an internal act. We have been trained by the influence of Eastern thought that meditation is an emptying of the mind. The word used in Joshua 1:7 for meditate means "to mutter." In other words, God's Word should be Joshua's words all day long. The same should be true for us. If determine to live our lives in light of God's power and promise, we should make it a habit to speak of God's Word constantly. If God's Word is the word you speak consistently, if it is the topic of your conversation consistently, it is less likely that you will depart from the ways of God. When we live like that, we will experience success in the gospel tasks before us.

Joshua's Command from God

With all that said, Joshua now gives a command to the people. It too is a simple command. In effect, Joshua says, "Get ready. We are going over the Jordan and taking the land." In giving the command, Joshua expresses his trust in the Lord's power and promise. In obeying the command, the people do as well. Oftentimes, when God gives a command, we want to delay. We might do so because we are fearful or reluctant. We might "pray for insight." Joshua and the people could have done likewise. They could have asked God more questions about the coming conflict or how they would cross the Jordan at flood stage (see 3:15). "Our temptation is to wait and then ask for further light, without acting on the light he has already given us. But all I need to do for my heart to harden, after God has spoken his word, is...nothing!" (Preaching, 31) The Israelites did not need any more information at this point. They had all they needed: the promise of the land and the promise of God's powerful presence. With that information, they can act and "make provision" for whatever God has next.

Summarize and Transition: Likewise, we should act on the commands of God as they come. He has already told us how to live in His word. When He guides us to act through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we should simply do what he says and act. The truth is, if our minds and hearts are focused on Him and His Word, we can move forward confidently toward success. God's command to Joshua and Joshua's command to the people remind us that "We can discern God's best for our lives by studying His Word" (ETBC LG, 21) and obeying His leadership.

3. ISRAEL'S RESPONSE (JOSH. 1:16-18)

Read (or have someone read) Joshua **1:16-18**.

Notes:

It was "an earthshaking, tomb-breaking, curtain-tearing ceremony of to celebrate." (Preaching, 876)

Hebrews 10:19-20

"¹⁹Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus—²⁰he has inaugurated for us a new and living way through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)—"

Strong and Courageous: Joshua 1:1-11,16-18

Explain: We skipped over verses 12-15. In those verses, Joshua turns his attention to the 2-and-half tribes that had requested to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan. Moses had granted them permission to do so with the stipulation that their fighting men enter Canaan and fight alongside the other tribes. In verses 12-15, Joshua reminds them of their commitment to do so. In response:

- They affirm Joshua's leadership (v. 16-17a)
- They affirm God's selection of Joshua (v. 17b)
- They assert the nation's commitment to follow Joshua (v. 18a)
- They restate God's command to Joshua to be strong and courageous (v. 18b)

"The last three verses of the chapter underline for us how God is already fulfilling his promises to Joshua." (Preaching, 31) The people's commitment to follow him is an affirmation of God's promises to Joshua. They were surely an encouragement to the new leader.

Discuss: How can church members use their words to encourage their leaders?

Explain: "Leaders only have as much authority as people give them." (ETBC, 19) Sometimes leaders only hear the negative comments or only remember the negative reactions and results of their efforts. Church members can encourage their leaders by accentuating the positive, by following them when things are difficult, and by acknowledging God's call on the leader's life.

Summarize and Transition: This short passage, in which the people affirm Joshua as leader, might have provided him with a bit of strength and courage to move forward. He might have let out a sigh of relief when they spoke to him like this. This shows us that "we can encourage the kingdom work of others by supporting and partnering with them." (ETB LG, 23)

CONCLUDE

As we begin our look at the book of Joshua, we see that God prepared the people by giving them a new leader. We also see that God prepared that leader by giving him a promise and a command. God gives us promises and commands as well. We should hold tight to the promises of God and diligently seek to fulfill His commands.

This week, you might need to take a moment and consider the promises God has given you. You might want to write them down on a note card for future reference. You might also need to consider the commands God has given. You might need to ask Him to help you fulfill those commands. In order to do that, you will need to saturate your life with the Word of God. His word and His Spirit will guide you as you seek to fulfill God's gospel work.