

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

January 29, 2023 "Fresh Start: Courage."

I Intro.

We're solidly in 2023 now. The new year will bring some new and innovative ideas in all areas of our church life. We have seen an increased activity in our children's ministry, and we're working on new ideas for both our children and our students. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can also revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

II Recap.

This is the fourth and final Sunday in our ***Fresh Start*** series. How to begin again. Doing a *fresh start* in 2023. We want this year to be better than last. We can't change much out there...the world is just going to be what it is. BUT...we can work on ourselves. The first week we redefined what it means to realign our understanding of, and relationship with, God. This is a foundational truth and practice. The second week we went in considerable detail about how to develop a regular practice of self-examination and testing. And the importance of doing this work BEFORE we run into problems. We also talked about having a scripturally grounded faith to examine and test ourselves with. Last week we discussed the importance and practice of gathering and growing in wisdom. Today, how to live truly courageously.

III Sunday.

Okay, a disclaimer first. This will be a less than settled devotion. I genuinely struggled through the topic of courage, and here is why. First, I think western culture has warped the idea of courage and it usually ends up in triumphal 'winning' rather than standing alone in our beliefs with no certainty that our courage will be rewarded. Now, we're willing to stand for some beliefs and values, but if we're honest they tend to be the same values and beliefs that our closest peer group holds. Which I'm not sure is actually courage. Second, courage is often framed in aggressive terms rather than the same kind of quiet courage that led Jesus to the cross. We want others to know how wrong they are, and courage is often expressed through a bullhorn or some in your face sign or bumper sticker we flaunt. But, I want to highlight a greater courage. It's the single mom/dad who's working two jobs and still getting their kids ready for school. It's the person who is fighting a big battle...alone, and they just show up day after day. Courage is asking, how did I contribute to the problem/issue? It's staying in a tough or uncomfortable conversation or situation to work it out as long as possible. It's pushing back against your own discomfort in a tough situation and not bailing.

So, courage. What do you think of when you hear the word courage?

How have you seen or experienced what you would call courage?

We have two passages today, and we'll just ask a few questions about each. We aren't going to come to some final truth or understanding about what courage is. What we're hoping to do is to understand where courage is rooted and then different ways we can live that out.

Our first passage. Read **Joshua 1:1-9**.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

What did it say to you about being "*strong and courageous*"?

Now a really tough question based on most scholars saying this passage contains both situational truths (which means naming truths they only apply to this specific story), and universal truths that we can apply to our lives now. **What do you see as courage specific to Joshua's story, and what are truths about being courageous we can pull from this passage and apply to our daily lives?**

There are basically two levels of reading of this passage. One, is the narrative account of the specific detail that only pertains to Joshua and the taking of lands on the way to The Promised Land. Some people have tried to allegorize each detail of this story. I understand that desire, but it can lead to some very dangerous placing your own beliefs and values into a historical account.

But we are able to pull some universal truths from this story.

God is saying wherever you go, I will be there with you.

God is saying he will not fail you or abandon you.

Obey all that I've told you. Let it penetrate deep into your heart.

Stay on the right path. Talked about this last week.

Be strong, courageous, do not be afraid or discouraged, because God is with you.

These are great universal truths that give us hope, strength, courage no matter what we're facing.

The second passage is an almost equally incredible historical account, but it has a slight twist in the way it understands courage. Read **Daniel 3:16-18**.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

How did it speak to you about being courageous?

How was courage in this story different from the courage talked about in the Joshua passage?

This passage was equally dramatic. But there was an obvious difference in the way courage was expressed. Joshua seemed to have a confident assurance, almost certainty, that all of the specific promises God made to him would come to pass. Not that the path would be easy. But it would happen just as God had said. And even though he accomplished this he lived in certainty.

This was not the storyline in the account from Daniel 3. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego showed tremendous courage. But their courage was not in the assurance that things would work out the way they wanted things to. Their courage was rooted in the nature of God. And even if they weren't saved God was still God, and they would not be afraid. This is the courage I want us to embrace.

IV Challenge.

We have no assurance life will go like we want it to. The world is a scary place and constantly changing. We have no hope that things will turn out like we want them to. But we have full hope God will be who he is, and do what he needs to do to reconcile the world. Which is what all of us want.

So, the final question of this Fresh Start. **What do you need in your life to live fully in this kind of courage?**