

LESSON 3

Joshua: Courage for the Task

Joshua 1:1–9

Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9

Class Overview: After Moses' death, the weight of leadership fell upon Joshua. The wilderness generation was gone, and the time had come for Israel to cross the Jordan and claim the land God had promised. Joshua faced overwhelming responsibility, a grieving nation, and a future filled with uncertainty. Yet God's message to him was clear and repeated three times: *"Be strong and courageous."* This lesson shows that courage in God's service is not the absence of fear but the presence of faith. The same God who strengthened Joshua to lead Israel gives His people courage today to obey His word and trust His promises.

Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Understand the historical and spiritual transition from Moses to Joshua.
2. Explain what true courage looks like in the context of faith and obedience.
3. Identify the promises God gave Joshua and how they apply to believers today.
4. Recognize that courage grows from confidence in God's presence and word.
5. Commit to taking courageous steps of obedience in your own walk with God.

Introduction

JOSHUA'S STORY BEGINS AT A CRUCIAL, DIFFICULT MOMENT in Israel's history. Moses, the only leader the people had ever known, was gone. The wilderness wanderings had ended, and the next step was to enter the land of Canaan: a place filled with fortified cities, mighty armies, and long-standing enemies. For forty years, Joshua had served as Moses' assistant, standing faithfully by his side. But now, the responsibility was fully on his shoulders. The future of a nation depended on his leadership and bravery.

It's not surprising that Joshua felt overwhelmed by fear. The people depended on him for strength, yet he was mourning the loss of his mentor. The road ahead would test every bit of his faith. That's why God spoke to him so clearly and repeatedly: "Be strong and courageous." These words were divine commands based on a promise. Joshua's courage wouldn't come from personality or experience alone but from the certainty that God was with him.

The lesson of Joshua 1:1–9 speaks for all time. Each generation of God's people faces its own moments of change, challenge, and uncertainty. Whether stepping into a new role, enduring hardship, or standing for truth, the message remains the same: be strong and courageous. True courage isn't the absence of fear but the choice to trust God's presence and follow His word despite fear. Joshua's story shows that strength for the task always comes from the One who sends us.

Historical Background

Joshua was familiar with leadership and battle. His name means "The Lord is salvation," and he had long served as Moses' trusted follower. He led Israel's forces against Amalek (Exodus 17), accompanied Moses partway up Mount Sinai (Exodus 24), and was one of the twelve spies who surveyed the Promised Land (Numbers 13). Along with Caleb, he believed in God's promise and encouraged the people to enter the land forty years earlier. Because of his faith, he and Caleb were the only two of their generation allowed to see Canaan.

By the time of Joshua 1, the nation had spent forty years wandering in the wilderness. Moses had died on Mount Nebo, and God had buried him there (Deuteronomy 34:5–6). Israel was camped on the plains of Moab, across the Jordan River from Jericho. The people were tired but hopeful. They had seen God’s power in the wilderness, but now they faced a new kind of challenge: settling and securing the land. The task was humanly impossible, yet God’s promise was sure: “Every place the sole of your foot treads, I have given to you” (Joshua 1:3).

The command “Be strong and courageous” appears three times in this chapter (vv. 6, 7, 9), each linked to a specific reason. Joshua was to be strong because of God’s *promise* (“You will distribute the land I swore to their ancestors”), strong through God’s *word* (“Be careful to observe everything written in it”), and strong in God’s *presence* (“The Lord your God is with you wherever you go”). These three truths form the foundation of all courage in serving God.

Joshua’s mission was clear: lead the people into the land and follow the Book of the Law. Israel’s success wouldn’t rely on military power but on spiritual obedience. Just as God had been with Moses, He now promised to be with Joshua. That reassurance turned fear into faith and gave him the courage to face every battle ahead.

God’s Promises Bring Courage

The first words Joshua heard after Moses’ death were filled with both grief and hope: “*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*” (Joshua 1:2). Joshua had lost his mentor and friend, but the work of God was not over. The promises of God did not die with Moses. What God had spoken to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob centuries earlier was still certain. God’s plan never depends on one person; it continues through every generation that trusts Him.

God grounded Joshua’s courage in His promises. He said, “*Every place the sole of your foot treads, I have given to you . . . No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or abandon you*” (Joshua 1:3–5). Before Joshua

lifted a sword or crossed a river, God reminded him that victory was already secured. The land was described in the past tense, *"I have given you,"* because in God's mind, the outcome was already decided. Courage grows when we believe that God's promises are stronger than our problems.

These promises were not vague assurances; they were specific and based on history. God had sworn to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land (Genesis 12:7; 15:18). Now that promise was coming true through Joshua. The same God who had parted the Red Sea was about to part the Jordan. The same God who had fed Israel in the wilderness would now fight for them in Canaan. Joshua could face the future with confidence, not because he was experienced, but because God was faithful.

The command to "be strong and courageous" in verse 6 is based on that foundation. God linked Joshua's strength to His faithfulness: *"For you will distribute the land I swore to their ancestors to give them."* The word *swore* is essential. God commits Himself to His word. What He promises, He fulfills. Joshua's courage didn't come from optimism or self-confidence. It came from knowing that the God who called him could not lie.

This truth still applies to God's people today. We find courage in the promises of His word. When Jesus said, "I am with you always," He offered the same assurance Joshua received. When He said, "I will build my church," He proclaimed that His plans would endure despite opposition. Every act of obedience we undertake is built on a foundation of divine certainty. We can move forward into unknown territory because God has already gone ahead of us.

Practical faith starts when we stop judging challenges by their size and begin judging them by God's faithfulness. Fear often grows in the space where promises are forgotten. That's why God began with reassurance: *"I will not leave you or abandon you."* The strength to lead, teach, or serve doesn't come from what we can control, it comes from recalling what God has already said.

When we anchor our hearts in His promises, courage comes naturally. We can face grief, uncertainty, and overwhelming tasks with peace because the same God who stood beside Joshua stands with us. The command “Be strong and courageous” isn’t about self-confidence; it’s a call to trust in the unchanging faithfulness of God.

God’s Word Sustains Courage

After reminding Joshua of His promises, God gave him another source of strength: His Word. *“Be strong and very courageous to observe carefully the whole instruction my servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go. This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do”* (Joshua 1:7–8).

Courage is not just emotional; it is moral and spiritual. Joshua’s success relied not on clever strategy or military power but on faithful obedience to God’s revealed will. God did not instruct him to study the enemy’s defenses; He commanded him to study His Word. True strength comes from knowing, trusting, and applying what God has spoken.

God told Joshua to keep His Word on his lips, in his mind, and in his actions. Each phrase holds importance. “Do not let it depart from your mouth” means speak it often: teach it, discuss it, and encourage others with it. “Meditate on it day and night” means let it fill your thoughts continuously. Courage grows when Scripture influences how we see the world. “Observe everything written in it” means obedience must be complete, not selective. Joshua could not follow God halfway or only when it was convenient. Every decision, battle plan, and command must come from God’s Word.

This pattern is vital for everyone who serves God today. The more we understand His Word, the more we trust His promises. Scripture trains the heart to overcome fear by keeping us focused on God’s truth rather than our circumstances. Psalm 1 describes the person who delights in the Lord’s instruction and meditates on it day and night as being “like a tree planted beside flowing streams.” Strength and stability come from deep roots in God’s Word.

Courage without Scripture quickly turns to presumption. Israel's later defeats during Joshua's lifetime (such as at Ai in chapter 7) show that success without obedience is impossible. God wanted Joshua to realize that His presence and blessing would stay only as long as His Word remained the focus. The same principle applies to the church. We can develop programs, train leaders, and plan strategies, but without Scripture as the foundation, spiritual strength diminishes.

To "not turn from it to the right or the left" means staying true when pressures pull in all directions. Courageous faith remains steady even when it's unpopular or costly. For Joshua, that involved trusting God's commands even when the plan seemed impossible, like marching around Jericho's walls in silence. For us, it means living by God's truth when culture, convenience, or comfort urge us to compromise.

God's call to meditate day and night challenges us to let Scripture do more than inform—it must transform. Reading the Word fuels courage; obeying it completes it. We don't need to summon bravery from within; we need to stay close to the voice that gives it. The same Spirit who strengthened Joshua strengthens us through the Word today. When God's Word fills our hearts, His courage fills our lives.

In short, Joshua's courage did not stem from pep talks or positive thinking. It came from a steady, disciplined walk with God through His Word. Strength diminishes when we drift away from Scripture; it grows when we stay in it. As God told Joshua, success and peace belong to those who keep His Word at the center of their lives.

God's Presence Empowers Courage

After reminding Joshua of His promises and instructing him to remain grounded in His Word, God provided one final source of courage: His constant presence. Verse 9 highlights this message best: *"Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

This wasn't a new idea for Joshua. He had experienced God's presence through Moses for many years. He had stood at the base of Mount Sinai, where God's glory appeared in fire and cloud. He had watched the pillar

of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night leading the people. But now, the assurance was personal. The same divine presence that once rested on Moses would now be with him. Joshua wouldn't be leading alone.

Fear and discouragement are natural during moments of great responsibility. Joshua faced the huge challenge of leading a nation into uncharted territory and capturing fortified cities. Still, God didn't provide him with detailed battle plans or maps. He gave him Himself. That truth is what makes biblical courage different from human bravery. Human courage depends on preparation and confidence; divine courage depends on God's presence.

Throughout Scripture, God's presence is consistently the answer to fear. When He called Moses, He said, "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12). When Gideon hesitated, He said, "Go in the strength you have ... I will be with you" (Judges 6:14–16). When Jesus sent His disciples into the world, His final words were, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). The pattern remains the same: God's presence is His greatest gift to His followers.

Notice that in verse 9, God repeats his command to Joshua: "Do not be afraid" and "Do not be discouraged." These two phrases address the main enemies of faith. Fear looks ahead and imagines defeat, while discouragement looks back and dwells on failure. Both steal courage. The remedy for both is the same, remembering that the Lord is near. Courage does not mean we stop feeling afraid; it means we choose to act in faith rather than fear, because we know God is with us.

For Christians today, the promise of God's presence feels even more personal. Through the Holy Spirit, God lives within us. We don't just have God beside us, we carry His power inside. That presence provides comfort in hardships, guidance when we're confused, and strength when we are weak. When we feel lonely or overwhelmed, we can echo David's words: "Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for You are with me" (Psalm 23:4).

The greatest challenge to Joshua's courage would come later, as he faced opposition, disobedience among his own people, and years of warfare.

Yet each victory came from one unwavering truth: God was with him. The same applies to us. Our strength for service, our endurance through trials, and our confidence in the face of fear all depend on this promise.

When God said, “The Lord your God is with you wherever you go,” He eliminated every condition. His presence is constant, whether in victory or failure, in peace or conflict. That promise allows us to serve boldly and faithfully. We might not know the future, but we know who goes with us into it. *The courage to do God’s will doesn’t come from who we are or what we can do—it comes from the God who never leaves us.*

Lesson Summary and Reflection

Joshua 1 marks a pivotal moment in Israel’s history. With Moses gone, Joshua must lead the next generation into God’s promises. The task is daunting, the people are anxious, and the future is uncertain. But God speaks to Joshua with words that resonate with every servant who has ever faced fear: “*Be strong and courageous.*” Those words are not just encouragement. They are a command based on three powerful truths. God’s promises inspire courage, His Word sustains courage, and His presence empowers courage.

First, *courage starts with trusting in God’s promises.* The Lord reminded Joshua that His plan had not failed. What He swore to Abraham centuries earlier remains certain. The land has already been given, and victory is already assured. Joshua could move forward confidently because God’s word is dependable. The same truth applies to us. When we rely on God’s promises, fear loses its strength. His faithfulness surpasses any obstacle we face.

Second, *courage is upheld by Scripture.* God instructed Joshua to keep His Word constantly in his mind—to speak it, meditate on it, and obey it fully. The command to “not turn from it to the right or to the left” reminds us that courage and obedience are inseparable. The person who lives by God’s Word will not break down under pressure. When God’s truth fills our thoughts, our outlook shifts. We stop listening to fear and start listening to faith.

Finally, *courage is strengthened by God's presence*. "Do not be afraid or discouraged," God said, "for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." That promise was enough for Joshua, and it is enough for us. God never leaves His people alone. His presence transforms impossible tasks into opportunities for faith. When we know He is near, fear no longer controls us.

Strength and courage come from trust, not talent. We find courage when we remember that God keeps His promises, guides us through His Word, and walks with us in every situation. The same God who called Joshua to lead His people into the Promised Land calls us to live boldly in His service today. He still says, "Be strong and courageous... I will be with you wherever you go."

Key Truths

- God's promises are the foundation of lasting courage.
- Scripture strengthens faith and guards against fear.
- True courage means trusting and obeying God, even when afraid.
- God's presence removes the need to rely on our own strength.
- Every challenge becomes an opportunity to prove God's faithfulness.

Conclusion

Joshua's courage did not come from himself; it was rooted in God. Every victory he won, every battle he faced, started with faith in God's presence and promise. The same holds true for us today. The call to "be strong and courageous" isn't about ignoring fear but overcoming it through faith. God has already provided us with everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The question is whether we will trust Him enough to act.

When you face a moment of uncertainty or transition, remember Joshua's lesson. Stand on God's promises. Stay grounded in His Word. Trust His presence. The Lord who was with Joshua is with you. And with Him beside you, there is no reason to fear the task ahead.

Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge

Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9 (CSB)

This verse captures the heart of Joshua's call and the foundation of all Christian courage. It reminds us that fear fades when we remember who walks beside us. God's presence is not occasional—it is constant.

Weekly Challenge

1. Memorize Joshua 1:9.

Repeat it daily until it becomes part of your thinking. Let it remind you that courage is not self-made—it's God-given.

2. Face One Fear with Faith.

Identify a situation where fear or hesitation has held you back. Pray specifically for courage to obey God in that area this week.

3. Read God's Word Daily.

Follow God's command to Joshua by setting aside time each day to meditate on Scripture. Ask, "What is God teaching me through His Word today?"

spiritbuilding.com

4. Encourage Another Believer.

Find someone who feels discouraged or uncertain. Share Joshua 1:9 with them and remind them that God is with them, too.

5. Record a Victory.

At the end of the week, write down one way God gave you courage to act when you felt afraid. Use it as a personal testimony of His faithfulness.

For Discussion

1. What fears or uncertainties are keeping you from stepping into something God is calling you to do?

2. Which of God's promises gives you the most courage when life feels overwhelming?

3. How can you keep God's Word at the center of your thoughts and decisions this week?

4. In what ways have you experienced the truth of God's presence during difficult times?

5. How can Joshua's example help you lead, serve, or stand firm when others are hesitant or afraid?
