

Courage through Presence

January 3, 2026

Joshua 1:9

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.

I love the theme “Encountering God’s Presence,” because it validates a spiritual truth that we do so much more than just acknowledge the existence of God in our spiritual life; we actually ENCOUNTER the PRESENCE of the ALMIGHTY.

When I first heard the theme “Encountering God’s Presence,” I recalled some of the momentous celebratory occasions that we have shared as a church body that have been evidence of His blessing, His faithfulness and His glory. I recall the first time that our church family shared a worship service at 6040 Watson Blvd on May 28, 2000 – many of the church members drove in caravan fashion from the former Eberta Road church home, and we celebrated together that God had brought us to the present location, (that was then on the outskirts of town surrounded by peach tree orchards). We celebrated God’s presence as we all proclaimed in song, “Look what the Lord has done.” We had no idea what God would do to further expand the territory and the impact of that single red brick building with its stucco drive-under canopy over the following twenty-five years to our current multi building campus.

I recall the initial Celebrate Recovery service at the Assembly over six years ago – we declared God’s providence and tearfully trusted that the chains of the bondage from addiction would be broken, and that God would use this ministry platform to bring the broken-hearted to salvation through the Grace of Jesus. Even as high as our expectations of faith were, none of us had a clue the degree to which God would exponentially draw literally thousands of souls into the Kingdom through CR at the Assembly during these recent years. As we embark upon expansion of the homeless ministry and further increase of our prison ministry, we have similar expectations of great faith.

As much as we are captivated by these magnanimous broad-scale evidence of God’s presence, His Word is specific in affirming that God’s power are experienced through INDIVIDUAL situations in PERSONAL lives. God CAN and WILL do what cannot be done in any other way through any other means.

In our theme passage, God commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous, to resist discouragement and to have complete and unwavering confidence in God’s presence.

God knew Joshua's challenges and his struggles. Joshua had immense responsibility and overwhelming challenges ahead of him; he may have been experiencing fear and uncertainty. In the midst of Joshua's struggles God spoke to him personally. The direction for Joshua to be strong and courageous wasn't a recommendation or a light-hearted suggestion, it was an imperative command. God committed His presence to be with Joshua.

God speaks to us through His Word. The reference of Joshua 1:9 directly applies to your life and to mine. God is the same God who provided strength and courage to Joshua. To the degree that God's presence provides us with courage and strength, I believe it to be a true statement that God IS our strength and that God IS our courage. We don't have to beg or plead for the strength or the courage of God; we already have them through Him. As you begin your day, commit to boldly and courageously walk in the strength of the Lord in every task you undertake and every challenge you face.

Ps. Richard