



Central  
Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

*We Can Be Strong and Courageous*

Joshua 1:1–18

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*series: Ventures in Faith: The Book of Joshua*

Several years ago there was a TV series called *Early Edition*. Did you ever watch it? I didn't see much of it, but its story line was about a young man who somehow was able to read tomorrow's newspaper today. In other words, he was able to know what was going to happen a day before it actually happened. Now let me ask you: If you were able to know what was going to happen before it happened, how would you use that knowledge? What if we knew tomorrow's price of stocks and bonds? Or scores of tomorrow's games? Would you use it to help people in need? If you knew someone was going to be in trouble and needed help, would you rush to help them?

Some people obsess with the idea of trying to know the immediate future. But in reality none of us really knows the future here on earth. No one knows what tomorrow will bring. When I think of all the great people working to find us a permanent 7-day-a-week facility and a new campus pastor to lead us and renew in us vision to reach into the mid-peninsula with the gospel of Jesus Christ, I know that all of us can imagine what that will look like. We can dream. But none of us knows what life will look like or even what our church will look like a year from now.

Solomon talks about this kind of thinking. In Ecclesiastes 8:7 he says, ***"Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come?"*** As smart as Solomon was, he didn't know the future, I sure don't know the future, and I would add, if anyone claims they know what tomorrow will bring, I would counsel you to get as far away from that person as possible!

Who can tell us what is to come? Only God can. In fact God is the only one who knows the future. Regarding our future there are a couple of things that God tells us not to do. First he tells us not to presume about tomorrow. Proverbs 27:1 says, ***"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth."*** Don't boast. Don't get cocky about your plans for tomorrow or next week or next year because life has this strange way of changing our plans. Most of us get presumptuous about the future. We trust in our strength, ability, and brain power and experience to get us there. We are presumptuous when we don't pray, when we don't fear God, when we don't seek first to be obedient to God.

Also, God tells us not to panic about the future. From a world's standpoint there is a lot going on in our world that warrants panic. Jesus says in Matthew 6:34, ***"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself."*** Thankfully, we

serve a loving and merciful God. Yes, he is known to give us more than we can handle. Why? So we will trust him and give him credit as he pulls us through. But Jesus says, "Because I know the future you can 'Live your life as it comes, one day at a time.'" What a great calming and restful thought that is.

So God says, "don't presume" about the future and "don't panic" about the future. But what does God tell us to do when we look to the unknown of the future? What he tells us is found in Joshua chapter 1. In fact it is repeated four times. Three times God says it and one time the people say it back to Joshua. What does God say to us when we face an unknown future? He says, "Be strong and courageous!" And he gives us five reasons why we can be strong and courageous.

As you have figured out, today we are kicking off a new teaching series in the book of Joshua that will take us into the New Year. The first five books of the Old Testament are called the books of the Law or the Pentateuch. They are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Joshua comes right after Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy Moses is the leader of the people and we see his leadership evident as he leads his people to the very brink of the Promised Land. We know from the account that Moses was never going to enter the Promised Land because of his own disobedience when he got angry and struck the rock in Numbers chapter 20. So throughout Numbers and Deuteronomy we see life for the Israelites in the desert. We see an entire generation of Israelites over 20 years of age wander in the wilderness and then die off because of their lack of faith and disobedience. Everyone but Joshua and Caleb would not survive to enter the Promised Land.

So the first phrase of the first chapter of the first verse of Joshua is, ***"After the death of Moses..."*** The book of Joshua provides a historical look at Israel after they completed their 40 years of wandering in the desert and records how they finally cross the Jordan River and actually enter the land, conquer it and claim it as the land God promised them. This land they were about to enter was rooted in the promise to Abraham back in Genesis 12.

We will learn a lot together about facing our future with strength and courage from our study of Joshua. So as we each consider our future, let's not be presumptuous, and let's not panic. Instead, let us be strong and courageous. The first reason we can be strong and courageous is because of God's promises.

## Because of God's Promises

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west (verses 1-4).

In the last chapter of Deuteronomy Moses is dying. In the last three verses of chapter 34 we see a beautiful summary of his life. Remember Moses their great leader had just died. He was considered to be the greatest man who had ever lived. In order to appreciate the reference to Moses' death, we must appreciate his greatness. Moses was a rock star. Back in Exodus 32, after that golden calf fiasco, Israel was one inch from spontaneous combustion for their sin. The nation was hanging by a thread. Moses was the only Israelite left in a covenant relationship with Yahweh and he stood in the gap and became Israel's mediator. He intervened to save his nation from destruction. He was revered by Israel. There was no one like Moses until the One greater than Moses came.

To the Israelites, Moses was The Servant of the Lord. Their leader was gone. What do you do when your leader is gone? What do you do after the grief, after the funeral, after saying good bye? What do you do when the servant of God who you loved and led you leaves you and a raging river lies between you and the land you are to inherit?

It's with this background that the writer gives us a reminder of the promises of God. It is easy for us to panic when a leader leaves us. What will happen? Who will lead us now? But this story helps us understand that Moses, as great as he was, was just one link in a chain of leaders. We know God is sovereign, therefore we know that nothing happens that surprises him. Nothing happens that causes him anxiety. He isn't up there saying, well, Moses is gone; who is going to carry this forward? Throughout history when one leader passes on or falls away, God just says, "Next." God doesn't panic when there is an empty place on the church org chart. The first lesson we can learn from Joshua is that God's purposes do not change. People change. Leaders change. It will be a new generation led by a new leader Joshua who will claim the land.

Did God say, "Moses my servant has died so you must wait."? No. Instead he says, "Joshua, you are the new leader. You and all my people, all 2.5 million of them, rise up and cross over into the land." God is saying, follow this new leader. His name is Joshua. His name means Yahweh or God saves, a great name for a leader

who will lead Israel under God's command to a victorious conquest of the promised land.

It's important for us to remember to think of God's promises to us personally as well as God's promises to us as a church body in transition. God's promise doesn't evaporate when a leader transitions out. God's faithfulness to his promises doesn't evaporate in the face of challenges between us and the Promised Land. Why? Because God's promises do not hinge on how easy or hard circumstances seem.

Verses 2-4 actually summarizes the entire book. In verse 2 God says "***You will cross the Jordan into the land.***" Verse 3 God says, "***You will conquer the land.***" Verse 4 is where God "***explains the boundaries of the land that will be distributed to each of the tribes of Israel.***" Notice how much detail God reveals about the extent of the land. If you get out your Bible Atlas you can see the Euphrates River which is the eastern boundary. You can see the western boundary which is the Mediterranean Sea. You can see the Northern region known as the Hittite Country and you can see the desert to the south and west including the Judean desert west of the Jordan.

The passage tells us that this promised land is presented as a gift which the Lord is about to give. Here is a reoccurring theme: God promises it, but as we will see they must rise up, cross over on faith and take the land for themselves. Whether it's a funeral, or a raging river, or God's enemies in front of us, we can be strong and courageous because of God's eternal and unchanging promises.

## Because of God's Presence

**No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them (verses 5-6).**

God's words to Joshua here speak to a kind of invincibility that is totally linked to God's promises and presence. Courage must be linked to a calling, a challenge to do something. Courage rests on a clear assignment from God. There is no such thing as courage apart from a mission. Just as there is no such thing as faith without challenges.

Nothing in life happens without courage. Do you remember back in Exodus chapter 3 when Moses was called by God to face up to the Israelites and then face up to Pharaoh? How did Moses answer God? He said, "Not me Lord, send someone else." The excuses poured out of his mouth. "Lord, this is too hard. I'm not qualified. I don't speak well. The Israelites won't respect me. I've blown it in my past. And it can be downright dangerous going up against Pharaoh. Send someone else." And what did God say to Moses? He said, "I told you what to do. Just do it. Do not fear, I will

be with you. Of course you can't accomplish this mission without me. That is the point. My name is to be glorified not yours."

Now even though their leader Moses was no longer present with them, God remains present with them. God never calls us to anything without the promise of his presence with us. So now with Joshua, it is because of this assurance of God's presence that God can exhort Joshua to be strong and courageous. God didn't tell him to grit his teeth or somehow figure out how to screw on more courage. He is to be strong and courageous only because Yahweh is with him.

How does knowing that God will never leave us or forsake us help us to be strong and courageous as we are called to advance across those personal raging rivers, in our lives? How does knowing God is with us challenge us to grow in contentment? How does it help us let go of those things in the world that keep us bound up in fear and insecurity about our future? How does knowing God is with us help us from becoming enslaved to the things in this world that promise security but never seem to deliver what they promised? This Old Testament truth translates well into the New Testament for Christians. In Hebrews 13:5-6 the writer says, *"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?'"* I can't think of anything more essential for me to hear than God repeating to me amid all the changing circumstances in our personal and church life "I will be with you" or "I will not forsake you."

When we think about advancing as a church into new frontiers and through unknowns, we think of Jesus' words to a bunch of scared disciples before he sent them out on their worldwide mission into new frontiers with lots of scary unknowns. What were his last words to them? Jesus himself said in Matthew 28:20, *"I am with you always to the very end of the age."*

### **Because of God's Word**

**"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 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" (verses 7-9.)**

Courage is anchored by the Word of God. Success for Joshua wasn't because he strived to obey the word of God. Success for Joshua was because Joshua loved God and loved his Word and he drew close to God and God is with him and enabled him to

obey. In the same way, as Christians we do not deepen spiritually because we strive harder than our neighbor to obey God's word. That's work on our part and we always fall short when we work to obey. Instead of working to obey, we deepen spiritually when we work to draw close to God by drawing close to Christ in relationship when we pray, read, meditate on his Word, and share the love of God in relationship with other believers in community.

It is so important in this time of transition for our church that we stay anchored to the Word of God. To be strong and courageous we need a word from the Lord. We need to proclaim it. We need to proclaim truth. Success or failure in our future mission is tied to our relationship to God's truth being known and made known to others.

God also tells Joshua to meditate on God's Word. We don't talk about meditating very much at church. When we think of meditation we may think of sitting cross leg, hands folded, humming or chanting something. What does meditating God's way really mean? Meditation is a good biblical word. It means dull sound. It's thinking about what God can do, how God works in our lives day and night. So when trials and tests come we just turn up the sound on what is already playing and replaying in the background.

**So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own'" (verses 10-11).**

Most people are afraid of the unknown. Those things we have never seen or experienced can overwhelm us. I like old maps. On old maps, back before the world was understood in modern terms, map makers would put down what they knew, but at the edges of the map, beyond which they had no knowledge or understanding, they would often write, "Beyond here, there be dragons." I think of the Israelites as they packed up, they were likely looking across the Jordan at a land full of hostile Canaanites and saying, "Beyond here, there be dragons."

And when God actually opens up a new 7-day-a-week facility for us and we begin to pack up, we look at the unknown, we imagine the challenges, the obstacles and we can easily fall into saying, "Beyond here, there be dragons." Argh.... But instead we say "Argh... beyond here, there be the LORD your God." Be strong and courageous because he has promised us a mission to carry forth, his presence as we step out in obedience, and his Word to anchor us in truth. So don't be afraid, do not be discouraged.

### **Because of God's People**

**But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, "Remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave**

you after he said, 'The Lord your God will give you rest by giving you this land.' Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, ready for battle, must cross over ahead of your fellow Israelites. You are to help them until the Lord gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land the Lord your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise" (verses 12-15).

This is a great reminder that we find strength and courage from one another when we have others fighting the same battle alongside us. Back in the book of Numbers Moses was concerned that the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh would stay in their land east of the Jordan River and not help in the conquest of land west of the Jordan. That their men wouldn't show up for the fight and when the people saw this they would become discouraged and lose their courage and unbelief would lead to their defeat. But Joshua reminded them of what Moses had said, "you can leave your wives and children and animals in your land in the east, but you must send your fighting men to join us, then they can return." All Israel was to participate in the conquest.

When we have one next to us serving and sacrificing it gives us courage. When we have community and feel a sense of belonging and connection with other believers we are strengthened for the journey. As we said earlier, today is Community Life Sunday. I am convinced that one of the critical things that holds us together, that brings us joy, that helps us grow spiritually is our connection with a smaller group of believers. Community is like glue for South Campus. It doesn't require a lot of staff, it doesn't require a building, it doesn't require amazing talents. It just requires a commitment to engage deeply with other believers and be willing to be loved and love as God loves us. I am also convinced that if South Campus can realize the awesome potential to have deeper and greater community, it can offer something so much more attractive to those who don't know Jesus than anything the world can offer.

We have covered a lot of ground here this morning. So far in Joshua chapter 1 we have seen four reasons why we can be strong and courageous. And we have one more: We can be strong and courageous because of God's leaders. The people have turned a corner. They are ready to move on to follow a new leader.

## Because of God's Leaders

Then they answered Joshua, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey it, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!" (verses 16-18).

The people begin to encourage their leader. They tell Joshua to be strong and courageous. Don't forget to encourage your leaders among you. Encourage those who serve in our nursery, with our kids, and with our students, our set up and take down crews, our sound and media people, our coffee and greeters, and ushers, and Community Group Leaders, and worship leaders. Encourage our elders who are called to be especially strong and courageous during this time of transition. Courage for what? Leadership for what? To lead us across the river and into our promised land as South Campus. Lift them up with your prayers. They know that their courage rests on their assignment to stay close to God and lead us well. And I challenge each of you here. What has God called you to do? What has he already told you. Are you doing it? Elizabeth Elliot said, "God has not called us to a playground but to a battleground."

I can guarantee you one thing in this transition. Every assignment can lead to burn out, and I know that some of us if we are not burned out we can at least see it on the horizon. To avoid burnout we need to see our assignment as more than a job. In every assignment, I want to encourage you to trust that God is present with you. So if God is with us for every assignment, that means that God gives us an opportunity to grow spiritually. Every assignment is an opportunity to be sanctified. And in every assignment we are safe because God is with us. Phillip Brooks, 19th century Puritan preacher said this, "Don't ask God for tasks equal to your powers. Ask God for powers equal to your tasks. The doing of the ministry is not the miracle, but you become the miracle in the process of doing the work."

Moses has died. But God has not died. Some leaders have left us. But God has not left us. I can tell you we have leaders who have not left us, and we look forward to new leaders in our future who will be strong and courageous, strong and courageous because they are anchored in God's Promises, His Presence, His Word, and His People. And even though it may feel today that "there be dragons out there," we will rise and go as the Lord leads us.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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