

How to Be Strong and Courageous

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HOW TO BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS:

We are all familiar with the story of Moses, leading the Israelites out of Egypt, their 40 year sojourn in the wilderness - wandering from place to place, fighting battles, being obedient at times to the Lord but frequently disobeying His commandments. Even Moses, their vaunted and favoured leader was refused the right to enter the promised land; he was only allowed to see it from the top of mount Pisgah. He must have yearned to go there but leading the chosen people into the Promised Land was a task God gave to Joshua when he had instructed Moses to commission Joshua for the task in Deuteronomy 31.

Let's pick the story up in Joshua 1:1-9.

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. 4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. 5 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

This text is rich in nuance and meaning but it's easy for us flawed humans to take the idea of being strong and courageous out of context.

In our modern, secular society we see and hear people talking about strength and courage. For some, those words mean lording it over others, taking "your fair share", pitting your interests over the interests of others. We see this in popular media where people posture, posing as experts trying to sell you books or programs for self help or how to get what you deserve - your fair share!.

Our North American popular culture is not centred on objective truth; it's centred on special interests, personal opinions, fake news, shaming others, creating conflict and division. If I can yell over you, or shut you down, I'm being courageous; if I get the upper hand over you, I'm strong. And even some Christians can fall into these traps when we try to push our views on others without godly love, humility and true concern for the other person involved. It's too easy to let human pride get in the way: "I'm right" we think, "and you're wrong and I can out debate and outshout you." That's not the Christian approach and it's certainly not what God was saying to Joshua and to us as well.

The things I've mentioned thus far are examples of trying to do things under our own strength and trumped up courage. And while some of us may be able to do this for a while, eventually we meet situations where our own courage and strength is depleted and we become weak and discouraged. This leads me to point number 1.

1. IT'S NOT MY STRENGTH OR COURAGE; IT'S GOD'S.

While God commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous, the implication is that this was and is strength and courage that comes from an endless sources. God promises Joshua, in Joshua 1:5-6, "**No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous.**" Notice that instructing Joshua to be strong and of good courage was preceded by a promise, that God would be with Joshua just as he had been with Moses. And as we understand more and more about the attributes of our almighty God, we also begin to recognize that God treats all who love and follow Him in the same manner; that strength and courage is available to us. If you or I try to do this on our own, we will burn out, wear out and ultimately fail.

And this leads me to our second point.

2. STRENGTH AND COURAGE ARE MINE - WITH CONDITIONS.

Chapter 1, verse 7 makes this clear. **“Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.”**

God requires that we follow His precepts to experience the supernatural courage and strength we see in the great men and women of God throughout history. When we consider the first Christian martyr, Stephen, in Acts chapter 7, who courageously preached the gospel to his murderers in spite of his imminent death, we recognize that this is supernatural; strength and courage is a gift from God for those who love *and* obey Him. Stephen’s last words as he was stoned to death were, **“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”** This kind of Holy Spirit driven strength is far greater than anything you or I could drum up out of our own human willpower. Psalm 27:14 says, **“Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!”** The psalmist recognizes the importance of surrendering to the LORD and to His timing; he brackets the phrase, **“be strong and let your heart take courage”** with **“wait for the LORD”!**

3. GOD ANTICIPATES MY HUMAN FRAILITY AND REMINDS ME OF HIS FAITHFULNESS.

While our own human nature is prone to doubt, fear, worry, anxiety, and discouragement, (a great word, literally reading as the removal or the absence of courage!), God knows us better than we know ourselves. When we recognize that the strength and courage we need isn’t our own, it’s God’s, and when we follow His instructions to obey Him, His commitment to us is clear in Joshua 1:9: **“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”**

Now that’s a promise to hold close.

Joshua was a leader of his people but more importantly he was a servant of the Lord.

The New Testament, too, is full of reminders of God's faithfulness and through our Saviour, and the indwelling Holy Spirit we are given the means to be strong and courageous. Most of you are very familiar with Ephesians 6:10-18 where we are instructed to put on the whole armour of God. (*Reference Pastor Chris' teachings on the Cedarview YouTube channel*) Paul starts by telling us, (verse 10) **"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might."** Whose might and whose strength? The Lord's! And in Isaiah 41:10 we learn more about the nature of our God when he promises his people, **"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your god; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."**

God is faithful in spite of our human frailty and weakness.

When Pastor Chris spoke this morning about the importance of serving, it was a reminder that God will use you and me when we are faithfully following Him. If you are called to serve as a volunteer in a ministry here at Cedarview, or to pursue a future as a global worker, or to plant a church in an unchurched town, or reach out to those folks in your neighbourhood who need Jesus, the courage and strength needed to do that comes from developing a healthy and mature relationship with the Lord. Otherwise, in spite of good intentions, your efforts will be unsustainable.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he commissioned his disciples (which includes YOU!, by the way). We find this in a familiar passage in Matthew 28 where our Lord said, **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

Jesus commissioned you and me; and just like God had instructed Moses to commission Joshua, this is to take on big kingdom tasks. But we were not expected to do this on our own power. Jesus promises that **"I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

Remember the source of your strength and courage.

A.W. Tozer wrote, "With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack? Surely, we are the most favoured of all creatures."

He also wrote, "Some morning, get up and allow the power of God to come on you, and allow him to bless you.:

I wonder what will happen if tomorrow is that morning!

Prayer