

**Stepping Out**  
Courageous Series Week 4  
Joshua 3  
September 18, 2016

Welcome/intro/vision

This is our fourth week in a seven-week series called Courageous  
we're looking at a character in the Bible who was told by God to be strong and courageous amidst a huge transition and as he takes the lead of a nation of people facing all sorts of challenges

And then he is! At every turn, Joshua faces all kinds of obstacles and challenges and opportunities for fear drive him to behave in ways that he might regret  
But instead he lives a strong and courageous life over and over and over again

And so we're looking at his story and talking about how WE might live lives of every-day courage, too

Because we feel most alive and are our best selves when we're living courageously—we like us the best when we know that we're living strong and courageous

And we believe that's because that God has made us in his image to live lives that are marked by courage, not settling for a life of fear or even comfort

Some of you aren't sure if you believe that, maybe you're here trying to figure out what you think about the whole God thing, we're so glad that you're here

We believe that it is worth it for us to invest in becoming strong and courageous people because to be strong a courageous best matches with our original design and intent  
And we invite you to join us as all of us are on a journey of figuring out how we might become people who are strong and courageous and how God might be a part of that

Now this morning, we're at the point in Joshua's story where the people of Israel are getting ready to cross from the east side of the Jordan River over to the West side of the Jordan River, into the land God has promised them

And in order to get from the east side of the Jordan River to the west side of the Jordan River, God's going to require them to take a first risky step and trust that he will provide for them and act on their behalf.

And so to get us warmed up here this morning, I want to invite you to think about a risk that you've taken in your life that has stuck with you, you just remember that time, that risk, that step

Because it felt like you were stepping off a cliff, taking a big plunge, A HUGE LEAP OF FAITH and you had no idea if it was going to work out or not.

Could be a move or a new job or a new project or to quit your job and see what else was out there or to have a hard conversation or to get married or have kids

You got something that felt risky to you? Do you remember how you felt on the front-end of that risk? A mixture of excitement and energy and nerves?

This is something of what a couple of key characters are going to be feeling and experiencing in the passage that we're going to be looking at

In response to a command from God, they're going to take a huge step of faith that they can't soften or cushion or manage in any way

They're just going to have to be strong and courageous and TRUST that God is going to come through like he says he will

And what happens to them is very helpful for us, as we consider our own leaps and steps of faith in our own lives

Bible/no Bible/Book table: 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays book table open and available with free Bibles and a ton of great, great books and resources, including a couple new books for this fall, check it out

***Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. <sup>2</sup> After three days the officers went throughout the camp, <sup>3</sup> giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God [if you're not a Bible person but you've seen Indiana Jones, then you're pretty much up to speed, that's the ark of the covenant that represented God's presence to the people], and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.***

***<sup>4</sup> Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the ark; do not go near it."***

***<sup>5</sup> Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you."***

Two weeks ago we celebrated my youngest daughter's 9<sup>th</sup> birthday, and she'd been counting down the days for I think about the past 3 months before getting there.

And the two nights before her birthday I was tucking her in before bed and we were celebrating that it was birthday eve eve! It was birthday eve eve, the next day was birthday eve, and the next day was the big day

And I was getting ready to pray for her and she looks at me with a really pensive face and she says to me,

“Dad, sometimes I feel like I’m so excited about my birthday but then it comes and it happens so fast and at the end of the day I feel like I’ve missed it.”

And I was so moved by her comment because I’ve felt like I’ve looked forward eagerly to some big days and then felt like I’ve missed them, too, how about you?

And I was moved all the more by that particular moment, looking at my littlest girl, about to turn 9, and aching to not miss those moments with her that are moving so fast.

And so we prayed that night and the next night, that we would both have eyes wide open to see what God was doing, to savor wonderful moments, to soak in all that there was to soak in and be grateful for all of it

Joshua here has full confidence that God is about to do something marvelous in the community’s midst, something that they’re going to need to tell their kids and grandkids about in the years ahead

And so he says to them, “Consecrate yourselves, because tomorrow God’s going to do something wonderful and amazing among you.”

Now part of what’s so great about Joshua here is that he doesn’t know yet WHAT God’s going to do.

But Joshua is so confident that God will do SOMETHING amazing, he tells everyone in the camp to get ready, to prepare themselves so that they don’t miss it

Consecrate yourselves: set apart, purify, cleanse, prepare something for a special use: demo on the PBO space, prayer over the PBO space next Sunday

A couple of different ways throughout the Old Testament that this command was used:

First was in order for a holy God to do his work among his people, especially in the OT, there was often a command for the people to purify themselves so that they could be in the presence of a holy God.

They do not want their sin to be an impediment to God’s presence and God’s work among them.

But consecrating themselves is also a way to be prepared to see, experience, know, and not miss out on anything that God will be doing in this next step of their journey.

Because just like a birthday, sometimes you can be in the midst of a big day and you can miss it, can't you? Sometimes you can be in the midst of a miracle and not have eyes to see it.

We see this with Jesus in the New Testament:

he would do a miraculous healing and some people in the crowd would have eyes to see it for what it was and they would praise God and put their trust in Jesus

but others in that same crowd who saw the exact same miracle would harden their hearts and look for ways to discredit him and ultimately to kill him

Same experience, same miracle, two very different hearts and two very different sets of eyes.

Joshua here wants the people to cultivate hearts and eyes that make sure that they don't miss what God's about to do.

My friends, as we're talking about being strong and courageous there are times and seasons of our lives that require greater courage and riskier steps

And in those times, there are often all kinds of pressures and temptations to introduce things into your life that will inhibit your spiritual awareness and blunt and dull you to what God might be doing

When instead we need to be consecrating ourselves so that we might not miss what God is up to—we need to be asking God in particular ways to give us wisdom and courage, to ask God in a particular way to help us to have eyes to see him

And we need, as best we can, to get rid of any gunk in our lives that would clog up our hearts or dull our eyes to see and participate in what God wants to do!

In my own life, one of the things that gunks up my spiritual works and keeps me from being able to see and experience and enter into the fullness of a God-moment is PRIDE

Pride makes it all about me, which unfortunately has at points KEPT ME from entering into work that in retrospect I think God wanted me to do—I needed to consecrate myself, set aside my pride, in order to participate in the work of God

And sometimes my pride doesn't keep me from being in the midst of God's work, but pride does dull me from being able to see what God is doing all around me.

because pride is always about me which always blocks my ability to see something that's all about Him.

And so when I'm approaching a moment where I know I need God to move in powerful ways, when I'm approaching a moment where I know that I'll need to be strong and courageous

I try to surface my pride in prayer and repent of it, let go of it, ask God to rescue me from it, because if I let it, my own pride could keep me from entering into the amazing things that God wants to do all around me

Another thing that gunks up my spiritual works is busy-ness.

If I just let my schedule run away and run all over me, then I could be very busy doing all kinds of nice things, urgent things! good things! and miss the really important things

And so especially in moments or seasons that I know are going to require me to be ever more strong and courageous, which often also means that there will be more things vying for my schedule

I try to guard my time with the Lord. I will turn towards God, not cut God out, when things get crazy busy or I'm in a season that requires more of me

Because when I'm in a season that requires more of me, that's the time when I need more of Him.

My friends, some of you are in particular seasons where you need to be strong and courageous in a particular way.

Sometimes that requires PREP work—to consecrate yourself and dedicate yourself to being attuned and available to the Lord and to ask him to help you to see it, and not to miss it.

Your gunk might be different from my gunk.

You perhaps are blessed to NEVER struggle with pride and to NEVER struggle with busy-ness!

But we've all got gunk we've got to get rid of in order to fully enter into and experience the amazing things of God that he wants to do around us and in us and through us

So Joshua calls all the camp to get ready for what God's going to do, even though he doesn't know what it will be yet

And then God speak and give Joshua the plan, here it is:

***<sup>7</sup> And the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. <sup>8</sup> Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: "When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river."***

Okay, so here we've got God giving Joshua the marching orders, the Path that we talked about week 1 that's going to fuel him to be strong and courageous

And God says first, "here's how the people you're leading are going to know for sure that I am with you like I was with Moses—I'm going to do this miracle."

Now, if you don't know Moses's story, maybe you've seen one of the many movies made about his life—and one of the signature events of his leadership was the crossing of the Red Sea

Quick back-story: 40 years before this event in Joshua, Moses leads the nation of Israel out of slavery in Egypt

But then the king of Egypt changes his mind and he sends his armies to chase down his slaves and get them back

So the armies are bearing down on the Israelites and God through Moses parts the Red Sea and the Israelites scurry across

And when the Egyptians attempt to do so, the water comes crashing in on them and the Israelites are delivered from Egypt once and for all

That parting of the Red Sea was a signature event that sealed Moses's authority as the leader of the Israelite nation 40 years earlier

So here, at the beginning of Joshua's tenure as Moses's replacement and as they get ready to leave the desert and move into the promised land, God is going to bookend that Red Sea experience with this one: the parting of the Jordan River.

But this one has one small wrinkle of a difference that we're going to explore as we get a little further into the story:

***<sup>9</sup> Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. <sup>10</sup> This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites.***

Okay, so if you're an Israelite, you're all ears at this point—GREAT! How will we know?

How will we know for sure that we'll be successful in this campaign, how will we know for sure that we're going to get the land?

How will we know for sure that we're not going to get slaughtered by these people who have armies that are better equipped than we are and great big walls around their cities?

Here's how you'll know, Joshua says:

***<sup>11</sup> See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you... <sup>13</sup> And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."***

Now, if you're Joe or Josephine Israelite, this sounds pretty cool.

You know the stories your parents told you of how they crossed through the Red Sea with Moses, and now you're going to get your own experience and your own story to share with your kids

HOWEVER, if you're one of the four priests who are on ark-carrying duty, and if you're hearing this for the first time, at this point you raise your hand and interrupt Joshua:

"Uh, excuse me, Mr. Joshua, sir, I think I mis-heard you. I think you said that as soon as me and my three other amigos here step foot in the Jordan THEN the water would stop. But that's not how this story works

See, LAST time the Lord did this, God stopped the water up FIRST and THEN we stepped foot in and crossed over on dry ground.

So I'm sure that I probably just mis-heard or maybe YOU mis-heard and if I didn't mis-hear you, you might want to check on that. Sir. With all due respect. Amen"

To which Joshua would reply to you:

"No, you heard me right and I heard God right. THIS time, for this miracle, at this crossing, WE, meaning YOU are going to have step out FIRST and only AFTER we meaning you have stepped out first will the water be cut off"

See, to deliver and rescue his people out of Egypt, God acted first and did a pre-emptive miracle: Moses held up his staff, the wind blew and blew, and the waters parted and they were delivered

But to bring his people INTO the promised land, it's going to require THEM to take a step of faith first.

Delivery FROM slavery was done all by God, delivery INTO the promise will require a step of faith first.

All of us want God to act in ways that are predictable and comfortable and safe and so very often those are the kinds of things we ask God to do in our lives:

move this mountain! Part these seas! You did it before for me or for someone else or in the Bible! Why can't you do it here and now?

But God says to you and to me, "I'm doing a new thing here in this moment. And I'm going to call you to be strong and courageous and to walk over that mountain and to step into those seas and trust me that I will honor your step of faith with my miracle."

Sometimes in our lives we're waiting for the miracle to happen when God is calling us to step out and participate in the miracle he wants to do.

And so the same God who parted the Red Sea 40 years earlier to get the Israelites OUT of Egypt is calling the priests to set foot into the Jordan River FIRST in order to get them INTO the promised land.

And sometimes that same God who moved and stirred in amazing ways to get you OUT of a difficult situation previously

will call you to take a little more risk and a little more ownership of that next step to get INTO the place of blessing that he has prepared in advance for you

***<sup>14</sup> So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. <sup>15</sup> Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest.***

Now, if this isn't adding insult to injury, I don't know what is! They aren't going to step into the Jordan while it's at a little trickle, the spigot is on all the way and it's on at full-on flood stage

If you're one of the four priests who have ark duty that morning, I think you're calling in sick. Fake a fever, pretend you've got a stomach ache, whatever you've got to do

Because not only is this thing you're about to do totally crazy and you might lose your own life, you're ALSO carrying the ark of the covenant, the symbol of the presence of God among his people!

This isn't a cheap yo-yo you got out of a gumball dispenser at the Piggly Wiggly! This has the 10 commandments in it, and all sorts of sacred objects and is itself a sacred object

You don't want to be the guy who drowned in the Jordan

AND you certainly don't want to be the guy who not only drowned in the Jordan river but who lost the ark of the covenant of the people of God in the process!

But somehow, in spite of everything they've got 4 priests who are either faithful enough or obedient enough or maybe stupid enough to carry the ark into the water at flood stage

And here's what happened next:

***Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, <sup>16</sup> the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off.***

So these four guys, step into the water. There's two in the front, two in the back.

And the two in the front put their first foot in, and the water is high and the ground is muddy and squishy and the bottom of their robes get soaking wet

And you know what it looks like to them is happening? Nothing. All they can see right in front of them is the water is still high and still strong

They take another step in, you know what it looks like is happening? Nothing, the water still feels high, still feels strong

One more step, all four of them are touching the water at this point, do you know what it feels like is happening? It feels no different, it doesn't feel in the immediate moment like God is coming through on his promises.

But do you know what God's doing upstream? He's stopping the water. Do you know what God's doing upstream? He's working to make a way where there was no way before.

The people taking the first step of faith do not know it right away, they do not feel it or experience it right away  
but God is working a miracle upstream that is about to change their lives and change the fate of an entire nation forever

My friends, I've been sent here this morning to tell you that God is an upstream-working God. And sometimes we're right in the middle of a miracle and we don't even know it

Sometimes we're taking the steps of faith and it doesn't look like and it doesn't feel like anything is happening  
And we're wondering where God is and why he isn't showing up and why he isn't changing our situation, why isn't God DOING something

This morning, if that's you, if you're struggling with that, if you're crying out to God about that, I've been sent here to tell you this good news: ***God is an upstream-working God***  
***God is an upstream-working God who delights to create downstream miracles.***

And this morning, the call to you and to me is to be strong and courageous  
and for some of us, maybe many of us, that's going to include taking some sort of an initial step into the Jordan, maybe at flood stage  
and for some of us, we've already stepped in but we're not seeing the water starting to recede quite yet.

And so I want to speak the word of the Lord and the promises of the Lord over you: be strong and courageous! God will never leave you, he will never forsake you!

Be strong and courageous and move, act, engage! Be strong and courageous and wise and faithful and take that step, take that risk!  
And if you're in the water and the water's not moving yet, wait on the Lord! Be strong, take courage, and wait on the Lord. Stand firm and see what the Lord will do!

Some of you have been staring down something that you know you need to do for this whole series, the whole last 4 weeks you've been skirting around something that God's tapping you on the shoulder to take care of

This morning, it is time. No more running. No more hiding. No more excuses. No more calling in sick.

Consecrate yourselves, repent of the spiritual gunk that keeps you from seeing the Lord and from seeking the Lord, and take that first small step. Even if it feels like stepping into the Jordan at flood stage

For some of you, that step is a step of initial faith. For some of you, God's been tapping you on the shoulder not just to be strong and courageous with a situation in your life

For some of you, God's calling you to be strong and courageous and take the step of faith to finally trust him. To finally commit yourself to him.

To finally relent from your running and your questions that were real and serious for a while but are now just kind of smoke-screen questions that you can hide behind

For some of you, the step of faith that you need to take IS your first step of faith. I'm going to give you a chance to pray that prayer and take that step in a few minutes

But let's close with seeing how the story ends:

***So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. <sup>17</sup> The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.***

God calls Joshua and all the people of Israel to be strong and courageous.

Then in this story he lays out a surprising path for the people and especially the priests to follow that requires them to take a step of faith FIRST and trust that God will do something in response to their step of faith

They take that step. It doesn't look like anything is happening initially but God is fast at work upstream at a town called Adam to produce a downstream miracle for the people as they all safely and very dry-ly crossed over opposite Jericho.

Because sometimes, if you want the water to stop and the miracle to happen, you've got to be willing to step into the water and trust that even when it doesn't look like anything is happening

That the upstream God is at work to create the downstream miracle.

And this morning, there's one big idea and a couple of ways you might apply it depending on your situation or circumstances: ***"Consecrate yourselves and act, for the Lord will do amazing things among you."***

**1. Is there spiritual gunk that you need to clean out to not miss God's work?**

Is there stuff in your heart that needs to be done away with so that nothing blocks God's work in you or through you

AND so that there's nothing that impedes your ability to experience and enter into the fullness of the wonder of God's work all around you?

**2. If you've already stepped out and are waiting for the miracle, what do you need to be strong and courageous and stay?**

In my small group this past week a couple of folks were feeling like they'd stepped in and taken a risk and they were waiting for God to meet them in the midst of it

And what we found as we talked was that there were some places where there struggles matched some struggles that other people had already been through and come out the other side on

And so the resources they needed to be strong and courageous while waiting were there in our small group—awesome, so why we love small groups around here!

This morning, I want to encourage you to be strong and courageous as you step in and risk and I want to encourage you to find other resources that might help you to be strong and courageous as well

**3. Where is God calling you to step out into your Jordan River (even at flood stage)?**

Is there a place where God is calling you to take the first step into the miracle that he wants to generate and produce in and around you?

In your family? In your business?

Is there some sort of non-profit work or ministry that God wants you step into?

Has God been tapping you on the shoulder this morning or maybe this whole series or maybe for this whole year or maybe the past 10 years and trying to get you to slow down, trying to get you to consider something?

Is today the day to take that step? Even if it's not convenient? Even if the circumstances look set against you, like the Jordan at flood stage?

**4. Is that step for you an initial step of faith today?**

We've got so many people who wouldn't call themselves Christians here or who maybe once did but it's been a long time since they've been engaged with their faith in a real way

And we're so glad that you're here

and every so often we want to invite you to put a stake in the ground and make a conscious decision to say, "I'm putting my trust and my hope in the upstream God who creates downstream miracles."

The God we worship here this morning worked upstream 2,000 years ago to send his son Jesus Christ to take away the sins of the entire world and to reconcile all things to a loving God who created each one of us and loves each on us

And in order to be reconciled to God, we have to at some point put our trust in that upstream work in order that we might cross over from being a people who are separated from God into a people who are reconciled and who walk in a restored relationship.

This morning, if you're ready to step out in faith and trust the work that Jesus did for you upstream 2,000 years ago, and cross over from being separated from a God who loves you to being reconciled to a God who loves you

The work is simple, we **acknowledge that we've got gunk** in us that separates us from a holy perfect God—none of us is perfect in thoughts, words, and in our actions, all of us sin against one another and against God by what we've done and what we've left undone

You and I don't even live up to our own standards, do we? Much less a perfect God's standards.

And so there is a flood of our own doing between us and a perfect God. And what God has done is send his Son upstream to absorb the flow of sin that separates us from God and make a way for us to have access to him once again.

All we have to do is trust, step out, let the forgiveness flow and the relationship grow as we learn what it means to be a disciple and follower of Jesus.

I'm going to pray through each of these, and I'm going to pause during each one and give you a few seconds of silence to do whatever business with God that you need to do.