

Strong and Courageous
Courageous Series Week 1
Joshua 1:1-9
August 28, 2016: Fall Launch

Welcome/intro/vision

This is our first week in a seven-week series called Courageous—we'll be looking at a character in the Bible who was facing all kinds of transitions and challenges

And today and over these few weeks we're going to look at Joshua's story and see how it might help US to be strong and courageous as well.

Because there are two equally true things that most of us intuitively know about ourselves.

- 1. The first is that *we feel most alive and are our best selves when we are living courageously.***

You've probably got at least one moment in your life where you took what was for you an extremely courageous step or risk

Maybe it was a courageous step to have a hard conversation or take a new job or go off to college or school somewhere or to chase off a grizzly bear from your campsite or to investigate the noise downstairs in the middle of the night

It might not have been a crazy step for someone else, but for you, given your wiring and temperament, you know that took some courage for you to take that step

And you look back on that moment and part of you thinks you were stupid! That was crazy! What was I thinking?!?

But another part of you, the deeper part of you knows that in that moment, you were perhaps the most alive you've ever been, the strongest version of you, the most creative, the most engaged.

You actually like you the most when you're are living a courageous life.

And given that, here's the kicker and the other thing that we know about ourselves:

- 2. *Courage leaks. Easily.***

Some of those leaks we blame on external challenges and threats: people who don't like us, work environments that aren't healthy

Maybe you're concerned about our country, concerned about the election, concerned about global terrorism or these other situations

Sometimes it's a mis-understandings of what it means to live a courageous life

So for example, bullying people who makes things happen through sheer force of will?

That's not true courage

Bullying is just fear being masked behind aggression

On the other hand, some of us feel like we're just not wired up to live courageously, we know we're careful or even timid people by nature

So it's super-important here at the outset to recognize that to live courageously isn't about fitting into some Hollywood stereotype of some superhero.

We're not going to show any Braveheart clips or Avengers clips during this series.

Living courageously means ***recognizing where our fears would rob us of the life or purposes God has for us and not allowing those fears to dictate our actions***

Courageous living could look like stepping INTO something new

But it could ALSO look like setting a healthy boundary in an unhealthy relationship

Courageous people feel afraid. They just don't let the fear have the last word on what it is they will or will not do when they know what it is that they actually need to do regardless of the fear

Some types of fear are healthy and good—if you're being chased by the abominable snow man, by all means, let the fear drive you to run faster!

But very often fear threatens to over-run the banks of its usefulness.

And in those situations, we have to do the emotional and yes even spiritual work of naming those fears and choosing a different path than the one that fear would dictate we would take.

This is exactly what Joshua is facing today as we open up to Joshua chapter 1.

And today we're going to get 3 P's for a life of Courage that we'll come back to again and again and again over these next 6 weeks.

3 P's from God that fuel Joshua's courage and can fuel our own courage when we're struggling with the fog of fear, uncertainty, anxiety, or threats.

Joshua is the 6th book from the beginning, and Joshua 1 picks up the action right where the first books left off

The previous couple of books have described how the people of Israel were a slave nation in Egypt and God delivered them through a man named Moses out of Egypt in order to lead them to a land that God promised them

Moses leads them out of Egypt and then they get in some trouble with God, so they end up wandering around in the wilderness for 40 years until that whole generation dies off

And here as we pick up in Joshua chapter 1, we're going to pick right up with Moses having led the people BACK to the doorstep of the promised land, and then Moses, just as God had said, dies right there

And here's what happens next:

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "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..."

My first job when I first graduated from college I went to work for a campus ministry up in Richmond, Virginia

I was replacing a married couple, Kim and Kevin Green, they had been working at two campuses in Richmond for about 6 years

Now, Kim and Kevin Green were absolute LEGENDS in our world. They were both fantastic speakers, both were wise and funny and warm, great with people, freakishly smart, everyone, everyone everyone loved them and their work was simply outstanding

And I was the 22-year-old hire straight out college guy sent up to take their place
I was sent to VCU, another guy was sent to the University of Richmond

And we both knew we had big shoes to fill. And the students we were working with, they knew it too

In fact, one University of Richmond student said to the other poor guy who went there,
"Look, we're going to try to be nice to you and all, but we feel like we just lost two of the best staff workers in the country."

We were talking about it afterwards and we pretty much agreed with him!

In fact, we both kind of felt sorry for the students—they HAD lost two of the best staff workers in the country, and now they were stuck with us!

Have you ever felt like you had big shoes to fill? Like you were following someone who's giftedness and experience vastly outstripped yours?

When Moses dies, Joshua at this point in Israel's story is following after the ONLY leader this community has ever known.

If you're not familiar with Moses's resume of accomplishments during his tenure of leading the Israelites, let me introduce you to some of the highlights

CIRCA 4,000-3960 BC He had ONE Big Job with lots of responsibilities:

-He was called by God by name to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt

Duties included:

-He regularly got into head-to-head debate matches (and won) with the king of one of the largest superpowers in the world at the time

-He called down plagues upon Egypt not once, twice or three times but 10 different plagues that completely disrupted their economy and eventually pried the Israelites free from Egypt

-Through Moses God parted the Red Sea all night long so they could cross safely after the Egyptian army came after them

-Moses climbed a mountain and received the 10 commandments written in stone by the hand of God himself

-A couple of times Moses talked God out of destroying the Israelites after they did something stupid!

Here's just the highlights of Moses's resume! I hate to break it to you but my resume doesn't look anywhere near as impressive as that!

How would YOU like to be the person who follows that kind of a leader?

But... After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "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 ..."

Get ready, Joshua, because like it or not, you're the one who's leading this charge next

And oh, by the way, your job isn't just going to be to keep status quo, you're not just going to keep wandering around in the desert with your primary responsibility to keep them all from killing each other

YOU are the guy who's going to lead these people into the land that I've promised them. You're going to lead this huge change, this huge new season in the history of these people

Have you ever felt like you've got big shoes to fill?

Or maybe more generally, have you just felt like you were in over your head?

Like the weight of this responsibility for leading this project or this family or this ministry or this department suddenly hits you and you just feel swamped? Overwhelmed? Not sure you want this gig?

This is kind of the situation Joshua is facing

The Lord, of course, knows this, and so he's going to give Joshua 3 P's that will fuel him for courageous living in the face of massive change and uncertainty and transition

³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ 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.

The first P that we'll come back to throughout this series: **Promise**

God speaks these tremendous promises to Joshua—he says, “I'm going to give you this land that I promised Moses you and your people would have...I will give you every place where you set your foot.

Joshua has a God-given purpose with a God-given promise of success. This is part of what fuels him in the midst of the fears and anxieties that he's facing

And this is part of what fuels him to be courageous

The problem many of us have at this point, of course, is that God hasn't spelled out for you his plans for you as clearly, has he?

Anyone have a dream last night where God gave you a promise this specific?

He promised you an exact dollar figure for your retirement or the precise date of your next promotion or he promised you that that idea you've got is going to be wildly successful?

Me neither! And some of us think that if God just told me exactly what he was going to do for me as clearly as he does here for Joshua, then I'd be courageous too!

But here's the catch: throughout the Scriptures, God makes all kinds of promises to us. And even with clear and specific promises from God, it takes courage and faith to trust that he will deliver on those promises.

In fact, the people of Israel had been in this place about 40 years earlier, on the doorstep of the promised land and they sent spies throughout the land to gather intelligence on who was in the land and what it was like

And all but two of them melted down and they said, ‘we can't take the land. Even if God promised it to us.’

And so they wandered for 40 years while that whole generation died.

And here they are, 40 years later, with another chance at making a better, more faithful, more COURAGEOUS decision to trust God's PROMISES more than to trust what their eyes could see

Joshua has a very specific set of promises that he is given that require faith and courage to act on.

We don't have this same specific set of promises, but we do have promises throughout the Scriptures that we're invited to hook our lives into

I remember once hearing a speaker describe how he moved from a nominal Christian, just sort of going through the motions, a Christian in name only, to one who's whole life was transformed by the grace of God

What he said he did was he went through the Bible and wrote down all the promises of God that he could find that would be applicable to him and to anyone who's a Christian

And what he said he did was he "hooked his life into the promises of God."

And hooking his life into the promises of God is what completely changed him from a going-through-the-motions Christian into a vibrant relationship with Christ where God's love and grace was changing everything.

***When we're in the fog and uncertainty of pain, confusion or anxiety
the spiritual work of God's people that propels us forward with courage is to hook our lives into the promises of God***

Here's just one promise from the New Testament that if you and I were to hook our lives into it, it would free us from all kinds of fears and unleash courageous living:

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."

-Romans 8:28

This doesn't mean that every single thing that happens to us is good—we know this, right? We shouldn't put promises in God's mouth.

But it does mean that even given that people make decisions and that this world's a mess

There is a God who is bigger than all of it and who has power over all of it

And promise is that God will make all things work to the good no matter what happens in the interim.

This promise is roughly the equivalent of living your life like you're watching an Olympic event where you already know the outcome!

If God really is promising the eventually and ultimately he will command and direct all things to work together for our good, to bless us either in this life or into eternity

And if we would joyfully, willingly, playfully, even recklessly put all of the weight of our lives into that promise

Do you know what kind of COURAGE that would generate and unleash in those of us who are Jesus-people?

Do you know what kind of freedom and courage and joy could be unleashed in our hearts and our lives for you and for me in this one little verse?

Do you know what kind of courage we could have in this world to bring good to this world if just the Christians were willing to actually believe that this is true?

If you are a Jesus person here this morning, you are playing your life with house money. God's got this. You are taken care of.

Our job is to trust in him, trust in his promises, and go to work doing what we have been called to do and trust that no matter the outcome, he will work that outcome for our good eventually.

Our image for this series is a mountain, and a mountain is just a big rock, so here's...

Big Rock #1 for a Life of Courage: Promises. God's promises

And the question: is my heart hooked into God's promises?

What if this week, you just picked that one verse, that one promise from Romans 8:28 and you memorized it—wouldn't take you more than one day of repeating it over and over to get it

And then this week, whenever you felt fear over-running your life

whenever you felt fear or confusion or anxiety driving you to retreat and withdraw, what if you unhooked from that fear and instead hooked into God's promise that he'll work all things for your good?

And then from that perspective, based on that promise, then you did the next wise thing, the next faithful thing that you could think of to do?

Now one of the biggest promises that we have in the Scriptures that is available for all of us gets reiterated to Joshua in a big way and is significant fuel for his courage, God says this:

⁵No 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. ⁶Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

Many years ago I read a book that was a compilation of excerpts written by two different authors separated by several hundred years

who basically made it one of their primary mental works to practice the presence of God in Jesus Christ in their every-day lives as much as possible throughout their days

One of the guys was named Frank Laubach and he called his book “The Game with Minutes”
he had made it one of his life goals to remember that God was with him at least once a minute, every waking hour—he practiced and practiced and practiced at it until it was just a habit

“what would you have me to do? What would you have me to say? You’re already at work here, how can I join you in what you’re already doing?”

And during his day he became one of the most influential leaders in our country, speaking and advocating for global literacy and developing programs to help people learn to read.

At one point in the mid 20th-century it was estimated that over 2 million people were learning to read through his global literacy work.

He’s the only missionary to ever have a U.S. postage stamp dedicated to him in history

And he says that it was all simply to do with his game with minutes.

Every minute of every day he was touching the presence of Jesus Christ in his life
and it transformed him on the inside
and it multiplied his efforts and opened doors all around the globe for him to be a part of God’s redemptive and healing work and purposes in the world.

And I was fascinated by this story and I really worked at this for several months, probably the better part of a year, trying different ways to get my own attention and steer my thoughts back to Jesus regularly:

“Jesus you’re here, that changes everything. Jesus, what do you want me to do in this moment? Where are you already at work? How might I join you?”

And what I found was when I was rooted in the with-ness and presence of Christ, the things that so often robbed me of courage melted away.

The problems weren’t nearly as intimidating. The internal voices of fear or aggression were quieted.

Jesus was with me, walking alongside me; Jesus was sitting in that meeting with me, present in this argument with my wife, and occasionally calling me to do things that I would not have done if it was just left up to me.

I was the best me I could be when I was rooted in the presence of Christ who was at work in me and around me

God calls Joshua to be strong and courageous as he commits himself to being with Joshua in the midst of all the various challenges and situations he’s going to face.

God will be with him wherever Joshua goes, he's going to walk with him, he's going to lead him and guide him,

he's going to be his strength when he's up against stronger armies and fortified cities and bigger people

God will be with Joshua.

And one of the biggest promises and most important promises that gives us courage in the face of our own adversities or challenges is the promise that Jesus gives to us along these same lines

That God will never leave us nor forsake us, that we'll never been alone or abandoned.

The promise of **God's PRESENCE** is Big Rock #2 for a courageous life, the foundation of a life of courage

Again, we're going to come back to all three of these P's over the next six weeks or so but for this one, one way you might apply this is to practice the presence of Jesus this week

What if you tried for the next seven days to remember as often as possible and as frequently as possible that Jesus is with you? Not in a "Jesus is watching so look busy" kind of a way

But in a way that attentive and open, in a way that gave you courage and strength for the work you needed to do in that moment?

What if you leaned into the promise of the Lord's presence in your life in order to make you strong and courageous for your week ahead?

We've got Promise and Presence

There's one more "P" that God's going to give Joshua that will fuel him into courageous living for the road ahead and we get that in these last few verses that we're going to look at this morning:

⁷ "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. ⁸ 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."

This last "P" is the Path: there's a path that's been laid out by God for his people to walk in. Obey the law! Don't turn away from it! Talk about it! Meditate and memorize it!

This is the Path of Life—the first followers of Jesus weren't called Christians, they were called followers of the Way

There is a way that does not change but that has application to every situation

If we walk in that path, God says to Joshua that he will be successful and prosperous

Again, he doesn't make that same promise to everyone—there are lots of poor Christians. But walking in the Path laid out by the Lord is part of what gives us courage in the midst of uncertainty and anxiety

When we don't know what to do or when threats come our way, anxiety kicks in and we often do one of two things:

we either freeze or we act impulsively, sometimes stupidly, because when we're anxious and feeling threatened we kind of revert to our core reptile brain.

And so what happens when we're in the fog and we act out of our reptile brain? We end up making a bad decision that complicates life, makes things worse

So here's a core principle when we're in the fog of anxiety and fear and uncertainty and trying to figure out how to move forward with courage:

Do not complicate a hard situation with a bad decision

If we're in a hard situation, we do not want to complicate it with a bad decision.

A bad decision is always a bad decision, even if it offers temporary relief in the midst of challenges or uncertainty

A bad decision always, always always complicates our lives in the long-run, it does not solve our problems it only complicates them

Do not complicate a hard situation with a bad decision.

So how do you know what a bad decision looks like?

Look to the path the Lord has laid out. For 92% of the situations we face in our lives, we have a path clearly articulated in the Scriptures

If the thing you're thinking about doing involves manipulating people, lying to people, using people, cutting corners, grasping for fame or power or money

If it involves nursing a grudge or a resentment, it's off the path and it's a bad decision

If it involves doing something unethical with money or if it involves what the Scriptures would say is a mis-use of God's wonderful gift of sex and sexuality, then it is off the path and it's always a bad decision

Having a Path to follow in the midst of the fog of confusion and uncertainty in this life gives us courage.

This is a good path. It's served millions of people before us through very trying and difficult times. It has proven to lead to good places, spacious places, peaceful places

And Joshua here is being exhorted to follow it in his leadership, in his situation, into the destiny God has laid out for the Israelite people and for Joshua personally

My friends, God has a good plan for your life.

We cannot find God's plan or God's peace or the courage that God wants to give us if we refuse to walk in his path that leads there

And so the final P that we'll circle back to over these next few weeks is the ***Path***.

And the question for each of us this morning is simply: ***Am I moving in step with God's path?***

Some of you don't know God's path, you've never read the Scriptures, never really been exposed to this path—welcome! We're so glad you're here!

We teach each week from the Scriptures because we believe that it is the Path of the Life, the road that we can walk courageously on.

We read the Scriptures in small groups because we believe that's the path of Life.

And I'd encourage you to spend time on your own during the week, each day, reading a bit of the Bible. Try starting in the New Testament book of Mark.

That book tells the Jesus story in the shortest, most condensed way of all the biographies of Jesus

And start to take note of the different instructions Jesus gives to the people he's talking to—many of those instructions come attached with promises to hold onto as well!

See, the Path of the Scriptures comes loaded up with all kinds of Promises for us to hook our lives into, that remind us of why it's worth it for us to continue walking down this path.

If we are, then we can know that even if we experience setbacks and heartaches along the way and even if ultimately we end up having to change course altogether

We can take courage because we're following this Path that he has laid out for us, the Path that has been attested to by more people throughout history than any other spiritual path as the road to the life that we want to lead

Walking in this path gives us courage—no matter what the road ahead holds, I know ultimately what I'm doing and where I'm going.

I'm walking this PATH *with* Jesus (that's PRESENCE).

And I'm trusting him with the outcomes that he PROMISES will always turn into blessing for me, no matter what happens

As we close this morning, we're going to hit on these 3 P's and continue to unpack them over these next several weeks

But to get your juices flowing, here's our take-home question for this week as we invest in these next six weeks in become men and women whose lives are marked by courage:

Which of these 3 P's do you need to start with this week to cultivate courage in your heart?

Promise: go home and work on memorizing Romans 8:28 and call that to mind as you hear the voices of fear in your heart and mind this week.

Presence: spend this week doing the “Game with Minutes”—how often can you call to mind the presence of Christ in your life each hour, each day, all week?

Path: spend some time this week in the Scriptures (Mark?) to refresh yourself on this faithful and true path that gives us courage to navigate uncertain times

RETURN to the path if you've drifted, that happens to all of us at various points, it'll happen to Joshua too

Some of you are here trying to decide if you're going to re-connect with a path that you used to know or walk at some point in your life, we're glad you're here, come and see!

Some of you are here trying to decide if you can trust this path or if it's good for you—the only way you can really know is if you walk it. So come, walk it with us.

Walk it with us these next 6 weeks and see if God might not do a new thing in your life

This week I want to encourage you to just pick ONE of these things to test-drive this week—these are some practices that will help us to build courageous muscles

Can you imagine something with me? If over the next 6 weeks we all developed hearts that were more courageous, more free, less slaves to fear, less bound up in what-ifs and less caught up in the fog of our world and our situations?

Can you imagine what kind of a difference it might make in our community, in our neighborhoods, in your work place, in your family, in your friendships if you were less fearful, less hung up on anxiety or confusion and more clear-eyed and more courageous?

Let's do it, shall we?

Let's spend these next six weeks learning how to hang our lives on the Promises, Presence and Path of God, so that we might live courageous, generous, and joyful lives

PRAY