

Be Strong and Courageous

Joshua 1:1-9

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Since our youngest daughter has now graduated from high school, it got me thinking about how many graduation speeches I've heard. Some have been very good and others, well, not so good. I've given some speeches myself...some were good, and others, well, not so much.

About a month ago Pastor Kevin DeYoung wrote a blog post for the Gospel Coalition called, "Beware the Graduation Speech." Here's part of what he said.

The truth is: you can't do anything you set your mind to. You can't be whatever you want to be. You aren't the last, best hope for planet earth. You shouldn't always follow your dreams. You shouldn't always believe in yourself. And you shouldn't expect life's most meaningful gifts to come through unchecked self-expression.

Most commencement addresses boil down to three sentiments:

- 1. You're amazing.*
- 2. Follow your dreams.*
- 3. Never give up.*

The classic description of character is barely heard in today's moral exhortations. Which is why most graduation speeches posit a different set of virtues: differentiation, self-expression, confidence, and a "don't let other people stand in your way" stick-to-it-tiveness.

The cardinal virtues that anchored moral thought in the west for 2,500 years have been largely forgotten...today's courage--as self-willed perseverance--bears some semblance to the older definition, but missing are the accompanying virtues of patience and self-sacrifice for the sake of others.

On Father's Day, the message to dads is often similar to graduation speeches – *step it up, man up, be strong, be courageous.*

I recognize that this day is difficult for some of you because your dad is no longer here. On Tuesday night I spoke on Samson to about 50 teenage guys from Rock Island at Camp Summit, a ministry of Youth Hope, one of our Go Team partners. I emphasized how Samson was strong on the outside but because he never had self-control, romance and revenge led to his downfall. I got there early and was drawn to a withdrawn 16-year-old so sat with him for supper and for the singing time. His shoulders were slumped and he made no eye contact. I asked the camp director about his story and he said that his dad died just months ago.

Some of you have a dad who has deserted you. And there are dads here today who feel discouraged and others who've been dissed by their kids. Still others are delighted to be dads but don't really like the attention Father's Day brings.

Our text for today is often taken out of context: ***"Be strong and courageous."*** You'll often hear it quoted as a synonym for being tough and tenacious.

We're going to discover how the context of this phrase, which is actually used three times in Joshua 1, will help us grow not only as dads, but also as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Instead of just telling Joshua that because he's amazing he should follow his dreams and never give up, we're going to see that because *God is amazing*, He has some plans for Joshua. Because God is strong, Joshua can be courageous.

Lean in and listen to 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.

It's now time for Joshua to graduate and become the leader God designed him to be. Before we get to his marching orders, let's set the scene.

A new generation is standing on the banks of the Jordan River wondering if they have the faith to do what their wandering parents did not. We begin to see a new phrase: ***“go over,”*** meaning “crossover.” This group of some two million people is poised to claim the promises of God but probably also frightened that they will commit the same sin as their parents, who died because of their disobedience. They are in a tough spot because their leader Moses is now dead. But they're on the verge of victory with only the Jordan River standing between them and Wisconsin, the land *“flowing with milk and honey.”*

They're not proud of their past but they're also frightened about the future. Can you relate? Maybe you're afraid of turning out like your ancestors did. Perhaps you've just been wandering in the wilderness, experiencing more failure than faithfulness.

Normally the Jordan River was pretty easy to cross but during flood season it was treacherous. In some sections the distance across would swell to over two miles. It's important to note that God calls his people to cross the Jordan when it is precisely at its most dangerous and when it seems the most impossible (see Joshua 3:15). The Jordan also served as a boundary between what the Israelites presently had and what God had promised them on the other side.

What's your Jordan River today? What barriers are you facing? Dads, where is God asking you to take a step of faith? If you're not sure what it is, ask yourself this question: *“What am I afraid of?”* Your fear will tell you. Symbolically in Scripture, the Jordan represents decision. Remember that your greatest extremity is God's grand opportunity.

We're going to see 5 leadership lessons from Joshua's life that can be applied to dads, and to any disciple of Jesus Christ.

1. Submit to the Purposes of God. After Moses dies, the Lord speaks to Joshua, who had been serving as Moses' assistant in verse 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.”*** Joshua may have felt inadequate and alone so God tells him to ***“arise,”*** which means, ***“to take decisive action by standing.”*** And then Joshua is told what His mission is – to ***“go over this Jordan with all this people.”***

God makes it clear that this is His work. Just as He had used Moses, He will now use Joshua. God's plans did not die with the departure of one man because His work is not dependent on one man.

I admit that I was nervous about following Dr. Mel Brown, who faithfully and fervently preached the gospel here at Edgewood for 44 years! Since so many people asked me how I was doing at filling his shoes, I decided to address this during one of my early sermons. I stepped off to the side and said, ***“Many people have asked me how I'm doing filling Pastor Brown's shoes.”*** I then looked down at my feet and said, ***“I only wear a size 8...if I were to put my feet into his shoes; I couldn't even steer them!”***

God used Pastor Brown by His grace and for His glory...and God is doing the same in and through each of us as we live on mission for His majesty.

2. Seize the Promises of God. God always keeps His promises. Check out verse 3: ***“Every place that the sole of your feet will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised Moses.”*** Don't miss that the people had to get up and go into the land in order for it to become theirs. Its fascinating that God says, ***“I have given it to you”*** in verse 3 but in verse 2, we read, ***“I am giving it to them.”*** They have to take the territory and possess their possession. Interestingly, they are told to possess it more than twenty times!

The promise of land goes all the way back to Abraham in Genesis 12:7. Moses was given this promise in Deuteronomy 11:24: ***“Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours.”*** Verse 4 gives the specs to the title of the land: ***“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.”*** Interestingly, this is far bigger than Israel ever claimed. This section covers about 300,000 square miles but the most Israel ever

possessed was about 30,000 square miles, or 10%. Today the nation of Israel only has 8,000 square miles, or about 1/3 of that amount.

God also promises success in the first part of verse 5: ***“No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life”*** and in the second part of verse 5, He promises to be right by their side: ***“Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you or forsake you.”*** The word ***“leave”*** refers to abandoning or dropping someone. We can count on His presence because it’s His promise.
Romans 8:31: ***“If God is for us, who can be against us?”***

We’re to submit to the purposes of God and seize the promises of God. That’s lead to the third leadership lesson...stand on the precepts of God.

3. Stand on the Precepts of God. Two different times God speaks these same words to Joshua: ***“Be strong and courageous”*** (1:6, 9). The word ***“strong”*** comes from twisting ropes together and ***“courageous”*** means to persist and conquer. In Joshua 1:7 God tells Joshua, ***“only be strong and very courageous.”*** The use of ***“only”*** has the idea of the ***“only thing to be done”*** and ***“very”*** means, ***“abundantly or exceedingly.”***

The root for courage is the word encouragement, which literally means, ***“to put heart into.”*** When God sees our fears, He wants to fill us with courage. Isaiah 43:1-2 seems to reflect this historical situation: ***“...Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you...”***

It’s interesting that God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous three times. When something is repeated three times it communicates the greatest possible emphasis, like ***“holy, holy, holy”*** in Isaiah 6. In Deuteronomy 31, Moses charged Joshua with being strong and courageous three different times and in Joshua 1:18 the people say to Joshua: ***“...only be strong and courageous.”*** They promise to follow his leadership and then they tell him to not be afraid.

This is really cool. God is urging him to be strong and courageous and the people around him are cheering him on as well. Incidentally, that’s what I sense from each of you as you follow the leadership team here at Edgewood.

Edgewood has been blessed with many strong and courageous servant leaders for more than a century. Some time ago we honored Randy Matya for serving over 30 years as a deacon and trustee and today I want us to show our appreciation to Jim Koehler, who has served as a deacon for over 30 years, most of them as the chairman! Jim is a servant leader who submits to the purposes of God, seizes the promises of God, and stands on the precepts of God.

I asked those who've served alongside Jim to share some words that best describe him. Here's what we came up with...

1. Dedicated
2. Faithful
3. Hardworking/Industrious
4. Humble
5. Honest
6. Tenacious
7. Wise
8. Courageous
9. Generous
10. Tender
11. Fruitful
12. Spiritual
13. Genuine
14. Unselfish
15. Godly
16. Caring
17. Compassionate
18. Thorough
19. Goes above and beyond for *"such a time as this"*
20. Determined – *"If he sets his mind to a project, there's a high probability it's going to happen!"*

Jim reminds me a lot of Joshua because he is also a man of Scripture. Jim taught the college/career class some time ago and has been leading a Sunday morning Growth Group for many years – it's so full that they've run out of space!

Look at Joshua 1:7: ***"...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."*** And verse 8: ***"...be careful to***

do according to all that is written in it.” Assent is not sufficient; God is looking for consent.

Psalm 119:60: *“I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.”* Is there anything you’ve been putting off that you know God is telling you to do right now? If you’re disobeying, stop right now and confess it. Stick to Scripture and you’ll be successful.

Up until this point God spoke directly to His servants but now that things have been written down, we are called to read and heed His book. Joshua is told in verse 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.”*

- ✓ **Talk about it.** The Bible must be on our lips as we freely talk about it, quote it, and refer to it. This is especially important for dads and moms as seen in Deuteronomy 6:7: *“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”*
- ✓ **Think about it.** To meditate means to “*chew on*” or literally, “*to mutter*” or dialog with the Word. I’ve found that the best way to meditate is to first memorize and the best way to memorize is to first meditate. They go hand-in-hand. Listen to these words found in Psalm 119:97: *“Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.”* The one who meditates is called “*blessed*” in Psalm 1:1-2.
- ✓ **Live it out.** It must move from communication to meditation and then to application. The Word must freely flow from our lips but also must be evident in our lives. I love Deuteronomy 30:14: *“But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it.”*

We’re to submit to the purposes of God, seize the promises of God, stand on the precepts of God and fourthly, we’re to soak in the presence of God.

4. Soak in the Presence of God. Don’t you love the fact that God is always with us? Joshua needed the assurance that God was now going to be with him. Look at Joshua 1:5: *“...Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave*

you nor forsake you.” The Hebrew reads like this: *“I will never make you sink; I will never drop you.”* In Exodus 33:14, God says: ***“My Presence will go with you...”*** Friends, this same promise is given to believers today in Hebrews 13:5: ***“...Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”***

This reminds me of the 4-year-old who was trying to recite the Lord’s Prayer. One Sunday he prayed in a loud voice: *“Our Father, who art in Heaven, I know you know my name.”* Brothers and sisters in Christ, do you have the confidence that God knows your name and is with you right now? Some of us struggle when we can’t *feel* Him nearby but it is at those times that we must claim this truth by faith.

As I was meditating on these verses, I saw something that I didn’t see right away. The presence of God is like two pieces of bread in a sandwich, with strength and courage as the meat.

“JUST AS I WAS WITH MOSES, SO I WILL BE WITH YOU.” (v. 5)

- ***“Be strong and courageous”*** (6)
- ***“Only be strong and very courageous”*** (7)
- ***“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous”*** (9)

“FOR THE LORD IS WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO” (v. 9)

Listen. When you’re struggling with being strong and you’re caving instead of demonstrating courage, remember that you are surrounded by the presence of God! God’s presence will give you the power to do what He’s called you to do! You can have courage because of the character of God himself.

We’re to submit to the purposes of God, seize the promises of God, stand on the precepts of God, we’re to soak in the presence of God and finally, we’re to stay on point.

5. Stay on Point with God. Please turn to the last chapter of the Book of Joshua. The man Joshua is now about 110 years old and Joshua 24:2 says that he’s speaking to ***“all the people.”*** That means that his message is not just for dads, but also for everyone here today.

After reciting some history so they don’t forget, Joshua rises up and challenges the people to respond because he knows they are faltering in verses 14-15: ***“Now***

therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Joshua knows the human heart and how hard it is for us to surrender our wills to the Lord. He knows that we get complacent, we're prone to compromise and some of us procrastinate in order to avoid commitment.

Let's look at his four-fold challenge.

- **Fear the Lord devotedly.** The word “*now*” means in light of all God has done, we must tremble before Him and see him as holy.
- **Serve the Lord exclusively.** Joshua is calling his people to serve the Lord with all they have. The word “*serve*” in Hebrew comes from the same root as “worship” and is used 15 times in this chapter. Worship must lead to our working. Three times the people respond by saying that they will “*serve the Lord*” (18, 21, 24).
- **Throw away idols totally.** It's amazing how many times God's people were tripped up because they wouldn't incinerate their idols. The phrase, “*throw away*” literally means, “to turn off.” The idea is that we throw them so far away that their power over us is extinguished.

An idol is really anything that is loved or feared more than God. It can involve the worship of a person, an image, object, activity or idea. Pastor Tim is leading a study for men this summer called “Gods at War” by Kyle Idleman to help identify idolatry in our hearts and then deal with it. They meet on the second and fourth Wednesday nights at 6:30 in the north overflow.

- **Choose whom you will serve unreservedly.** Would you notice that a choice is required? “*Then choose...*” This choice must also become very personal: “*whom you...*” and it's an urgent imperative: “*Choose this day whom you will serve.*” Too many of us waver and hesitate and capitulate because we want to keep one foot in and one foot out. Spiritual indecision

leads to disorientation. Or to say it another way: *Indifference will lead to indecision.*

I was struck by the story of the dad from Galesburg who was out fishing with his six-year-old son on the Mississippi. When his son fell into the river, the dad didn't hesitate and jumped in after him, trying to save him. He didn't survive but fortunately someone else helped his son back to shore. Talk about selflessness! This dad jumped in even though he couldn't swim because he wanted his son to live.

Check this out. *As a father, Joshua is choosing to live out his faith for the sake of his family.* It's as if he is saying: *"I have chosen to serve the Lord, I am choosing to serve the Lord right now, and I will go on serving God until the very end."* The Hebrew literally reads, **"I myself."** He is determining that his faith will be lived out at home: **"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."** Joshua, as the head of his household declared, **"AS FOR ME..."** and then he included his household because he was going to lead them in the right paths. Don't miss this, parents (and grandparents): *You can't pass something on to your children that you don't have yourself.*

As point man, Joshua is setting the spiritual temperature in his home because he's the priest of his family. Studies have shown that the influence of a parent is two to three times more influential than any church program in passing along faith to the next generation.

I often think about the famous painting by Norman Rockwell that appeared on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post in 1959. It shows a suburban family going off to church, led by the oldest sister followed by the mother who is followed by the younger sister. All three women are dressed for church. Following them is a young boy who appears to be going with some reluctance. Why is he reluctant? Because at the center of the painting is dear old dad slumped in a chair, in his pajamas, reading the paper. As junior walks by he casts a longing eye at his father. He's going to church but clearly he'd rather be with his dad.

Fellow fathers, as the point man in our homes, let's lead our families!

When our daughters were much younger, one of them asked a great question. It went something like this: *"Daddy, how can we know for sure that we'll serve the Lord for the rest of our lives?"* After pondering that question, we got hold of a big

rock and wrote Joshua 24:15 on it: ***“But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”***

Several years later, when we were on vacation (yes, in Wisconsin), I read this passage again to our family and encouraged each of us individually to make sure that we’re still going to follow the Lord. I asked each of them to find a rock and write Joshua 24:15 on it if they were serious about marking that moment with a declaration that they were going to serve the Lord for the rest of their lives.

Let’s summarize...

- Submit to the Purposes of God
- Seize the Promises of God
- Stand on the Precepts of God
- Soak in the Presence of God
- Stay on Point with God

Dads, thanks for answering the call!

Closing Video