

## Be Strong and Courageous - Joshua 1

What do these people have in common?



Indra Nooyi – Nicola Sturgeon – Alex Ferguson – Alan Sugar

They are all leaders – arguably very successful ones.

Our passage today raises the question of leadership – and good Christian leadership – what does that look like, are they all just soft???

As we begin in Joshua, let me show you this map:  
God's people are on the right-hand side waiting to cross over the river Jordan and enter into the promised land, which is currently occupied by other nations.

This is the second time they've been here, last time most of them were distrusting of God and unfaithful so he made them wait 40 years!

But, the biggest thing, is that their leader Moses has just died.

God and Moses had been preparing a young assistant, Joshua, to take over after Moses.

You might have heard about Joshua, and actually he has been mentioned a few times even before this point.



We already know that Joshua is someone who really loves God.

Exodus 33 describes how Moses used to go into a tent just outside the Israelite camp in order to speak to God, in a way that no one else ever has! And v11 says this “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.”

That is saying that Joshua just loved to be close to God, he had a hunger to know him and his glory, and to draw near.

Now, the first few chapters of the book of Joshua shows what happened as he began to take charge of God’s people, and particularly, how he was *just like Moses* – picked up and did exactly the same things that Moses did.

But here we are right at the start, just as he begins to take charge, and I’m going to point out three things about Joshua and leadership and then draw out two lessons for us.

So, here is the first thing:

### **1 – God’s people need a strong and courageous leader**

I’m sure you didn’t miss it – four times he is told to be strong and courageous:

- in v6 God says “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.”
- At the start of v7 “Be strong and *very* courageous.”
- v9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged,”
- And finally in v16 he is told this time by the people! (Not God) they will follow him, and “Only be strong and courageous!” they say.

Really, God couldn’t be more clear with him, in order to be a successful leader of God’s people he is going to need great courage. He is going to have to be brave, persistent, determined, strong-willed, and actually physically strong too!

Let’s answer two questions about this command:

#### **Why is it important?**

And the answer comes in v6: “Be strong and courageous, *because* you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.”

It’s really important to Joshua to be strong and courageous, for the sake of God’s people! They are the ones who benefit! He needs to be a good leader for the sake of the people. God is going to take care of his people, is going to give them everything he promised – that they would have their own land, a place to call home; where there will be loads of them; and that he would pour his blessing on them.

It’s about fulfilment of the promises:

And that might seem like an awful lot of pressure... you might even begin to feel nervous for Joshua, or sympathy towards him:

So the second question I want to ask is: **How can Joshua do this?** Why is it possible for Joshua to be so strong and courageous?

We might think: Joshua has been prepared for this role.

He's followed Moses everywhere for years, he has known this day was coming, he watched Moses lead, when Moses met with God – he was there!

Surely if anyone is ready to take up leadership and be confident and bold in it, Joshua is the man. But if we think that way, we show our thinking revolves around human strength and competence.

Because actually, the answer comes in v5 and v9

V5 “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”

V9 “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”

God makes a wonderful promise: Joshua can be bold and strong, he can be full of courage and confidence(!) *because* God will always always be with him!

Isn't that wonderful? What incredible comfort!

And it makes total sense – God has made these promises to his people, and so God is going to *absolutely* make sure that his promises are kept.

So that's the first thing, God's people need strong and courageous leader.

## **2 – God's people need a leader who is devoted to God's word**

This seems to be the other tip God gives Joshua.

I guess if you start a new job lots of people might give you tips like “don't worry too much about doing *this* in the first couple of weeks” or “don't worry too much about *so-and-so* they always love to complain”

But I hope you would listen carefully to what your boss has to say as they tell you how to do the job?

And God told Joshua to be devoted to his word.

Look down at v7 “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”

God knows what people are like – we are forgetful, and we drift away from him, very naturally!

And that is no different for Joshua as a leader, even a leader who loves being near to God so much that he used to just hang out in that special tent of meeting.

Joshua needs to keep close to God, he needs to know what God thinks, what his priorities are, how he works, what his laws and commands are. And he needs to know them really really well!

Before I was ordained, I used to be a maths teacher. And I know from that experience how important it is to know in great depth, anything you're trying to teach about.

If we were in class, and the kids were asking questions because they didn't understand – often I needed to explain the idea from a different angle, or explain how it fitted into the

whole – so it was really important that I had the big picture, and a really deep understanding – it allowed me to be a much better teacher.

And that’s true for Joshua: He needs to be close to God, and he needs to know God’s *ways* really really well. So it shouldn’t surprise us really that Joshua needs to know God’s *law* really really well: and it needs to be a personal knowledge – v8 says he needs to meditate on it day and night, and he needs to be careful to do everything written in it – not simply someone who hears the word, and knows it, but someone who puts it into practice. And I hope that doesn’t surprise you – God speaks to us, and we can know him, through the words that he has written down to reveal himself to us.

And the great news for Joshua, and the great news of this chapter is:

### 3 – Joshua makes a GREAT start

He picks up straight from where Moses left off, and I think he already shows courage even in this chapter. Courage as a leader and a commander.

That’s why this whole section is here from v10 onwards. The section with the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh.

If it didn’t make much sense to you, have a look at this picture again:

These tribes are on the right-hand side of the river Jordan, and importantly they have already got their land, they’ve settled!

Years before, God had told Moses, and Moses had made them *promise* to help out all of the other tribes when they conquered the land – not just to leave everyone else to it, once they got what they wanted.

So, whilst in verse 10 Joshua commands everyone to get ready to cross the Jordan – and he hasn’t forgotten that there might potentially be a problem with these three.

That’s why we get v12 “But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said,<sup>13</sup> “Remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you...

<sup>v14</sup> 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.”

And they respond really well v16 “Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go.<sup>17</sup> 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. [and they finish]. Only be strong and courageous!”

Joshua does what he needs to do, he gives clear and direct commands, takes control, and people respect that and they follow – it’s a brilliant start!



I suppose this moment is a bit like his first presentation at a new job, or his first lesson as a teacher, it's an important moment – as he stands before the people – it's important and there's pressure, and he is strong and courageous! It's a great start.

What a positive chapter – and what a great guy Joshua seems to be!

But what should we make of it all – what are the lessons here for us?

I wonder what you would say? If you read this passage at the start of your day, and you were praying, Lord what do you want me to learn for today?

Would you think, *I* need to be strong and courageous! I need to be like Joshua?

We sang didn't we – be bold, be strong! Are those words to us?

Well, there is some of that, but I want to say first of all, no.

We've said haven't we, that

**1 – God's people need a strong and courageous leader**

**2 – God's people need a leader who is devoted to God's word**

And Joshua makes a great start.

So it's not actually about us directly, but more about the *leader* we need.

And Joshua is a great leader, but he isn't perfect. Perhaps the most poignant example of him getting something wrong, is that he didn't prepare somebody to take over from him, like Moses did. And after Joshua died, the whole nation fell into disarray, (years of war and conflict and displeasing God).

There are two things for us to learn from this chapter, things for us to do

**1 Thank God for Jesus.**

Actually, although Joshua is a great leader, Jesus is **the great leader** of God's people, and *these things* really fit him!

*Jesus* was courageous and strong.

If you don't already see him that way, let that idea clarify how you view Jesus. Not just gentle Jesus meek and mild. But Jesus the warrior, brave and courageous against evil, he is not afraid of the devil, and he's not afraid of death.

The Lord you follow is a strong Lord, a courageous saviour, a mighty warrior and commander. He is your friend and he is also your champion.

- Think of the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus was facing death and knowing the pain he would endure, said "please father, another way – but not my will but yours be done" – and he goes through with it.
- Even before that, he is talking with his disciples and they are telling him how it's going to be dangerous to go into Jerusalem, and he shouldn't go and so on and so forth. Jesus knew *even more* than them just how dangerous it was, yet Luke tells us "he set his face, (determinedly), towards Jerusalem". He knew what was coming.

Is that how you think of Jesus? When you pray, and give thanks for your saviour, do you think of someone who is mighty and determined? Someone whose passion for you, and love for you, was unwavering in its *strength*, and which was seen in his incredible *courage*? Because that's what Jesus is like – if you have met him in person you would have been struck not only by his gentleness and kindness but also by his single-minded focus, his determination and confidence, he was a really brave and courageous person. And that's great news, because we need a really courageous leader.

Jesus also fits the bill as the leader who is devoted to God's word.

You probably know that Jesus used to get up and rush away from the busyness and the disciples to find some time to pray.

We know he used to study the Scriptures in great detail too, for example – when the devil tempts him in the wilderness, he responds to those temptations by quoting Scripture – and each time it's from verses in the same part of Deuteronomy – suggesting he'd been reading that recently and meditating on it – just as Joshua was supposed to as the leader of God's people!

If I try to put it into modern language: we would say that Jesus was the kind of guy who had time alone with God, and with God's word.

You might even say that Jesus was a very spiritual person – in the modern sense of the word I mean – he spent a lot of his time doing spiritual things like praying and reading the Scriptures.

Jesus would always be at the prayer meeting, Jesus would go to home groups, Jesus walks closely with God (his father).

So I hope that's how you see Jesus: totally devoted to prayer and the scriptures. That's how he kept close to his father, it's where he drew all his strength. Without it he wouldn't have been able to do all he did, it was like the battery in the phone, or the engine in the car, vital, and powering everything.

Joshua was a *great* leader, but the standards he's called to, remind us and point us to Jesus who was the perfect leader, and I hope they highlight for us particular aspects of Jesus character, which we might find encouraging, thank God for him!

So, that is the first thing, give thanks for Jesus.

## **2 Be courageous and devoted like Joshua**

I hope as you read this you are actually encouraged to be courageous for God and devoted to God?

Anyone who works in a school and I guess many other workplaces, will have heard talk recently about developing "resilience"

I often do funerals for older folks and hear how they persevered through immense pain and hardship. I hear about people who didn't complain and just got on with it – It seems to have grown out of a wartime mentality – people were very strong!

Yet today it seems that there's a problem that people lack strength and resilience.

Of course, all of us are at times afraid to try, afraid of change, afraid of the unknown!

But if that is you at the moment, and if you're a Christian and you find yourself often feeling afraid:

Let me point out, the same promises Joshua received *are* true of you, although of course his mission to conquer a land, and be the commander of God's people isn't!

However, just like Joshua, the Lord will never leave you for forsake you v5.

Just like Joshua, the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go v9

And that *should* affect your fear, your worry, your apprehension. Look to him, rely on him!

Pray!

Perhaps you need to take to heart v7+8 more and more, which talk about the importance of closeness with the Lord and knowing his word? If Joshua and Jesus need it, then you probably do too.

But remember the reason why Joshua could be courageous, because the Almighty Lord of all, was *his* Lord, and *his* God.

And he is your God to.

It's not simply that you need to 'man up' or the equivalent if you're a lady. No, remember that God is on your side, he is with you, and he will look after you.

Over the next few weeks we're going to work through the next few chapters of Joshua, and we're going to see how, again and again the Lord was with Joshua, and helped him, actually the Lord did everything. I hope you will all look forward to seeing more.

But today we've seen that the Lord wants a strong and courageous leader for his people, and one who is devoted to his word – and Joshua makes a great start.