

BE STRONG - BE COURAGEOUS

JOSHUA'S COMMISSION - Joshua 1:1-9 (NRSV)

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. No one shall 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 not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. **I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.**"

After the death of Moses, Joshua is named by God to be Moses' successor as God's prophet. Imagine following Moses as the leader of the God's chosen people. It had to have been rather intimidating for Joshua to even contemplate the days ahead of him. Moses' leadership and closeness to God was unparalleled. Deuteronomy 34:10-12 states that no one had ever matched Moses for all of the signs and wonders that the Lord had sent him to perform. Joshua must have been quaking in his baby shoes just knowing that he had Moses' very big boots to fill! How would he be received by the people of Israel? Would the people ever follow him? Would he be able to lead with Moses' authority and faithfulness? Would he even be able to believe in himself?

Yet, God had also stated that he would raise up another prophet just like Moses to lead the people just as Moses had done (Deut. 18:15-22), and God had chosen Moses' assistant Joshua was to become Moses' successor. God promised that Joshua would speak like a prophet, intercede on Israel's behalf, and mediate the covenant just as Moses had done before him. Joshua would be okay; Joshua would be equal to Moses.

And so, we have the installation service at the beginning of the book of Joshua, placed at the beginning of this new ministry to assure both Joshua and Israel that God would continue to be with them. This service of installation includes three key narratives: 1. God charges Joshua with encouragement (be strong and courageous), 2. God describes Joshua's mission (cross the Jordan, occupy the land, act in accordance with the law), and 3. God promises assistance (I will be with you). Together these three encapsulate Joshua's life going forward. If Joshua stays the course and does not stray away from God's guiding hand he will be the leader God has promised Israel. He has nothing to fear.

This installation service comes before Joshua has done a thing. The words of God confidently promise a secure and fruitful future for the people of Israel. While the battle to occupy Canaan has not yet begun God has already determined that it will be so. Through the advance notice that God gives of their occupation of the land the people are taught that the land comes to them not because of their might, but because of God's grace. Thus, when God instructs Joshua to 'be strong and courageous' (three times in this text), God is not telling Joshua that he ought to buck up, work out, and practice his battle skills so that he might possess the land. Joshua's battle skills really don't even matter. The strength and courage Joshua needs to count on is the strength of his faithfulness to God and his courage to follow God's guiding hand going forward; God is encouraging Joshua that it is only through his trust and dependance on the Lord that he will succeed and be the prophet that God is calling him to be. God's call to 'be strong and courageous' reminds us all that God will be guiding us every step of the way - and in that we can claim strength and courage enough to fill some very big shoes.

Questions for Reflection

Have you ever felt intimidated following a person of great giftedness? What thoughts ran through your head? How were you received? How were you able to do this?

When has God gone before you? When have you found strength and courage in God's faithfulness?

If strength and courage are not to be found within, but through God, how do you approach the challenges set before you? How would you help someone who needs strength and courage in their life?

PRAYER STATIONS

Choose one or more prayer experiences to reflect on the 'strength and courage' that God invites us to consider, understand and claim as we pray on behalf of ourselves and others who need strength and courage in these days.

PRAYERS FOR THE WORLD

There are many places in the world, and in our country where people live in fear. Fear of hunger or disease, fear of war or violence, fear of loneliness or isolation. Fear of

- Choose a particular place, whether a city, country, or other geographical area and find it on the map provided.
- Spend some time quietly praying that those in this area might hear those powerful words, "be strong and courageous," and that they might know that God is with them. Pray that they might know the peace of Christ.
- Pray for all those in that region - the poor, the rich, elected officials, families, workers. Pray for the environment, pray for justice, pray for community. Lift your prayers up to God.
- Write a brief prayer on your map at the location for which you have been praying. Take your map home with you and continue praying for this region and for others, filling your map with

OPEN HANDS

- Close your eyes and clench your hands tightly, with your palms facing upwards. Imagine, clenched in your hands, all the pressures and worries and tensions that you are carrying.
- Then in your own time turn your hands, still gripping tightly, over so that they are facing down.
- Imagine God's hands underneath yours and slowly open your hands so that the things that you are carrying fall into God's hands.
- You may wish to repeat this several times.
- Then turn your hands face up, but this time with the palms open and ask God's Spirit to fill you afresh.
- Trace your hand on the paper provided. Write some worries that you find difficult to entrust to God on your hand. Cut your hand out and tape it to a window when you get home. Look at how the light shines through your hand print. Contemplate what the light of God shining through your worries might mean when you need strength and courage.

PSALM 23

“Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.” There is an actual place in Palestine that has been called the Valley of the Shadow of Death. It leads from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea and is a very narrow and dangerous pathway through the mountain range. The path is rough, and there is danger that a sheep may fall at any moment to its death. It is a forbidding journey that one dreads to take. But the sheep are not afraid. Why? Because the shepherd is with them. And so come those dark places in life through which we are compelled to pass: Death is one; disappointment, loneliness, phobias, compulsions, obsessions, and reliving traumatic experiences fill us with fear.

- If you feel you are in "the valley of the shadow," or if you can recall a time when you did, stop, become still and quiet, and meditate on this powerful Psalm, and create a bead bracelet as you meditate. As you read each verse, and add the appropriate bead, take time to visualize each scene and form specific prayers around each of the healing principles in the psalm.
- Take out of your baggie the piece of clear elastic with the piece of tape on the end to keep the beads in place until it is knotted. Work over your baggie to keep your beads from “escaping.” In your baggie are the coloured beads you will need and silver spacer beads.
- Thread the beads on the elastic in the order as directed in the psalm below, pausing to pray with each bead as you come to it. Place a silver spacer bead between each coloured bead.

PSALM 23

The Lord is my shepherd (*white*), I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures (*emerald*),

he leads me beside still waters (*blue sapphire*),

he restores my soul.

He guides me in paths of righteousness (*clear crystal*) for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death (*black jet*)

I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

Your rod and your staff (*caramel brown*) they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil (*pale peach*), my cup overflows (*light amethyst*).

Surely goodness and love (*pink luster*) will follow me all the days of my life,

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

- Make your ‘psalm’ into a bracelet by tying the ends together with multiple knots