



Text: Joshua 1:1-9¹
Series: Facing Life with Courage
Title: Part 1 – A Solid Foundation for Courage
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“Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land....” Joshua 1:2

This is a pivotal moment in the life of Joshua and the people of God. I don't want you to miss this. This is a defining moment.

As we examine this Word from God this morning, this might become a defining moment for you, too. When all is stripped away, what is our confidence built upon? What is our foundation for courage? What is our strength grounded upon? When everything else is stripped away, what do we have left?

As Joshua prepares to lead the people of Israel of Israel into the land of promise God wants to make certain that Joshua's life is built on a foundation of confidence that cannot be shaken. God strips it all bare. He sweeps it clean of anything that will prove weak and uncertain in the days of challenge that lie ahead of Joshua and the people he leads. He wants nothing to remain that can crumble under the stresses of the battles that will come.

Joshua and the people of Israel are literally standing on the edge of the Jordan River, looking across into the Promised Land. The land had been promised to their ancestor Abraham 700 years earlier. (Gen 12:7) For most of last 400 years, they people of Israel had lived in slavery in Egypt. They had been waiting, longing, hoping, striving, suffering for this moment ... and now it was here. But Moses is dead!

Moses, God's servant, who led the people out of slavery in Egypt is dead. Moses, the man through whom God brought his Word, his Law, to the people on Mount Sinai is dead. Moses, the leader who stood toe to toe with Pharaoh and bested him, is dead. Moses, the great intercessor, who offered his life in exchange for that of the nation of Israel to set aside God's anger against his rebellious nation, is dead. And God says to Israel "now" is the time to move forward into the land? "Now"? Could there be a worse time than now?

Moses was a man like no other. Someone wrote this epitaph on his life. Just let your eyes drift from the beginning of The Book of Joshua over to the left in your

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Bible or just flip the page back to the end of the The Book of Deuteronomy, the book that comes just before The Book of Joshua in your Bible. This is how Deuteronomy ends...

“And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.” Deuteronomy 34:10-12

And now Joshua it's over to you. This has got to be one of history's greatest "tough acts to follow." Joshua had firsthand knowledge of the greatness of Moses. He had been Moses personal assistant for almost 40 years at this point. He had been with Moses on the slopes of Mt Sinai when God had given Moses the Law – Joshua had seen the glory of God in the face of Moses as he came down from his encounter with God. Joshua had sat at the door of the Tent of Meeting time and time again, the place where Moses went to commune with God. He'd heard the prayer. He'd seen the impact of God's Word upon the life and spirit of Moses. He knew Moses was a great man.

Joshua was not one of those "second seat guys" who is always looking for a way to become "number one." He was jealous for Moses' honour to a fault in fact Moses had to tell him to take it easy at one point. (C.f. Num 11:28) And now, Moses is dead.

Moses had been a great leader, but not a perfect leader. The reason Israel stood at the river, about to enter the land without him, was due to his imperfection. Years before, the people had needed water. They were travelling through a desert. They were thirsty and as they had done so many times before, they grumbled against God and against Moses. Moses asked God what to do and God said to Moses...

“Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle.” Numbers 20:8

But when Moses went to fulfill God's directive, instead of speaking to the rock, instead of telling the rock to produce water, he hit the rock with his staff, twice. God graciously overlooked Moses failure to follow through with his command and miraculously provided the water that the people needed, but he said to his servant, Moses...



“Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.” Numbers 20:12

And so Joshua, not Moses, stood on the bank of the Jordan River, preparing to lead the people into the land. What was Joshua’s state of mind? I think we have some strong clues in the words that the Lord spoke to him. Notice verse 9 of Joshua chapter one. The Lord said to Joshua...

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

Three times the Lord told Joshua, “be strong and courageous.” (1:6, 7, 9) When God repeats things there is usually some very good reason for him to do so. Joshua needed courage. As Joshua thought about the days to come, as he considered the challenges that lay ahead, perhaps there was a shiver of fear, a slight trembling of the hand, maybe a quick darting of the eyes.

“Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land....” Joshua 1:2

“You” is singular. “You” is Joshua. “All this people,” is a multitude. “Now” is the time. The full weight of leadership now rested on Joshua’s shoulders.

God knows he needs strengthening to face the challenges ahead. Throughout the years of wandering in the desert, Moses had steered the people straight when they so often had wandered off God’s course. If it hadn’t have been for Moses’ strong and faithful leadership, the people would never have come to banks of the Jordan River. And now, the same strength would be needed by Joshua to lead them across and take possession of the land and keep them on track with God.

It’s worth noting what God doesn’t do to encourage and hearten Joshua. He doesn’t point to Joshua’s track record as a military leader. Joshua had a great record, but Joshua’s past experience was not solid enough to be his foundation for the future.

God didn’t encourage him with the thought that he had been mentored by the greatest leader the world had ever seen. Joshua’s training under Moses was not a solid enough foundation for the leadership challenges he would face in the future.

God didn’t point to the support he would receive from the people in his efforts to take the land. With one voice and with sincere hearts they promised to support him (c.f. 1:16-17) but that was not a solid foundation for the future – they’d made similar promises before to Moses, only to break them.



The source of Joshua's strength had to be something more dependable than his own experience or his skills or his training. It certainly had to be in something more trustworthy than the people who surrounded him that day at the Jordan river.

Just stop with me for a moment. Where do people tell us most often to look for support and strength? We're directed to draw strength from our competencies, our abilities, our skills. We're told that we have it within us to accomplish great things. Strange then, that God didn't do that with Joshua at this crucial moment in this life. And we're often told to look to the support of others and draw strength from them and their abilities and their competence. Strange, don't you think, that God didn't do that either.

You see, God wants to make sure that Joshua's confidence and courage is built on bedrock. He wants everything else stripped away. He wants Joshua founded upon the Rock that cannot move! He wants Joshua's life to be grounded in the only source of strength that never changes! He wants Joshua to build the foundation of his courage on God himself.

If you build your confidence on your own experience, there will always come a day when you are out of your depth and beyond your experience. If you build your confidence on your training, you will always face situations for which you are unprepared. If you ground your confidence in the support of others, there will come a day when they will not be there when you need them. The only foundation for strength and courage that can truly stand every test and meet every challenge is a foundation built on the eternal God and his unchanging Word.

God equipped Joshua with three promises that were intended to strengthen him as he crossed the river and began the task of possessing the land that God was giving to the people of Israel. What could Joshua depend on? What foundation for courage did he have? None of these three promises were new. God reminded Joshua of the Word he had already given many times to his people. He stirs up in Joshua a **focused remembrance** of his promises.

Again, stop for a moment with me. This is a point at which our spiritual experience intersects with Joshua's. Often in the Bible we read of moments of fresh revelation but God was not bringing fresh revelation to Joshua's attention. He was reminding him of promises already made. Whenever God brings a promise to our attention it's always one that he has already made. Just like Joshua, our strength and courage need be grounded on a **focused remembrance** of the promises that God has already made in His Word.



First, God reminded Joshua that he was at work underneath the whole enterprise of taking the land and parcelling it out to the tribes of Israel. God said to Joshua...

“go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.” Joshua 1:2-3

Joshua’s foundation for courage was built on God’s promise of a homeland

The success of Joshua’s task did not ultimately rest on him but on God. Seven hundred years before the days of Joshua, God had made a promise to Abraham that he would be given the very land Joshua is about to enter. Abraham camped one night near the town of Shechem as he journeyed through from his ancestral home in the north to Egypt in the south. God appeared to Abraham and said...

“To your offspring I will give this land.” Genesis 12:7

Shechem is located in the very centre of the territory that Joshua was about to enter. Hundreds of years later, God appeared to Moses and repeated the promise. God commanded Moses to go to Egypt and lead the people of Israel out from under the slave power of the Pharaoh. And he said to Moses...

“I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.” Exodus 3:17

“I promise.” The land that Joshua was about to enter had been promised by God to the people of Israel for hundreds of years. It was an old promise, but God’s promises have no expiry date! For seven hundred years the descendants of Abraham had clung to the promise that one day they would have a land where they could dwell in safety without fearing the anger of slave masters and the attacks of bandits. They longed for a land of their own where they could plant their crops, raise their families and worship their God in peace and safety.

It takes faith to believe a promise. Whether it’s the promise of a friend to be there when you need them or the promise of a business colleague to keep their end of a bargain, promises require faith and trust.

Notice the way in which God expresses his promise of the land to Joshua. God refers to the land as something...

“I am giving to them” Joshua 1:2

That isn’t too surprising since they were standing on the shore, preparing to enter the land. And it isn’t surprising because it was really God’s land to give. The



earth is the Lord's (Ps 24:1) and he can give it to whoever he wishes (Acts 17:26). The residents of the land were a group of nations whose rebellion against God had reached such an overflow of wickedness that they were ripe for destruction and Israel's swords of conquest would serve as God's judgment upon them. (cf. Genesis 15:16)

But it's the second expression of the promise that caught my attention. God said to Joshua...

“Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you....” Joshua 1:3

In God's mind, it's a done deal! From God's perspective, Joshua and the people are already home! In his mind he sees every step they will take in the land in the years to come – and it will take years for them to take possession of the land. Not until the reigns of King David and King Solomon, some four hundred years after Joshua, will the people inhabit the boundaries that God outlines to Joshua. But God's eye and his promise meet in perfect harmony. What he has spoken will come to pass. It's his promise. You can count on it.

God promised the people of Israel a home. He promises one to you and me, too. Jesus said...

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” John 14:1-3

Will you believe his promise? Will you allow his promise to calm your troubled heart?

Second...

Joshua's foundation for courage was built on God's promise of protection

“No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life.” Joshua 1:5

As the people drew closer and closer to the land of promise, the Lord placed it on Moses heart to write a promise for the people. It wasn't Moses' promise, it was God's promise. As they began to think about how they would conquer the nations who lived in the land, Moses wrote this word of promise from the Lord for the people...



“he will give their kings into your hand, and you shall make their name perish from under heaven. No one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them.” Deuteronomy 7:24

Joshua had been there on the day that God had crushed the armies of Egypt in the Red Sea without Israel having to even raise a sword. He knew God was able to protect his people.

Joshua had also seen God in action on the day when he had led the army of Israel in battle against the Amalekites. Moses, together with Aaron his brother and a prominent leader by the name of Hur, watched the battle unfold from a hill nearby. When Moses lifted up his arms in petition to God, Israel carried the battle. But when Moses' arms became weary and they dropped, the Amalekites came on in strength. Aaron and Hur then stood with Moses, supporting his arms, and Joshua and the army defeated the Amalekites.

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.’” Exodus 17:14

Why was Moses to recite it to Joshua? It was to remind him of where victory came from. Joshua knew that Israel's hope wasn't in his wise military strategy or in the fighting heart of the people. Victory came from the Lord! God was their protector and defender.

God promised to protect Joshua and his people. God promises to protect you and me, too. Will you draw courage from his promise to you? The Apostle Peter wrote...

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:6-7

Will you trust in his care? Will you release your fears and worries to Him?

Third,

Joshua's foundation for courage was built on God's promise of His presence

“Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.” Joshua 1:5

When Moses had stood against the Pharaoh of Egypt, it was the Lord who was with him. When God had commissioned him to return to Egypt and lead the people out from slavery, Moses had had serious doubts. God said to him...



“Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.’ But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?’ He said, ‘But I will be with you...’” Exodus 3:10-12

God gave Moses some miraculous signs to show Pharaoh that the Lord’s presence was with Moses. Moses continued to dither and deal with the Lord, but ultimately the source of Moses’ strength before Pharaoh came back to this simple promise: “I will be with you....”

As Moses’ assistant for almost forty years, Joshua knew how many times Moses had relied on his relationship with God as his source of strength and encouragement.

During the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the people grumbled against Moses and against God again and again. They grumbled for water, they grumbled for food, they grumbled for new leaders, they grumbled for new gods.

Again and again, Moses was driven into the arms of the Lord as his only source of hope and strength, and Joshua saw that relationship first hand for all those years. As Moses is aware that his life is coming to a close, he intentionally passes the mantle of his leadership on to Joshua.

**“Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, ‘Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.’”
Deuteronomy 31:7-8**

Given all that Joshua knew about Moses’ relationship with God, you have to believe that those words had a tremendous impact on Joshua. Joshua had seen with his own eyes the testimony of God’s presence with Moses.

But something happened that had an even greater impact on him. A short time after Moses’ testified to the Lord’s promise to be with Joshua, the Lord himself spoke it to Joshua. The Lord told Moses that his days were few and that he should bring Joshua to “the tent of meeting, that I may commission him.” (Deuteronomy 31:14)

As Joshua and Moses approached the tent, God’s presence came down upon the tent in the form of a pillar of cloud. God spoke out of the cloud to Moses and then to Joshua.



“And the Lord commissioned Joshua the son of Nun and said, ‘Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to give them. I will be with you.’ Deuteronomy 31:23

“Just as” the Lord had been with Moses, so he would be with Joshua. What a promise! What a word from the Lord! “I will be with you.”

And “just as” the Lord was with Moses and Joshua, he promises to be with you and me, too. The writer of Hebrews draws from God’s word to Joshua...

“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ [Joshua 1:5] So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; [Ps 118:6] I will not fear; what can man do to me?’ [Ps 56:4,11]” Hebrews 13:5-6

Will the promise of God’s presence bring us peace even when financial markets are failing? Will the promise of his presence instil new courage into our hearts when we face hostility from former friends or alienated relationships?

God has rekindled in Joshua’s heart and mind his promises of a home, of protection and of his presence, but there was one more word that God needed to set in Joshua’s heart as a foundation for courage in the years to come.

How would all these promises remain alive and powerful in Joshua’s heart? What would keep them present to his mind? How would his leadership decisions be kept consistent with the promises of God?

The Book! The Book! The Book!

Moses had been writing down the words that the Lord had spoken to him and collecting them as a book. Remember Moses’ account of Joshua’s battle with the Amalekites, the one he was to read aloud to Joshua so that he would remember his source of victory? Well, Moses had written down the record of that battle and many others, too. He had written down the story of the patriarchs, of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. He had written the history of the travels of the people from Egypt to the border of the land of promise. He had written down the Law that God had given him on Mt Sinai and all the laws about worship that the Lord had spoken to him. He had written down the songs that the Lord had given him. He had even written down a manual for dividing up the land of promise, a manual that Joshua would need to consult in the years to come as the land was divided among the tribes. (cf. Deut 31:9; Ex 17:14; Ex 24:4, 7; Num 33:2; Num 36:13; Deut 31:19. He kept adding to his book until it contained everything the Lord wanted in it. (cf. Deut 31:24)

And now Moses gives Joshua a gift! The written Word of the Lord – the Book of the Law. And God said to Joshua...



“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.

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.” Joshua 1:7-8

Joshua’s foundation for courage was built on a steady intake of & obedience to God’s Word

If you want to stay on track with my promises, the Lord said to Joshua, devour the Book! Don’t let it out of your mouth!

Three times the Lord told Joshua to be “strong and courageous.” (1:6, 7, 9). In this instance, the middle of the three, the word “courageous” can also be translated as “resolute.” The kind of “courage” that we need in our interaction with God’s Word is a “resolute,” determined, unwavering commitment to read and obey the Word of the Lord. We need courage to stand on God’s Word. We need a resolute commitment to its authority and its truth because it is the Word of God.

The word “meditate” is drawn from a word that means “to mutter.” Meditation was the practice of talking over the Word of God with God and with others. The Book of the Law told Joshua...

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 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.” Deuteronomy 6:4-7

You shall “mutter” God’s Word in private and in public. Talk about it. Talk with God about it. Talk with one another about it. Talk to yourself about it. The Puritans used to talk about the importance of preaching to ourselves. What they were thinking of was meditating upon the Word and often they did it out loud to themselves! There have been many times I’ve preached myself into repentance and obedience as I’ve encountered the truth of God’s Word. I heartily recommend the exercise of muttering God’s Word to yourself as you drive, or wash dishes or putter in the garden.

And God’s word to Joshua was not only that he should mediate on it, but that his meditation should lead to obedience. Notice how important obedience to the Word was for God. **First** of all, Joshua was to be “careful to do” the law. (v.7) **Second**, he was to do “all the law.” (v.7) **Third**, he was not to deviate from it



even slightly, neither “to the right hand or to the left.” (v.7) **Fourth**, he was to mediate on it “day and night” so that he would be “careful to do ... all that is written in it.” (v.8)

It is impossible to overestimate the importance that God placed upon Joshua’s knowing and doing His Word. The success of Joshua’s task was tied to it. The prosperity and success that God promised Joshua was in the completing of the conquest of the land. As James Hudson Taylor, the pioneer missionary to China, once said ...

“God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply.”
James Hudson Taylor

This assurance of prosperity and success had nothing to do with building businesses, accumulating bank accounts or amassing wealth.² It’s was God’s promise that when Joshua accomplished the Lord’s purposes according to God Word he would experience God’s blessing and provision for his task.

God has reminded Joshua of his great promises: the promise of a homeland, the promise of his protection and the promise of his presence. He’s challenged Joshua to be resolute in his meditation on and obedience to his Law. Joshua’s foundation is to rest solidly on God’s Word.

To bring his point home to Joshua he asks him a question. In fact, everything that God has said to Joshua boils down to this.

“Have I not commanded you?” Joshua 1:9

God asks a question because I think he wants to get inside Joshua’s head and heart. He wants Joshua to examine his faith and trust in God. Underneath this question I think there are other questions:

**Is My Word enough for you?
Are My promises enough for you?
Is My revealed will enough for you?**

But the question that forms the foundation for them all is...

Am I enough for you?

It’s not enough to merely mediate on the Bible. It’s not enough to merely obey the Bible. Unless our meditation and obedience are rooted in a trust and

² For a thorough examination of the language and context issues surrounding the use of “prosperous” and “success” see David M. Howard Jr., Joshua, Vol. 5 The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998.



confidence in God himself, the Bible will be nothing to us but a book of antiquated rules and historical curiosities. “Have I not commanded you?” At the heart of God’s question to Joshua is the essence of God’s communication with the human race. He speaks to us in order to draw us into a relationship with himself.

If you want to face the challenges of life with the strength and courage that God can give, you need to answer these questions for yourself. I said as I began this morning that this could be a defining moment for you.

When we strip away all of the other things we usually lean on for courage – our competence, our experience, our connections – and we’re left without anything in ourselves on which to lean, are his promises enough for us? Is his Word enough for us? Is he enough for us?

Let’s pray.

- **The Celebration of the Lord’s Table**
- **Songs of Communion**
 - Before the Throne of God Above
 - There Is a Fountain
- **Benediction**