

“Diving Deep - Courage”

Scripture: Joshua 1:9

Graphics: scuba gear, water, diving, bible, courage

Big Truth: The word of God guides our lives, but so often we skim the surface with our reading or bible study. This series will take us deeper into common verses that hold incredible meaning for our lives. The people of the Panama UMC are called to dive deeper into the Word for life.

Focus Phrase: Strength and courage thrive when I'm obedient to God's Word and engaged in God's plans.

1. Introduction

- A. Back in 2009, I was commissioned to do the work of an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church. That means the church, my clergy peers, my mentors, and (most importantly) God confirmed in me a call to pastoral ministry. I was then ordained in 2011.
- B. When I first started out as a pastor in 2003, I was super-naive and green. Basically, I had no idea what I didn't know - I didn't know it - and so I was bold and fearless, or so I thought. I may have been zealous and reckless at times, as I look back.
- C. It turns out that I had a lot to learn along the way...and still learn more every day. But, my testimony is that I'm standing up here today because in 2002 I said yes to God's calling, somehow letting my fear and inexperience be used by God. He's somehow using this right-brained, introverted, recovering engineer from the suburbs of Buffalo to lead...and that wouldn't be possible without your grace and love for Stacy and me. So, thank you for that.
- D. In the bible there are many stories of commissioning. Moses and Aaron were commissioned. The disciples were commissioned. Jesus, himself, was commissioned at the beginning of his ministry in Mark 1. You may have been commissioned to do something at some point in your life.
- E. A commissioning is a charge or task given to a person or group with specific instructions to do something. Officers in the military are commissioned. Pastors are commissioned. Anyone sent out to do a task is commissioned, especially if that task is for Jesus and His Kingdom.
- F. For the past few Sundays, we've been diving deep into the Word of God by looking at ONE VERSE that maybe we've heard a lot, or posted on social media. The deep dive is like a scuba diver going to the depths to learn more than they can see from the surface.
- G. So far, we've dived deep into John 3:5 and Philippians 4:13.
- H. Today, we're going to the Old Testament book of Joshua to read about the commissioning of Joshua. I first began to hear and memorize this verse in a Vacation Bible School curriculum way back before I was a pastor.

- I. The verse we're diving into is Joshua 1:9. In the beginning of the book of Joshua, Moses has died and Joshua is commissioned by GOD to take over leadership of Israel.
- J. Our deep dive today will take us into the topics of courage and fear and trust, obedience to God's call, and, then, what it means to be commissioned for God's work in the world.
- K. If you're taking notes, here's where we're heading: **Strength and courage thrive when I'm obedient to God's Word and engaged in God's plans.**
- L. Let's center our hearts before the Lord and invite the Holy Spirit to come guide us and tell us the truth as we worship...
- M. **PRAY!**
- N. I hope you brought your bible with you today. Let's turn to Joshua 1, and read together verse 9. We're using the NRSV translation, and it'll be on the screen for us to read together...ready?!!

2. Scripture

A. READ Joshua 1:9 (together)

B. CAUTIONS:

- i. On the surface, this scripture is tailor-made for a bumper sticker! In fact, it seems like this could be a theme verse for the past two years. We've been living through a modern-day pandemic in which we don't have good answers, things constantly change, and there's been fear, confusion, head-scratching, and so much angst.
- ii. "All ya gotta do is be strong and courageous, do not be frightened or dismayed, and everything will be dandy, right?" WELL...
- iii. See, that's the major issue with ripping this particular verse out of context. When we take this verse and try to slap it onto any and every difficult situation in our lives, it leaves us wondering why we're not experiencing more courage or less fear...as if simply saying we should have courage will give that to us.
- iv. When we try to apply it to the most difficult circumstances, it really begins to leave us jaded unless we take more time to dive deeper.
- v. We're tempted to make this verse about putting on the big-boy or big-girl pants and gritting our teeth and doing hard things on our own.
- vi. The flip side of this, if we include the second half of the verse, is that we do things that may be reckless because, well, "The Lord is with me wherever I go..." and we think that also means, "Whatever I want to do..."
- vii. If we disconnect this verse from the context in which it's found, then it loses the meaning that God originally meant for Joshua and the people of Israel.

viii. Instead of being God's incredible encouragement to Joshua, this verse can make us feel even weaker and MORE afraid. "Why am I not more willing to simply stop being afraid of something that coming?" or "What am I doing wrong that I don't feel courageous, even though I know God is with me?"

C. Let's first get some CONTEXT, and then we can dive deeper.

- i. **This verse was spoken by God to Joshua.** Joshua was God's appointed leader for the Israelites after the death of Moses. Moses was the man who God chose to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land.
- ii. As the story of God's people unfolded in the wilderness - after the exodus and before entering the Promised Land - Moses made some mistakes and God removed the future leadership role from him. Because of that, God told Moses that he wouldn't be the one to lead the people into the Promised Land.
- iii. By the end of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses had died in the wilderness, leaving the people without a leader to lead them.
- iv. But before Moses died, God had selected Moses' apprentice Joshua to take over leadership. Now, Joshua wasn't always so sure he wanted to be the leader. That's why, at the beginning of the book of Joshua, God commissioned Moses' successor Joshua to lead the people.
- v. Now, you may be thinking, "How hard can it be to lead people across a river into the Promised Land?" The people needed a land and were without one, so let's go.
- vi. However, one problem. There were people - BIG, STRONG, NUMEROUS people - already living in the place that God had told Moses and Joshua that they were going to live.
- vii. So, not only did Joshua have to get a million+ people across a river with everything they own, BUT once they get there, he would lead a military campaign to defeat the people already living there, who, you can bet, weren't just going to roll out the red carpet and welcome the Israelites in!
- viii. Don't be afraid, Joshua? Don't be dismayed, Joshua? Seems like a lot to ask, right?

D. DEEPER

- i. Yet, the deeper we go, the more we see. Let's look around a bit...
- ii. First, the command by God to Joshua to be strong and courageous in verse 9 had very little to do with Joshua's internal fortitude to make this happen.
- iii. In fact, it wasn't Joshua's plan at all! It was God's plan that was given specifically to Moses. And, when Moses died, IT WAS STILL GOD'S

PLAN! It just happened that, now, Joshua was the one that God chose to help implement the plan instead of Moses.

- iv. In verses 1-6, God laid out the plan:
 - a. Proceed to cross the river, just like Moses planned.
 - b. Every place the sole of your foot will tread, I (God) will give that to you.
 - c. No one will be able to stop you...all the days of your life.
 - d. I (God) will be with you. I (God) will not fail you or forsake you.
 - e. Be strong and courageous for you SHALL put this people into the land I promised them.
- v. This was not a suggestion by God. This wasn't a game plan. This was a COMMAND. Joshua MAY have said, "Well, if that's the way you want it, then you have a real problem on your hands, God!"
- vi. But, see, God was not surprised by any of this. I suspect that Moses and Joshua had very similar spiritual gifts - leadership, administration, discernment... God knew everything about Joshua. God knew that Joshua was afraid. God knew that Joshua was dismayed. God knows that about you and me, too.
- vii. God knew the exact things that He needed to work on IN JOSHUA in order for him to engage in the command that God gave to Moses, which was then transferred to Joshua.
- viii. It wasn't internal fortitude that encouraged Joshua. He didn't need to simply put on his big-boy pants! He didn't need to be clever and manipulate the people or the process. He needed to trust God and give up any control that he might have had.
- ix. Joshua could understand the encouragement from God because Joshua KNEW that God had been faithful to Moses...and would be faithful to him, even though he was scared and dismayed that the plan included crossing a river and fighting an enemy.
- x. But there's one more thing we need to see as we dive deeper into this text: Joshua needed to continue to be faithful too...to trust God and trust God's instructions to Moses.
 - a. In verses 7-8, we read this, "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.”

- b. God was not JUST asking Joshua to trust the plan for the river crossing and the military campaign, as huge as that seemed. God was, maybe more importantly, commanding Joshua to be **holy**, to be obedient to the instructions God gave to Moses for ALL OF IT up to that moment - the Law, the instructions, the way to worship and sing and sacrifice.
- c. This wasn't about just crossing the river. This was about being commissioned to lead a LIFE with GOD for and with the people of God.
- xi. This verse is so much more than just finding strength when things get tough. This verse is about giving your entire life to the ONE who's Word is true and eternal and wants to USE you like He did Joshua and Moses and the disciples and Paul and your grandmother.

3. Application

- A. To be commissioned into the holy life of a courageous follower of God's Son Jesus, our Lord and Savior, is to be FILLED with the courage and strength that comes from Jesus.
- B. And in the same ways that Jesus was courageous and strong in the midst of incredible pain and suffering, you and I are called to be strong and courageous through Jesus.
- C. Strength and courage thrive in your life when you're obedient to God's Word and engaged in God's plans.
- D. Part of that is because, ultimately, it's not up to you or me...God is the one with the plans. God is the one in control. God is the one who knows the future.
- E. Your job is to receive the commissioning that God placed onto your life the instant you became a willing follower of Jesus, and then be obedient to the life that Jesus commands you to live...no excuses.
- F. Here are three practical ways to begin or increase a life of courage and strength in Jesus today:
 - i. First, **Let God turn your Fear into Trust**
 - a. Fear comes from the idea that there's something lacking in your life that you need and don't think you have. We fear that people will reject us. We fear being alone. We fear all kinds of things from financial problems to health crises.
 - b. God isn't asking you to wish away your fear. God is asking you to take your fear, admit you have it, and then allow Him to turn that into trust in Him.

- c. The pathway to that is admitting that God has been faithful in the past and is faithful now. And then allow the Holy Spirit to speak that truth into your life - over and over and over - for the future.
 - d. Joshua was ready to go forward because he knew the God who was behind him, next to him, and who went before him.
 - e. Let your fear be turned into trust because God has always proved to be faithful to you. Recount the ways today.
- ii. Second, **Be Obedient to God's Word and Plan**
- a. Joshua was commanded to be obedient to the Law of Moses, given by God to the people of Israel.
 - b. You and I, as followers of Jesus, are commanded by God to be obedient to Jesus and his words. We don't get to change those words, dismiss them, find loopholes, or ignore them.
 - c. We also are not forced to follow them. You and I are choosing to follow Jesus and live in obedience to His words, or I suspect we wouldn't be here today or worshiping online.
 - d. What we don't get to do is say we're followers of Jesus and then ignore or dismiss what He said. This isn't legalistic...this is a heart strangely warmed by Jesus and His words which then passionately desires to obey Jesus for life as a disciple.
 - e. It's about confessing our sin and letting Jesus take every sinful thought and action captive to eradicate it from our lives. It's about fleeing from immorality and greed and lust and anything that grieves the heart of God.
 - f. Be obedient to God's Word and plan.
- iii. And third, **Intentionally Engage in God's Mission**
- a. The more you trust in God's sovereignty and are obedient to God's plans, the more practice you'll get to engage in God's mission.
 - b. Joshua knew the mission and was ready to go, when God said GO! It took some time to prepare, but the camp moved and we know the plan was successful.
 - c. Jesus knew the plan and was intentional about implementing God's plan for salvation of the world...through the incarnation...the cross...and empty tomb.
 - d. The disciples were sent out by Jesus to, "...make disciples of every nation, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."
 - e. Your mission is to make disciples for Jesus Christ. You and I must be intentional about that, or it just doesn't happen.

- f. We have to embrace the Great Commission together. We have to embrace our church mission and vision to make disciples by giving every person in our community the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus.
 - g. We must be intentional about welcoming the new person, raising up new generations of Jesus apprentices, and walking together through every stage of life - through every circumstance.
 - h. When we keep practicing that mission together, in love, we grow in strength and courage, leaving fear behind, trusting God's plan for the church, and loving our community fiercely.
- G. Strength and courage thrive when I'm obedient to God's Word and engaged in God's plans.

4. Conclusion

- A. You, church, are the Joshua for this generation, along with every other church and believer who is trusting God, obeying His word, and intentionally engaging in God's mission.
- B. This morning, as we wrap this up, I want to commission us. There are as many different kinds of commissioning as there are aspects to God's mission. I won't be ordaining you into pastoral ministry, although God does ordain you today to intentionally go make disciples.
- C. As I pray for us, receive the strength and courage God wants you to have to engage in His mission.
- D. Let's stand and just extend our arms in a posture of receiving... **Father, in Jesus' name, commission these disciples once again for the work of evangelists, teachers, leaders, helpers, growers, seed-planters, lovers of people, and those who embrace the world with your arms. Where there is doubt and fear, remind us of your perfect faithfulness. Show us your vision for today and tomorrow, as we seek to follow you more closely. Give wisdom and clarity as we seek out the lost with you, and love them, invite them, encourage them, and help them grow into disciples that make disciples for Jesus. Send us out from this place, men and women, youth and older adults, ready to see with your heart, listen with your ears, love with your heart, and live in holiness, grace, and intentional mission. We want to be conduits for your life breaking into this world. Sustain us and gives us your passion, Lord, for the sake of Jesus and His Word...to save the world with love and forgiveness through grace. Amen and Amen!**
- E. *Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. AMEN!*