

Be Strong And Courageous

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[0 : 00] Good evening. As Stephen mentioned, my name is Nate Taylor.

If I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you yet, I hope to do so soon. My wife, Erin, and I and our three kids, we arrived in Glasgow just a few weeks ago.

And we are beyond grateful for the warm way that you've welcomed us, on how you've prayed for us, how you've encouraged us already, how you've overlooked our cultural ignorance and reminded us that the bond that we have in Christ transcends all others.

It's really a glorious thing to be a part of. And get it out up front to you have permission to copy my accent on the car ride home. It's both exciting and overwhelming to be in a new place, especially at a time such as this for Glasgow City Free Church as you make this transition towards Partic, right? Looking back on God's faithfulness over 50 years in this building and then looking ahead to Partic for however long that might be that we're there. Speaking of times of transition, as Stephen just read in Joshua 1, in that passage, there's this huge transition going on.

[1 : 17] The passage, it actually refers back to the end of the previous book, Deuteronomy. Moses has just died. The leader of God's people, one of the most important figures in all the Bible, has just died.

And right here at the very beginning, Joshua is being commissioned as the new leader of God's people. They're standing there at the edge of the Jordan, ready to enter into the promised land. This new leader, Joshua. If you know anything about Joshua, also, he's a very strong and courageous guy. Back in Numbers 13, there's a group of spies that get sent into the land of Canaan, and what they see terrifies them.

Big, strong, giant Canaanites. And all of them, except for two, come back and say, uh-uh, let's abort. Let's head back. This doesn't sound like a good plan, but it's Joshua and Caleb who say, no, we have to trust the Lord.

We need to be strong and courageous. We need to press forward. God, if he's made a promise, he will take care of us. But did you notice the command to the most courageous guy in all of Israel?

[2 : 30] Be strong and courageous. Even courageous men and women need to be reminded to be strong and to be courageous. Before we continue any further, though, and look at this passage, let me pray for the preaching of God's word.

Let's pray. Father, you know where we have fear or anxiety or doubt or apathy. We ask that by your truth and your good news that you would confront us and that you would shape us into a community that is both strong and courageous, not resting in our own strength or our own courage, but a strength and a courage that comes from outside of us, from you.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever been discouraged? So over a decade ago, I went to this conference for youth ministry leaders in the United States, and that was the question that was asked by the conference speaker.

Have you ever been discouraged? What discourages you most in ministry, he asked. And there's all these other youth ministry leaders there, and the hands shot up. And there was like a long list of stuff. People were saying, oh, man, if the parents of the kids in my youth ministry, they're so legalistic, they're all about rules, they don't understand grace.

And somebody else put up their hand and said, oh, the senior minister at my church, he doesn't support or understand my ministry. Another person put up their hand and said, oh, these kids, I can't get them to look away from their screen and pay attention.

[4 : 07] Another person put up their hand and said, the volunteers, they're inconsistent. I need consistent volunteers. Let this go on for a little while. And the speaker said, yeah, all those things, those can be very discouraging.

We want to know what discourages me most in ministry, he said. Me. It hit me like a ton of bricks because, you see, just before that, not too long before that, I had planned a weekend retreat for the kids in our youth group, and I spent all this time planning, got this great place where we went, prepared all the Bible lessons, recruited people to help lead games and take care of food, and it went pretty well.

Except there was this one kid who was so annoying. He kept talking back all the time, and he was getting on my nerves, and at the very end, I snapped at him in anger, said things I shouldn't have said.

And he went home and told his parents, I never want to go back to church again because of me. You ever been discouraged?

Thankfully, I was able to apologize to that kid repaired. He still goes to church now. But it was just in one moment of rage, almost torpedoed so much.

[5 : 29] Have you ever felt discouraged? Have you ever felt dismayed? Of course you have. The question probably should be, how have you felt discouraged lately? How have you been struggling with this?

What sort of discouragement have you faced of late? Maybe it is living in a culture where it seems like more and more it's at odds with your faith. Maybe it's you're a parent, and your kids are frustratingly their own person, and you cannot control them.

Maybe you've promised yourself that your marriage will never be like your parents, and yet you feel at odds with your spouse all the time, just like your parents fought.

Maybe you're working really hard in school, and you're wondering if it's all worth it. Maybe you're feeling alone and wondering if anybody is noticing. If you ever felt discouraged.

We all face discouragement. Did you hear the command, though, that got repeated to Joshua over and over? Verse 6, verse 7, verse 9, verse 18. Be strong and courageous.

[6 : 35] It even says on the flip side in verse 19, don't be frightened or be dismayed. Be strong and courageous. Oh, okay. And don't be frightened or be dismayed. Respond with valor and fortitude.

And, you know, none of us are a leader of a theocratic nation like Joshua was. You're wondering, maybe this is only for Joshua, but that command, it gets repeated. Right? Even as we were singing and reading in the Psalms, it's to respond with courage, to courageously trust the Lord and to follow him wherever he calls us.

And I don't know about you, but I hear that, and I think to myself, be strong and courageous. When things are going great, fine. What happens when I feel discouraged? Because there's so many things, including my own self, that can discourage me.

How can I be strong and courageous? Well, thanks for asking. That command doesn't come in a vacuum, right? But whenever God calls you to do something, there's always something that is true before he tells you what to do.

So there's a means of encouragement, if you're facing discouragement, in order to be courageous. I want to point those things out to us in our passage. It's three things for you note takers, and it's these three things.

[7 : 50] God's people, God's word, and God's presence. God's people, God's word, and God's presence. We're actually going to start at the end of the passage and work our way back through it.

First off, God's people. God repeatedly charges Joshua to be strong and to be courageous. And then you see in that last section in verses 10 through 18, Moses, he goes and he tells all of the leaders of Israel, hey, now is the time to enter the promised land.

Go tell your tribes to go and do this. And then he walks, and it says he goes and he talks to these two and a half tribes, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half of the tribe of Manasseh.

And he says, let's go, guys. And the reason that it points that out is because back in Numbers 32, those two and a half tribes had settled east of the Jordan River. The promised land is west of the Jordan River.

They had settled just east of it. And Moses said, that's fine. God will allow that. You can settle here as long as when it's time to enter the land, you go with your brothers and cross the Jordan and go in to take possession of the land.

[9 : 00] Moses says, if you do not do this, it will come as a huge discouragement to the rest of God's people. And so when they say, you know, that, hey, everything that you, Moses, excuse me, everything that you, Joshua, have said, we will do.

We will obey you like Moses. They're saying, yeah, we've got your back, Joshua. Here we come. We're ready to go. We're going to go with the other nine and a half tribes.

This is a huge source of encouragement, not just to all the people of Israel, but to Joshua as well. And they say to him, what do they say? What do they command him to do? Verse 18. Only be strong and courageous.

Yeah, we're coming. You can be strong and courageous because we are coming. What does this mean for us? It means, I think, that Christian unity often manifests itself in encouragement for one another.

The Christian life is not one of being self-sufficient. It is never going to be one of being self-sufficient. You know, kind of key to actually becoming a Christian is to admit your insufficiency before God and that you need his grace.

[10:09] And it doesn't stop there. It doesn't stop when we become a Christian. We continue to need him and to need others. I'll say it another way. Needing other people in your life is not a sign of spiritual immaturity.

It's a sign of spiritual maturity, that you need others. You know, counter to the movies where James Bond and Clint Eastwood take down all the bad guys by themselves, the courageous life, the courageous life, actually, truly, is one of community.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul's writing, and he says, encourage one another and build one another up. Encourage the faint-hearted. And here's my guess.

My guess, I don't know this for sure. I don't know all of you very well yet. My guess is many here tonight hear that verse and you go, of course. If anyone is faint-hearted, my Christian duty is to encourage them.

I will drop things in order to help the discouraged. I will do what it takes. I will come alongside them. Yes, amen. But what we often miss in hearing a verse like that is, oh, right, I can be faint-hearted too, and I need to receive encouragement as much as I need to give encouragement.

[11:32] To be courageous, I need God's people too. Not many of us probably walk around singing the praises of air, of oxygen.

Does anybody do that? You walk around just, man, air, it's so great. What would my brain be without oxygen? I love air.

You don't do that. If you do, okay, that's interesting. You can tell me about it later. But if you're underwater, air, you could really use some oxygen right now.

Totally underestimated you, air. Sorry, forgot about you. You can see in the same way a lot of us walk around saying to ourselves, I need God's people. I need God's people.

How can I live in life without God's people? Until you're discouraged. And you feel like you're suffering by yourself. And you feel like you're underwater.

[12:30] Feeling disconnected. Wondering how you got there. God has created us for community. And his people are to courage like air is to life.

So we must foster a community of encouragement. Where your battle is my battle. Where we eagerly want to bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ, as Paul says in Galatians 6.

So it helps so much being strong and courageous. When God's people are actually there to cheer you on and to encourage you. But you know what? Sometimes people are going to fail you.

Not only that, sometimes people will encourage you and it's like you will tune your ears out and you can't actually hear the encouragement. Is that the only thing that God gives to Joshua in order to encourage him, to help him find strength and courage?

No. Let's move back again. Second thing. God's word. Not just God's people, but also God's word. So God tells Joshua in verse 7, he says, Be strong and courageous.

[13:34] And he says this, Being careful to do all according to the law. When he references the law, some people, the commentaries debate whether he's referring to the book of the law, which is specifically Exodus 20 to 24, or just all of the Bible up to that point, which would be the Pentateuch, right?

The first five books of the Bible. Sixth book is Joshua. Either way, it's being careful to obey God's word to his people. You know, the courage that God is calling Joshua to and he's calling us to, it cannot be separated from obedience to his word.

In fact, it's his word that defines what courage actually is going to look like. And then in verse 8, he tells Joshua to meditate on his word day and night.

What does that mean? What does that mean? May you hear that? I don't know if you ever heard of like Charles Spurgeon's morning and evening devotions. And we hear, okay, day and night. I get up in the morning and I read God's word and I pray something.

Before I go to bed, I read God's word and then I put my head down on the pillow and I go to sleep. If you do that, wonderful. I'm not trying to stop you from that habit in your life.

[14:46] But that's not exactly what this means. Let me explain it another way. That phrase day and night, it's what's known as a Hebrew merism. A Hebrew merism.

A Hebrew merism is two opposites used in order to make one point. I think the easiest way is to give another example to understand what I'm saying. So in Psalm 139, the psalmist says, If I ascend heaven, God, you are there.

If I make my bed in Sheol, the grave, you are there. Is the point that God is only in heaven and only in the grave?

No. The point, he's everywhere. No matter where I go, you are there, God. That's the point that the psalmist is making. So when God says to meditate on his word day and night, is he saying, Hey, 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.

That's what this looks like. No, the point. If it's meditating on his word day and night, it's saying, End everything in between at all times.

[15:55] Ponder it. Apply it at all times. It's taking it in and letting it shape you as a man or woman of courage. And again, this is just for the leader of God's people, right?

This is for the super spiritual people or something. No, again, this happens in other parts of the Bible. Psalm 1. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on it he meditates day and night.

So this is the point. I'm tying it to courage. So courage is not standing around and waiting for a really big moment in order to prove yourself.

Instead, it's a thousand small decisions that build these habits of love and devotion and sacrifice and honesty and not entertaining lust and treating others as those who are actually made in God's image.

That's where our courage gets formed, by meditating on God's word day and night, and all the little things. Courage isn't just for the big moments.

[17:04] It's following the Lord, taking his word in and letting it shape us. I remember listening to this one theologian give a presentation, and he shared the story of Sully Sullenberger.

I don't know if anybody knows that name. I think they made a Tom Hanks movie about Sully Sullenberger. I haven't seen it. But Sully Sullenberger was an airplane pilot, and it was over a decade ago.

He took off in his airplane from LaGuardia Airport in New York City and hit a flock of geese. Went right into the engines.

I remember the theologian who said, you know, cooked goose. It's great if you smell it on Christmas Eve, not so much if you smell it inside of an airplane. And so Sully Sullenberger, he has two minutes to do something.

Two minutes. What could he have done? Well, option one, imagine he goes and he's like, oh, where's the crash landing manual? Let me go find that. And he gets it out and he starts flipping through it.

[18:06] And he's like, what am I supposed to do in this sort of a situation? Ah, I think it's section eight. No, section 14. Crash, right? I don't have time for that. Or Sully Sullenberger could have said, let me follow my heart.

Just going to follow my heart and try to land this plane. Good luck, right? But no. Here's the thing. Sully Sullenberger wasn't just a pilot. He had been a gliding instructor for 30 years.

He had helped train people what to do in this sort of situation. Sully Sullenberger had spent 30 years living inside the manual and training himself in it.

So in two minutes, he did all sorts of things that we can't even comprehend in order to land an airplane in the Hudson River and not a single life was lost.

I mean, this picture where everybody evacuates the plane. And there's the whole inside of the airplane is now standing on the wings of the plane floating in the water.

[19 : 15] You know, he didn't just run to the manual when things got discouraging. He had spent years hiding the manual in his heart, meditating on it day and night. So when that the time came, he was strong and courageous.

He didn't have to think about it. He responded with courage. So what's the application here? Like, read your Bible. Like, thanks, Nate. You traveled all the way from America to stand up in front of us and tell us to read our Bible.

Like, breaking new ground there, right? Well, yes, please do read your Bible. Again, it's not less than that, but it's more than that. To become a courageous person is not to sit on the sidelines and wait for something to happen so you can test your mettle.

It's to see God's story as the true story of the world. And that he calls you to be a faithful actor within his story. In the big things and the little.

In the grand and the mundane. You fill your mind with his truth. You inflame your heart with his promises. You guide your feet with his laws. You direct your life, reminding yourself and others that to live is Christ and to die is gain.

[20 : 23] You know, to disregard God's word is to assume that you actually care more about your life than God does. Yeah, sure. Read your Bible. But even more than that, it's working these things, these habits of obedience and courage and strength into our life.

So, we can be encouraged by God's people. Sometimes people fail us and sometimes we block other people's voices out. Not only that, he also gives his word.

But I don't know about you. A lot of times I fail to listen to God's word and to obey. What else gives courage? There's a third thing in our passage.

It's the central source of courage. And the third thing is God's presence. I used to be a lifeguard during the summers at a city pool in North Miami, Florida.

And part of my job was to teach swim lessons. And to teach these kids swim lessons, it was kids who had never swum at all before. And so, you know, you'd start. They would just hold onto the wall and kick their feet.

[21 : 26] You'd work on floating. And slowly through the summer, you'd work their way up until they were actually able to swim. And when we do the swim lessons, you're over on the shallow end. That's only like a meter deep. You know, they can stand up right next to the wall.

But when you felt like they were ready, you took them over to the diving well. You took them to the diving board. And the diving board was one meter above the water. But the water was three meters deep. So if you started to struggle, there was no way you could put your feet on the ground.

And a lot of times, these kids who had practiced swimming and were getting pretty good at it, they would get out onto that diving board. And they would kind of like be this far from the edge.

And they're like kind of slowly going out. And they would start to get a little scared. They'd become dismayed, discouraged. And one of the things that I found that would work a lot of times is if the other swim lesson participants cheered them on.

You can do it, Sam. You can do it, Sally. Go. And a lot of times, that would give them courage. And they would jump in the water. And not only that, though, the thing that would help them a lot was just practicing.

[22 : 31] The muscle memory would take over. They'd hit the water. And even though they were scared, they'd just start swimming. And they'd get to the wall. But you know what? Sometimes all the cheering in the world didn't get those kids to jump in the water.

Not only that, even though they could swim across the pool if the bottom of the pool was three feet deep, they'd get to the well. And they would get scared. And instead of taking big strokes, it's like they grew little alligator arms.

And they were trying to paddle for their lives. And they're swallowing water. Do you want to know what would help more than anything else to get those kids to jump in the water? It was somebody in the water that they trusted.

So I'd be treading water there. And they'd be slowly inching their way out. Do you promise that if something happens, you're going to catch me?

Yeah. Yeah, I promise. I'll be right here. It's going to be okay. I promise. They needed the presence of someone who could actually help them when they lost courage.

[23 : 35] Nothing was more encouraging. Be strong and courageous. How? How can I do that? Verses 5 and 9, God says to Joshua, I will be with you.

I will never leave you or forsake you. This is the encouragement underneath all the other encouragement for Joshua. This is the unshakable source of courage that God will be with him. God will not forsake him. It's God's presence. You know, when Joshua faces the terrifying thought of jumping into the water and leading all of God's people and crossing the Jordan and leading them against the Canaanites, he can cry, Do you promise God that you are going to catch me? And he can hear the voice. Yes. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. I'm right here. You know, the way to courage is not to filter out reality and to pretend like discouragement isn't there. Rather, it's this. To embrace the reality that even when the bottom falls out, God will never leave you or forsake you. If you are his, he will be with you.

[24 : 50] Again, though, he asked, but like Joshua, right? What about me? What about me? Can I know that? He's the special leader of all of Israel. What about me? Hebrews 13.5.

Same promise to every believer. I'll never leave you or forsake you. How with us is God. How with us is God actually? We see thousands of years after Joshua.

Another leader of God's people is born. One whose name in Greek is, it's just the Greek form of Joshua. His name is Jesus. And it says in Matthew 1.23 that he's actually Emmanuel, which means God with us.

And he's going to be the true leader of God's people. He will save them from their sins. And he dies and he rises. And in Matthew 28, he's got this group of people around him, these first 12 new leaders of the church.

And they stand not just on the brink of the Jordan to enter the promised land, but on the edge of the whole world. You know what he says to them? Lo, I'm with you. Even to the end of the age.

[26 : 01] I remember hearing a story some years ago, back when there was these terrible forest fires in California. Forests would catch on fire. And sometimes if it didn't rain, these fires would creep into the suburbs.

And people would have to evacuate and leave. And this happened this one time. And it just burned down a bunch of houses. And later, the father brought his son back to where their house used to be standing.

And they stood there and it's just ash everywhere on the ground. And his son starts to become just a little bit overwhelmed. He becomes discouraged, afraid, because it's just too much for him to take in.

And the father, he grabs his son and he picks him up and he assures him, Hey, it's okay. I'm right here. And he looks around and he gets the idea. He says, you know what, actually?

Actually, this is the safest place you could possibly be standing. The fire has already come here. It's already taken out everything. The fire cannot come back and get us.

[27 : 07] There is no way. There's nothing left to be burned here. How can you be even more assured that God is with you and will never leave you or never forsake you than even Joshua?

Well, on the cross, the greater Joshua cries out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The most courageous man to ever live.

Strong and courageous at every point. Loving God's people, trusting God's word, actually is called the very word of God. God gets treated as the forsaken one.

So that you and I can know you'll never be. See, if you stand in Christ, you stand where the fire is already burned.

It's not coming for you. There is no safer place to be. That's the source of courage. Be strong and courageous.

[28 : 18] How? He's given you his people. You're not alone. He's given you his word. It directs you. And he's given you his presence.

He's given you his very life. Do you know this presence? I'm not naturally a super strong and courageous guy.

It's not what it means to be a Christian to go around beating our chest and say, Hey, look at us. Look how amazing we are. Look how much faith we have. It's not your strength and your courage that will save you.

It's the object of your faith in the one who is strong and courageous. He's given you his people. He's given you his word.

He's given you his presence. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together. Father, we do pray as a church, as Glasgow City Free Church, whether it's in the city center in Partick or wherever you may lead us, that you would help us to be strong and courageous.

[29 : 31] Pray as the free church of Scotland that we would be strong and courageous. Pray for other Bible-believing evangelical churches in Glasgow and nearby.

Pray for the witness of Christians in this city. Help us and our fellow churches to be a community of courage. not confident in ourselves, but courageous because we know you, the creator of the rolling spheres who's ineffably sublime.

Would you cause us to see that part of our vocation is those who follow the leader of your people, King Jesus, is not just to be courageous in following you, but to be encouragers of each other.

Lord, would you bid our anxious fears to subside? Not just that we snap our fingers, Lord, but that we remind ourselves of the gospel, that we are yours, that you call us beloved, that your voice cries out and says, come, come.

Come, all who can hear, come to the marriage supper of the Lamb, that you don't just want to put up with us, but that you invite us into your very life, into your very presence, that you prepare a table before us, even in the presence of our enemies.

[30 : 51] That, Lord, even in the deep, dark, scary places, in the valleys of the shadow of death, even there, you are with us. Help us to experience this, to know this, to believe this.

Lord, assure us of your love and your presence, so that we can be comforted and that we can become comforters. We ask this in the name of the greater Joshua, our Savior Jesus.

We pray this in his name. Amen.