

life groups study guide

brave enough - Joshua 1



LIFE GROUPS
doing life together

"Disappointment is inevitable. But to become discouraged, there's a choice I make." -- Charles Stanley

"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen." -- Winston Churchill

Be Strong and Courageous . . . and Careful!

As we read Joshua, the first chapter starts out with his commissioning – his call. The context (which always has significance), is that Moses has died, and Joshua, as the second in command is now called upon to step forward and lead the people. I think for most people reading chapter 1, the big takeaway is God's call to Joshua to "be strong and courageous". But I think there are two important things to dive into regarding the call, specifically.

The first is that, as I read this passage over I was struck that Joshua was ALREADY strong and courageous. Look back at Numbers 14. The 12 spies have returned and 10 of them are stirring up the entire assembly with a "bad report", recalling the imposing nature of the people in the land, the fortified walls of their cities, and their own grasshopper-esque capabilities to dispossess these people from the land. Look at what Joshua and Caleb say to the "entire Israelite assembly":

"The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

Does that sound like someone with a strength and courage problem? We are not told of anything in Joshua's life that would lead to believe that he had somehow withered and shrank back from a fight in the past 40 years in the wilderness.

Q :: All of that said, God tells Joshua not once, not twice, but three different times to be strong and courageous. Why? What is going on that might not be readily visible on just the surface of things?

Q :: How might all of this be relevant to us, and situations we may find ourselves in today?

Q :: In verse 9, the Bible draws an interesting contrast to "be strong and courageous" that I think many people might miss at first blush. God tells Joshua "do not be terrified; do not be discouraged." (this mirrors, exactly, what Moses recalls that he told the assembly when they were refusing to go into the Promised Land after the 10 spies' bad report -**Read:** Deut. 1:26-32). We tend to think that the opposite of courageous is fearful – but these passages seem to tell us that it is, instead, "discouraged". The word "courage" is from the Greek word "tharrhountes". It means to be bold and **confident** – which seems to fit better with discouraged as an opposite. A very similar word in the Greek is "tharseo", which is translated "take courage" or "be of good cheer". Does that change how we might read God's words to Joshua in Chapter 1?

Being a leader of a nation of people will require a different *kind* of strength and courage—and confidence—than Joshua had previously needed as one of the 12 spies, or even as the second in command to Moses. Strength, courage and confidence is often needed in different measures when faced with tasks that require you to go against what may be your natural tendencies, strengths or giftings. For example, you may easily speak up and speak out when you feel you are being challenged, but do have the necessary measure of strength and courage required when the best course of action is to be quiet. On the other end of that spectrum, some people are wonderful at providing a fantastic witness for Christ simply by living out their faith very transparently – but they need an entirely different measure of faith to be confrontational if the situation demands it.

Q :: Have you even been in a situation that you felt called for something different you in terms of being strong in your faith, or in regard to not giving in to discouragement?

Q :: Why do you think God might place us in situations where what we need is beyond our normal strengths or giftings?

Q :: Why would this new position require Joshua to be incredibly on guard against discouragement?

Q :: How has the enemy used discouragement in your own life in an effort to cause you to shrink back from something God wants you, or has called you, to do?

Almost lost in all of this talking of being strong and courageous, is that fact that God tells Joshua something else it is incumbent on him to do here. Additional commands that are encapsulated in two small words. And out of the greater context of Scripture it would be incredibly easily to overlook them. The words are “be careful”.

Q :: What is Joshua being told to be careful about – and why do you think he needs – twice – to be careful about it?

I really think that a larger context is helpful in seeing the importance of this part of Joshua’s calling. Let’s look back at the previous book to get a sense for how important Moses thought it was for the people to be careful. The book of Deuteronomy, from chapter 4 through the end of the book in chapter 34 is about preparing the people to finally go in and take possession of the Promised Land. They were instructions given to ensure that they would have the life in this new land that God intended.

READ Deut:

4:5-6 | 4:9 | 4:15-18 | 5:32-33 | 6:3 | 6:10-12 | 6:24-25 | 7:10-12 | 8:1
8:10-14 | 11:16-17 | 11:22-24 | 12:1-4 | 12:13-14 | 12:19 | 12:28 | 15:4-5
19:8-9 | 26:16 | 28:1-2 | 28:12-13 | 28:15 | 28:58-59 | 29:9 | 31:12 | 32:45-47

Even if Joshua had slept through Deuteronomy, God, Himself, reminds him twice in chapter 1 of Joshua to “BE CAREFUL”.

Q :: Why all of this focus on being careful?

Q :: I find it interesting that, now being under grace, there is less a focus on the need to *so carefully* follow the law. I understand that because of Christ we are not under the law, but under grace. However, I think it can be strongly argued that the freedom we have in Christ has led to many Christians leading much sloppier lives. The idea that I don’t have to care about God’s rules because His grace will always cover me is a concept that theologians have termed “cheap grace”. Though under grace and secure in our salvation, do we still have a need to be careful in our faith?

Q :: What can be some consequences of being sloppy vs. being careful?

Q :: As seen in the Pharisees, there is also such a thing as being TOO careful in following the rules. Can one of the things we might actually need to be careful about be, ironically, being too radically careful!

Q :: God had promised to be with Joshua and the Israelites as they set out to conquer the land they have been given – but their success is NOT unconditionally guaranteed. To the contrary, look at Joshua 1:7 and then 1:8. Yes, God says they will indeed be prosperous and successful – but He ties it to their CAREFUL obedience. In the new covenant of grace, is our success unconditionally guaranteed, or is there still a need for careful obedience?

Q :: Think of the things that Jesus commands us, as His followers, to do. Is there a need to be careful to do them as well? Why or why not?

I believe being careful is related to intentionality – which we need in truckloads if we are going to live the life, and be the people, God has called us to be. As pastor Paul Sheppard has said: “You will not live a quality life by accident.” Let us all live and move with the freedom and grace that Jesus died to give us – while still being careful to not allow that freedom to make us sloppy in our walk, frivolous in our presumption on grace, or lazy and careless in our obedience.