

Courage

Joshua 1

Today we complete part 1 of Open - a one year journey through the Bible! Congratulations! This is the tenth installment in a 50 part series! If you are still active in your Bible reading plan, congratulations on that too! Sticking with any resolution into the middle of March is a major achievement.

The book of **Joshua is the hinge from the Torah** - the first five books of the Bible - into the historical books. Moses wrote the Torah, then other writers and editors took over for Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings. Notice how the book of Joshua pivots in verse 1:

“After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, ‘Moses, my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan...” Joshua 1:1-2

Abraham was the founding father of Israel. **Moses was its great prophet.** Moses led the nation out of Egypt, performed the 10 plagues and split the Red Sea with his staff, called down manna from heaven and quail to eat, brought water from the rock (twice) and brought the Word of God to the people of God in the form of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy... This Moses, the servant of the Lord, who spoke to God as a man speaks with his friend, **is now dead.**

This is the commissioning of a new leader for Israel whose name is **Joshua**. The name means “Savior.” So from the first verse of this book **we feel a sense of loss** in the death of the prophet and Lawgiver, Moses. **But we also feel hope** in the commissioning of a new leader whose name means salvation - and is the same name Mary and Joseph gave their son, Jesus or Yeshua.

Our goal this morning is **simply to obey verses 7-8:**

“Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you... This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night.” Joshua 1:7-8

We need to reflect on Scripture so we understand it thoroughly, believe it deeply and therefore OBEY IT ACCORDINGLY. Joshua and the nation of Israel were at **a scary crossroads** as they approached the Jordan River. The whole Promised Land stood in front of them with all of the blessing and provision that represented but also with all the dangers of war and fortified cities and enemies who were literally giants.

The sad thing is that they had been at this precise place around 40 years before. They had come up to the Jordan River, sent spies into the land and held a conference to make a decision. This was the report of that first batch of spies:

“We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there.” Numbers 13:27-28

They saw that the land was fertile and rich - flowing with milk and honey - but they also saw it was very inhabited and the people living there were strong. ***They stood at a crossroads and the path of obedience looked scary.*** Two of the spies trusted in the Lord and exhorted the nation to obey Him and move in to conquer the land:

But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, ***“Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.”*** Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.” Numbers 13:30-31

Caleb spoke up with faith and courage. And Joshua was right there with him. But the other 10 spies discouraged the people with a bad report. They spoke out of **FEAR not faith.**

As we heard a few minutes ago - ***“Fear is a liar.”*** When we face obstacles and enemies our fear will tell us to question God and disobey His clear direction in our lives. Caleb and Joshua stood together against this fear and spoke to the people:

“The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. ***Only do not rebel against the Lord.***” Numbers 14:8-9

“And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.” Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Numbers 14:9-10

Here is the danger of democracy. Two speak for faith. 10 speak for fear. Hearing the balance, the crowd sided with the ten and decided to get rid of Caleb and Joshua.

“Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. ***But the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel.***” Number 14:9-10

The blinding glory of God appeared in that moment to save the two faithful spies. And God nearly wiped out the whole nation of Israel again, as He wanted to do in Exodus 32 with the golden calf. But again ***Moses stepped in to intercede*** before a holy God on behalf of a sinful people. And again God relented from His justice and extended mercy. Yet the **consequences** were severe.

Then the Lord said, "I have pardoned, according to your word. But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, **none of the men** who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt... **shall see the land** that I swore to give to their fathers." Numbers 14:20-23

The whole generation of adults that stood at the Jordan River and **chose to rebel against God's direction** died in the wilderness - every one of them except Caleb and Joshua. 40 days of spying out the land - **one decision** to give in to fear - and the people had to wander in the desert and bury hundreds of thousands of people OUTSIDE of the land they were destined to possess. What a tragic way to **forfeit blessings that should have been theirs!**

Here is how Pastor Colin expresses it on Open the Bible:

"Some generations contribute more to advancing the purpose of God than others... Not all generations serve willingly. **Unity among God's people and courage among their leaders will save us from aimless wandering** and position us to advance God's purpose in the world." Colin Smith

I believe the American church is like Israel standing there in front of the Jordan River. We have an opportunity to obey God and **complete the Great Commission**. We can contribute to the purpose of God in the world with fearless faith and bold commitment to the assignment God has given us. Or we can let fear take over. We can let our worries and concerns about our safety and the safety of our children keep us from moving forward on the mission God has set before us.

Fear is a liar. Fear tells us that God's plan is crazy and we will all die. Fear tells us we're better off back in Egypt - that we belong in this world of slavery and sin. Fear tells us it can't be done. **Will we believe the lies of fear or will we move forward trusting in the promises of God's Word?**

Here are three lies we must expose and replace with the better promises of God's Word:

Lies to Expose	Promises to Believe
"I know what's best for me."	God's plan will maximize blessing
"I am safest when I am in control."	God's power is accessed by surrendering control
"I can't do this."	God's presence enables the impossible

First is **the lie of self-reliance**: "I know what's best for me." We must replace that with confidence in God's plan. His plan will maximize blessing for me and for the whole world! Second is **the lie of self-protection**: "I'm safest when I am in control." We must fight that deceptive reasoning with true FAITH, which surrenders my control to HIS control. Instead of leaning on

our own understanding and doing what we can do in our own strength, we need to access the power of God! Third is ***the lie of self-doubt***: “I can’t do this.” Of course, on one level that is absolutely true. On our own we can’t do anything significant. But the truth is that we are not ALONE - the Lord Almighty is WITH US and with HIM all things are possible!

The Lie of Self-Reliance: “I know what’s best for me.”

And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron... “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? ...Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” Numbers 14:2-3

Instead of trusting in God’s plan and being thankful for God’s provision, the people of Israel COMPLAINED. ***Grumbling and complaining is a symptom of failing faith***. They did not trust in God so they fussed at God. Listen to what they’re saying! “It would’ve been better if we had died in Egypt or in the desert.” Really, that would have been BETTER? So they call for a new election to appoint someone to replace Moses and lead them BACK TO EGYPT!

They were convinced that ***Moses was crazy and God’s plan was impossible***. They rejected God’s plan and decided to implement one of their own. “Let’s go back to Egypt!”

How are you tempted to doubt God’s goodness and plan for you? How is FEAR speaking to you right now? We are always tempted to trust in OURSELVES with all of our hearts. And we do this because ***we believe the lie of self-reliance***. We believe - as Israel did - that we know best. Our way is best...

Listen to how Caleb and Joshua tried to plead with the nation:

God’s Plan will maximize blessing for us and the world

“The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord.” Numbers 14:7-9

God’s plan is GOOD - they said! The Land is amazing! ***Obeying the Lord is the pathway to BLESSING!*** If we trust God now, He will bless us! Trusting in and following God’s plan is always the way to maximum blessing.

We can see that in the story of Israel. But do we see it today?

God’s plan is that the gospel be proclaimed in all nations and that disciples be trained up and sent out to complete this task. ***This plan will maximize blessing for US and for the whole WORLD***. This plan is the fulfillment of everything in Scripture - from the promise to bless all nations through the offspring of Abraham to Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones coming to life in Israel.

We hear that. We know we are supposed to support and engage in the Great Commission. But deep down we feel that **we know what's best for us**. You are sitting there saying - yeah, I know there's a missions conference coming up, and I know I ought to be more involved with God's work in the world - but RIGHT NOW there are just other things that are more pressing and important. So we drop a few more dollars in the plate for those missionaries out there and that's the end of it until the next wave of guilt.

- What's best for us (we think) is to work and make money and take care of the kids.
- What's most important right now is the health and safety of our family.
- We'd like to do more outreach-y type things but it just isn't PRACTICAL.

Hear this, brothers and sisters - **God's plan always maximizes blessings**. If we are a generation that fails to contribute to reaching the nations we will miss out on the blessings of the harvest! We will continue to wander in the wilderness of American "prosperity" - chasing the American Dream like a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. We will be like Israel turning back from the Jordan River saying, "We were better off in Egypt." We will trade spiritual blessings for the mirage of materialism.

That is the first lie. But the truth is that God has promised to bless us as we make disciples and through the pursuit of that mission ***He has promised to bless the whole world.***

God's Plan will maximize blessing for us and the world

"I will surely bless you... and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." Genesis 22:17-18

Abraham was blessed when he stepped out in faith. And the whole world has been blessed by that act of trust and obedience. ***Moses was blessed*** when he took the assignment to lead the nation of Israel and the whole world was blessed to see the miracles God performed through Moses. ***Caleb and Joshua were blessed*** to live through the wilderness wanderings because they trusting in God wholeheartedly. And because of their faith and obedience they were able to lead the nation into the conquest of the land 40 years later!

When we step out in faith we are blessed with the joy of obedience and participating in God's work in the world. And in the process we bring God's blessing to our neighbors and the nations. We can refuse to go, just like Israel did - and miss out on the blessings for ourselves and for others. That is the first lie - self-reliance - that we know better.

The second lie is self-protection - "I am safest when I am in control." The 10 spies brought this conclusion:

The Lie of Self-Protection: "I am safest when I am in control."

“We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are... all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim... and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.” Numbers 13:31-33

They focused on what they could SEE. ***They saw giants and well fortified cities.*** They chose to rely on their own assessment rather than trust in God’s plan and therefore chose the path of self-protection. They believed the lie that they were SAFER outside of God’s clearly revealed will. They believed they would be safer in control of their own lives.

Do you remember what happened right after they chose to reject God’s plan for them and turn back for Egypt? Moses announced the consequences of that choice - that the whole generation of adults would die in the wilderness. And right after that a group said, “Hey, let’s just do it - let’s go attack the promised land now!” Moses told them not to go - that God was not with them. But they went anyway, believing they were safest if they were in control.

“But they presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, although neither the ark of the covenant of the Lord nor Moses departed out of the camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them and pursued them, even to Hormah.” Numbers 14:44-45

Do you remember what happened right after Jericho? A group of 3,000 went on to Ai without God’s direction or blessing - and they were defeated just as the group was in Numbers 14. So ***whether it’s after a resounding failure or a glorious success we have to be careful not to take matters into our own hands...***

You are not safest when you are in control - you are actually in the most danger when you seize control from God. That’s what Israel did the first time at the Jordan River and it cost them 40 years. A whole generation missed out on the blessing of the Promised Land.

Let’s listen to Joshua 1 and feel the power of these promises:

God’s Power is Accessed by Surrendering Control

“Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon ***I have given to you***, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river... ***No man shall be able to stand before you*** all the days of your life.” Joshua 1:3-5

Here is **a blank check promise of victory**. The whole land is before you - I have already given it to you. No one can stop you. I have given them into your hand.

What was the first lesson Joshua had to learn when he crossed into the Promised Land? God’s power is accessed by surrendering control. ***The commander of the Lord’s Army*** - that was Jesus

- showed up and Joshua asked whose side he was on. To that Jesus said, "I'm not on either side - the question is whether you're on MY side." At that Joshua fell down before the Lord in worship and surrender.

Then Jesus gave him instructions to conquer Jericho. The story is so familiar that it probably doesn't sound strange anymore - but put yourself in Joshua's place.

- You're the new leader. Moses is dead and it's all on you now. You have to prove yourself.
- Jericho is the first challenge - the first city. If you get a "win" here you'll earn credibility. If you botch this one they very possibly might stone you. Certainly they will drop you as their leader.
- So - how do you conquer a city? Sneak attack? Siege? Ladders? Earth works?

I've seen Lord of the Rings so I'm thinking ladders - big, tall ladders. If that doesn't work, fall back into a siege. Starve 'em out.

You remember, God's instructions were: ***march around the city.*** Six days march in silence. That would have taken a while to get all the way around the city. The Jericho-ites were probably throwing rocks and slushies at them - probably making fun of them in french accents. After six days of marching there was no visible difference in Jericho. Imagine the faith it required to send the troops out for day seven.

The plan made no earthly sense. But it was God's clearly revealed plan - so it worked. They marched around the city, shouted, blew trumpets and "the walls came a-tumblin' down."

The modern parallel is PRAYER. It makes no earthly sense. How do you revitalize a church or reach a neighborhood or change a city or move the heart of a king? God's answer is PRAYER. Basically, walk around the church. Walk around the neighborhood. Walk around the city. It doesn't make sense to your earthly mind, but it is God's way of changing things.

And His power is accessed when we SURRENDER CONTROL. Prayer is the primary way we do that. Prayer is our daily and constant profession of faith in GOD'S CONTROL. We pray "not my will but yours be done." We submit our own desires and plans to HIS desires and plans. We submit our weakness to be used as an instrument for His infinite power.

Peter Greig was a pastor in England. For eight years his church grew and flourished so that he and his wife were busy and felt fruitful. But toward the end of those eight years they both felt stirred to something else. They didn't know what it was so they went on a pilgrimage to visit friends and key places in Europe. A friend took them to ***Hernhutt where the Moravian movement was born.*** Out of a place of serious and devoted prayer a missionary movement was born that touched John Wesley and literally the entire world.

Peter and his wife were profoundly moved by Hernhutt and the Moravians. The very next day they drove through a town in the Czech Republic that was littered with prostitutes - scantily clad women literally standing by the road offering their services. The contrast moved the couple deep in their hearts. One day - a center of revival and prayer. The next day - women and even young girls in the chains of a hideous slavery.

A few weeks later they got back to England and decided to try something a church planter friend had done - **40 days of 24-7 prayer**. It sounded crazy but it felt like the next thing God wanted them to do. In fact, Peter had seen a vision several years before - a vision of an army rising up all over Europe like the stars coming out after sunset. The vision was tied to Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones. Churches in Europe are a valley of dry bones but God showed him an army waking up to worship.

And so on September 5, 1999, Peter would say "***by accident***" ***they set up a schedule with prayer slots for every hour***, and people came to a central prayer room to pray. They had some artists dress the room up but it was pretty much just a room with some cushions to kneel on, a journal to scribble down prayer requests and answers, a whiteboard to list churches in the area to pray for - things like that.

Peter argued with the Lord saying "this doesn't make sense." He felt God tell him - "Peter, your plan is perfectly logical. Very strategic and sensible." Peter had a plan to build a network of church leaders throughout Europe and try to impact the continent that way. God said, "Your way makes good sense but the problem is, it won't work." Then God reminded Peter of Jericho and said, "**I have a different way. It won't make sense to you but the good news is: it works!**"

And that was the beginning of 24-7 prayer. This September will mark 20 years from that first prayer schedule in 1999. Think of that. ***For every minute of this millennium there has been nonstop prayer that started in Europe and has spread all over the world.***

Now if you were going to take on the challenge of reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the love and justice of God, how would you do it? If you're like me you would start with networking and strategies - leadership meetings and conferences, books and videos. And God says, "Those are sensible ideas but they won't work. Here's an idea that won't make sense to you but the good news is, it works. In fact, ***it's the only thing that works.***"

Listen to the promise of Jesus in Acts 1:8

God's Power is Accessed by Surrendering Control

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

The first step toward fulfilling the great commission was to **WAIT for the Holy Spirit**. “GO and make disciples of all nations” first by waiting to be filled with power from the Holy Spirit. And Jesus knew they would be filled. He promised they would be filled and empowered and emboldened. And then they would go.

This is our promise as we reach out here in Tampa and all over the world. We have access to the limitless power of God - but **we access that power by surrendering our control**, yielding our own desires, submitting our plans and strategies to HIS plans and desires.

When we line up our hearts with God’s heart we are truly praying - seeking Him above all and tuning our hearts to desire what He desires and long for the things He longs for.

And that is the story of 24-7 prayer. Just as it was born out of a triple experience of prayer, mission and justice, so those are the three threads that tie it together today. When we pray - when we really seek God in prayer, ***He always moves us toward PEOPLE***. He binds us together with our fellow believers in sincere worship and devotion. And then He moves us out to people who need to feel the love of Jesus, hear the gospel of Jesus and experience the freedom and justice of Jesus. Prayer, mission and justice.

Joshua surrendered to the leadership of Commander Jesus and through that act of faith accessed the unlimited power of God. As God promised, no one was able to stand up against Joshua all the days of his life. Joshua led the Israelites to conquer every part of the Promised Land that they attempted to conquer. Some tribes failed to drive out the inhabitants completely - and that failing was on them. God’s power was available for all who were humble and obedient enough to access it by faith.

The same was true for the apostles. They waited for the Spirit to be poured out and then were scattered through a combination of persecution and intentional mobilization. The point of the book of Acts is that GOD fulfilled His promise through very ordinary and even fearful believers. Those timid disciples became bold ambassadors for the gospel who were witnesses for Jesus throughout the known world of that day.

And the same thing is true of us. If we surrender to the leadership of Jesus - if we trust in His plans and submit to His control - then we gain access to His power. But if we remain stubborn and proud and self-reliant and self-protective we will miss out on the blessing and the gospel will advance without us.

Here is the third lie - the lie of self-doubt. Listen to God’s assessment of the Israelites’ rebellion back in Numbers 14:

The Lie of Self-Doubt: “I can’t do this.”

“None of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have **put me to the test** these ten times and **have not obeyed my voice**, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those **who despised me** shall see it.”
Numbers 14:20-23

The ten spies sounded very practical. They sounded exceedingly sensible. “The land is well fortified and the people who live there are huge.” Their information was accurate. Their conclusion, however, was not. By refusing to go in and take the land, they put God to the test, disobeyed His voice and despised His glory. The whole gathering chose to listen to the ten spies instead of to Caleb and Joshua - because the reasoning of the 10 made more sense.

But it was corrupted by FEAR and utterly devoid of FAITH. They had seen the glory of God on Mount Sinai. They had heard the voice of God in the giving of the ten commandments. They had seen the power of God in the 10 plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea. But over and over again - 10 times - ***they had complained and TESTED GOD instead of TRUSTING God.*** They demanded water. They demanded food. They demanded a leader. They demanded a plan that made sense to them. And finally they just flat out rebelled and decided to go back to Egypt.

Fear fed them the lie: “You can’t do this.” And they embraced that as fact: “We cannot do this. The giants are too big. The cities are too strong.” Now, on one level “I can’t do this” is absolutely true. But it assumes I have to do it alone. And that was the main thing God kept saying to Israel - “You are not alone! I am your God. You are my people. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. The LORD your God will be with you wherever you go!”

God’s presence enables the weakest believers to overcome the biggest obstacles

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

Where does our strength and courage come from? If it comes from ourselves - our own plans, insights and abilities, then fear will conquer us every time. But if our strength and confidence comes from the unshakeable nature of God’s promises and the unchangeable truth of His character as GOD WITH US - then, brothers and sisters, WE ARE INVINCIBLE!

God’s presence enables the weakest believers to overcome the biggest obstacles

“I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses...” Josh. 1:3	“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8
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God’s presence enables the weakest believers to overcome the biggest obstacles

“No one will be able to stand against you all	“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples
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the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." Josh. 1:5

of all nations.. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matt. 28:18-20

Do you see the New Testament fulfillment of these Old Testament promises? Just as God promised Joshua the land of Canaan, so **He has promised us the entire WORLD**. Just as God commissioned Joshua to be strong and courageous because God was with Him, so He has sent us out with the **promise to be with us to the end of the age**.

"No weapon formed against you will prosper; all those who rise up against you will fall" Is. 54:17

"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." 2 Cor. 10:4-5

So let's stand firm against all the devil's schemes - dressed in the full armor of God, boldly wielding the Sword of the Spirit and finding our strength on our knees in prayer!

Since God is with us **there is no obstacle we cannot overcome by faith** - if we trust Him completely, live for His glory alone and surrender our control to His direction. If we do not give in to fear but walk by faith - nothing is impossible.

"If God is for us who can be against us? What can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord?"

For us - "to live is Christ and to die is gain." We need not fear men who cannot kill us but can only send us home to our Lord. We must fear only doubt and disobedience - we must fear only SIN, rebellion and idolatry. Those are the enemies that can harm us. Nothing and no one else can stop us.

I believe we are nearing the end of the ages when young men will see visions and old men will dream dreams.

- I believe the Spirit is stirring throughout the Middle East, drawing thousands upon thousands of Muslims to Jesus the Messiah to provoke the Jews to jealousy.
- I believe there will be a **great revival** all over the world, leading to great persecution but also great missionary mobilization until the gospel finally breaks through in Israel and a vast number of Jews embrace Jesus as the Messiah.

In the process I believe there could be another Great Awakening resulting in the **abolition of human trafficking** as the second great awakening ended slavery in the British Empire.

- I believe there could be a movement that results in *every child in foster care* in this country being taken in by a Christian family just as the early church picked up babies from the dump.
- I believe there could be a *reversal of Roe v. Wade* and the barbarity of abortion.
- I believe there could be a *restoration of family values* and a reversal of the tide of secularism, materialism and evil.

None of these obstacles is beyond the irresistible power of God, moving through an awakened church. **“NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST YOU.”**

These promises are for us. The time to step forward with faith and boldness is now. “The LORD God Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.” The fields are ripe for harvest. They belong to King Jesus - let’s advance by faith into the harvest right here in Tampa and be a part of finishing the mission to bring this gospel to the nations!